

# **Soft Power: Exploring its Potentials in Bangladesh's Diplomacy**

Director General Md. Jashim Uddin, ndc

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Identification of the Problem**

Soft power is a relatively new concept. The term was coined by Harvard scholar Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (Nye Jr. 1990). It is argued that during the Cold War soft power played an important role for the West in its victory against the now defunct Soviet Union. It is also argued that 'soft power enjoyed a golden age as one of the most important weapons in the ideological clash between Moscow and Washington'<sup>1</sup>. Deliberate emphasis on soft power in the post-Cold War context, it can be argued, indicates a limitation of exercising coercive power as the international landscape underwent changes with the increasing influence of values such as protection and promotion of human rights, respect for International Law, and also the growing resistance of indigenous population to the presence of foreign troops.

Taking advantage of the new concept of soft power, emerging powers such as India and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have incorporated soft power as part of their foreign policy tool. Soft power is seemingly useful in the promotion and protection of their respective foreign policies. The use of soft power by PRC and India has generated lot of interest not only in these two countries but also in other countries. PRC's use of soft power is being viewed as of 'considerable interest to the international order' (Parmer, Inderjeet and Michael Cox (ed) 2010: 199).

Bangladesh too employs soft power in its diplomacy particularly in the area of cultural diplomacy. There, however, is no institutional awareness, neither is there any institutional arrangement. As a result, Bangladesh, as deficient as it is in its hard power capability, is deprived

---

1 Simard, Jean-Francois and Pierre C. Pahlavi, Measuring the Effects of Soft Power, Vanguard, <http://vanguardcanada.com/measuring-the-effects-of-soft-power/>

of employing a relatively easier and affordable tool in the conduct of the country's foreign policy.

## **1.2. Rationale of the Research**

As has been mentioned, Bangladesh is a hard power deficit country. Incorporating soft power would add value to Bangladesh's diplomacy. It is also likely to yield greater benefits than hard power. This argument is not based on the assumption that for a country like Bangladesh there is little or nil need for hard power. On the contrary, the argument recognizes the importance and imperative need for hard power for its role in protecting the core values of the State namely sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Soft power would contribute to that task and will also add momentum to the ongoing efforts at protecting and promoting the foreign policy goals of Bangladesh. In fact, this paper argues that Bangladesh can also employ hard power capability for soft power projection. The potential has been demonstrated by Bangladesh peace keeping contingents under the aegis of the United Nations peacekeeping missions. A deliberate and conscious effort at such projection will bring more dividends for Bangladesh. As of now, no such deliberate efforts have been made in Bangladesh's foreign policy. The present research lays emphasis on making deliberate and conscious efforts in Bangladesh's diplomacy to make effective use of soft power.

The other rationale is to fill in the lacuna left by the contemporary literature on Bangladesh's foreign policy in emphasizing on the need for employing soft power in diplomacy. Both the policy makers and the opinion makers need to focus on the subject. The paper specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

- a. Is there any potential for soft power for its application in the foreign policy of Bangladesh?
- b. If there is potential of soft power, what steps can be taken to incorporate soft power in the foreign policy of Bangladesh?

This research is exploratory in nature. The work depended primarily on secondary sources. On discussions on soft power elements in the context of Bangladesh in addition to secondary sources unstructured interviews of serving and former Bangladeshi diplomats were conducted.

### **1.3. Structure of the Paper**

This paper is divided into six sections. It begins with the concept of power, its hard and soft forms. It also deals with the problematic of measuring soft power. It then explores soft power in Bangladesh's diplomacy and makes an attempt to identify elements of soft power that can be employed in the country's diplomacy. The section that follows examines the important question of the need for institutional recognition of soft power and designing of soft power in Bangladesh's diplomacy. The paper also puts in place recommendations for the inclusion and operation of soft power in Bangladesh's diplomacy followed by a Conclusion.

## **UNDERSTANDING SOFT POWER**

### **2.1. Definition of Power**

Power is a major concept in the IR literature. It plays a predominant role in IR theories. Hans J. Morgenthau, the pioneer in the Realist school of thought, was of the view that men and women are by nature political animals who are born to pursue power and to enjoy the fruits of power (Jackson, Robert and Georg Sorensen (ed.) 2010: 66). Morgenthau spoke of *animus dominandi*, the human lust for power that brings men and women into conflict (Jackson, Robert and Georg Sorensen (ed.) 2010: 66). Human lust for power and the resulting inevitable conflict create a condition of power politics which is at the core not only of Morgenthau's Realism but of all classical and Neoclassical Realist conceptions of international relations (Jackson, Robert and Georg Sorensen (ed.) 2010: 66).

Despite its prominence it is not easy to define power. As Nye, Jr. said power is like weather because everyone depends on it and talks about it but few understand it (Nye, Jr. 2004: 1). For the purpose of this paper power may be defined as the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcome one wants (Nye, Jr. 2004: 2).

### **2.2. Difference between Hard and Soft Power**

According to the Realist School of thought, power is to be understood in terms of military and economic force or ‘hard’ power and the test for the great powers is conducted through the strength of war. Nye, Jr. called this type of narrow power as ‘command and coercion’ (Nye, Jr. 2010: 2). The First and Second World Wars were fought on the strength of hard power. Dependence on hard power continued even after the end of the Cold War.

Power has a second face where it is used without tangible threats or payoffs (Nye, Jr. 2010: 5). This is called soft power where a country ‘may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its examples, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it (Nye, Jr. 2010: 5). In contrast to command dimension of hard power, soft is co-optive power with the ability of attracting others that lead to acquiescence (Nye, Jr. 2010: 6).

Both categories of power aim at affecting the behaviors of others albeit the way they follow in achieving the goal are different. ‘The distinction between them is one of degree, both in nature of the behavior and in the tangibility of the resources’ (Nye, Jr. 2010: 6).

### **2.3. Measuring Soft Power**

Since the coinage of the term by Nye, Jr. in 1990, discussions on soft power centered on its conceptual development. Subsequently, it was felt that to employ it in diplomacy it is important to measure it. It was also felt that measuring of soft power is possible through a ‘multidisciplinary approach, using indirect means’<sup>2</sup>. In 2010 the discussions moved from definition to quantification and measurement (McClory, Jonathan: The New Persuaders III: A 2012 Global Ranking of Soft Power).

---

<sup>2</sup> Simard, Jean-Francois and Pierre C. Pahlavi, Measuring the Effects of Soft Power, Vanguard, <http://vanguardcanada.com/measuring-the-effects-of-soft-power/>

There have been efforts to measure this new form of power. Earlier, soft power was measured on the basis of public opinion survey like Pew Global Attitude Survey as opposed to composite metrics across various indicators (McClory, Jonathan: 6). As of now there are four different indexes to measure soft power. These are: the IfG-Monocole Soft Power Index, SKOLKVO-Ernst & Young Emerging Markets Soft Power Index, Real Instituto Elcano-Elcano Global Presence Index (IEPG) and of course, the one used by Nye, Jr.

These measurement tools are based on the assumption that soft power is based on hard power. A country with limited hard power, thus goes the argument, is unlikely to develop “much outsized soft power without having a minimum amount of decent hard power”<sup>3</sup>. This, however, is not based on empirical evidence. Studies show that countries with little hard power basis can indeed exercise soft power. Military and economic superiority, despite its obvious value, is not enough ‘to achieve a desired outcome as history does not always favor the side with the biggest battalions or the deepest pockets’<sup>4</sup>. Antwi-Boateng pointing out that the literature on soft power ‘have disproportionately focused on the same traditional great powers that dominate international politics in the exercise of hard power’ studied the case of Qatar’s soft power projection as ‘the focus on Qatar offers a departure from a great power exercising any form of power’ and it also ‘demonstrates how a small country can punch above its weight by exercising soft power influence and shaping the course of history in the Middle east’<sup>5</sup>. Other studies concluded that

---

3Bryane Michael, Christopher Hartwell and Bulat Nureev, Soft Power: A Double-Edged Sword, <http://bricsmagazine.com/en/articles/soft-power-a-double-edged-sword>)

4 Antwi-Boatend, Osman, The Rise of Qatar as a Soft Power and the Challenges, European Scientific Journal, December 2013, <http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/viewFile/2337/2210>

5 Antwi-Boatend, Osman, The Rise of Qatar as a Soft Power and the Challenges, European Scientific Journal, December 2013, <http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/viewFile/2337/2210>

small States are capable of projecting soft power<sup>6</sup>. As Nye, Jr. said that Soft power is available to all countries (Nye, Jr. 2010: 89).

Pending an acceptable and dependable Soft Power Measurement Index the following criteria set by Nye, Jr. may be useful. ‘Whether a particular asset is a soft power resource that produces attraction can be measured by asking people through polls or focus groups. Whether that attraction in turn produces desired policy outcomes has to be judged in particular cases. Attraction does not always determine others’ preferences, but this gap between power measured as resources and power judged as the outcomes of behavior is not unique to soft power’s (Nye, Jr. 2010: 6).

## **EXPLORING SOFT POWER POTENTIALS IN THE DIPLOMACY OF BANGLADESH**

### **3.1. Traditional Understanding of Power in Bangladesh’s Diplomacy**

Traditional understanding of power in Bangladesh’s diplomacy has been influenced and molded by the Western literature on power as well as by the practice of the countries in the West in the Cold War era. Haider listed Bangladesh’s power components in two categories namely constant and variable (Haider, Zaglul 2006: 18-19). Constant elements include geography, i.e. location, the shape and size of the country along with the boundaries while variable elements are composed of internal conditions of state such as domestic needs and values, quality of

---

6 Stringer, Kevin D., Sovereign Liechtenstein: The Soft Power Projection of a Very Small State, [http://webdev6.hi.is/wp-content/uploads/old/liechtenstein\\_layout\\_final.pdf](http://webdev6.hi.is/wp-content/uploads/old/liechtenstein_layout_final.pdf); Stokke, Kristian, The Soft Power of a Small State: Discursive Constructions and Institutional Practices of Norway’s Peace Engagement, <http://pcd.ugm.ac.id/?wpdmact=process&did=MTcuaG90bGluaw==>; Chong, Alan, The Foreign Policy Potential of “Small State Soft Power” Information Strategies, [www.eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/turin/Choong-ALAN%20CHONG%202007%20The%20Foreign%20Policy%20Potential%20of%20Small%20State%20Soft%20Power.pdf](http://www.eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/turin/Choong-ALAN%20CHONG%202007%20The%20Foreign%20Policy%20Potential%20of%20Small%20State%20Soft%20Power.pdf);

leadership, strength of national institutions, nature of people's participation in politics, military capabilities, industrial capabilities, natural resources, food production, national morale, quality of diplomacy, and external environment (Haider, Zaglul 2006: 18-19). Rashid has a similar list that includes geography, history, population, religion, ethos, culture and natural resources (Rashid Harunur 2004: 217). The foreign policy of Bangladesh is based on a similar understanding and the country pursues its foreign policy objectives by using the template practiced widely in other parts of the world namely, mostly through government to government interactions in set format.

### **3.2. Elements of Soft Power for Bangladesh**

The following is an attempt at preparing a list of items for Bangladesh's soft power. The rationale for inclusion of the elements below is their potential capability to influence constituents/target group that will promote Bangladesh's foreign policy objectives. Additionally, these elements have the potential of attracting people from other countries and leave a positive impression on their minds which could be cultivated for foreign policy objectives. This, however, is not an exhaustive list.

#### **3.2.1. Language**

International Mother Language Day provides a platform for Bangladesh. Bangladesh, taking advantage of the Day's observance/celebration worldwide, may embark on an aggressive plan of action to reach out to all the countries of the world. It may even venture to go one step further and try to reach to languages in addition to countries. The government of Bangladesh has already established the International Mother Language Institute. This Institute can be utilized for the aforementioned purpose. The basic idea is to connect to the languages throughout the world by using the platform of the International Mother Language Day. Bangladesh Missions can be provided with template to reach out to these constituents. Prior to this, the International Mother Language Institute can prepare a language map that would incorporate all living and dead languages. The Institute may organize language seminars and language dialogues with the purpose of getting scholars from different corners of the world. Dhaka, thereby, can turn into a 'city of the languages', a city which is also known as the city that hosted the language movement. Bangladesh can mesh in this venture the Shaheed Minar, built in memory of the

language martyrs' of 1952 that symbolizes an epic chapter of Bangladesh's history and would also stand for the linguistic diversity.

Language is a powerful tool not only for inter-personal communication but it has the potential of playing much larger and powerful role in the work of diplomacy. China has focused on increasing the number of Chinese speaking persons. The Confucius Center is playing a key role in this respect. The number has increased dramatically. This indicates the success of the Chinese soft power. It also speaks of the potential role language can play. From the Chinese experience, it also appears that internet can be an effective tool in addition to the work done by the Confucius Center.

The objective for Bangladesh diplomacy with regard to language is different from that of China. However, there are important lessons for Bangladesh to learn from the Chinese experience particularly the function of the Confucius Center and the use of Internet in reaching to people in different parts of the world. Since Bangladesh would need to reach out to different language communities/groups in addition to all the countries of the world, it will require to design the institutional mechanism and the modus operandi suitable for that purpose as mentioned above.

### **3.2.2. Paintings and other artwork**

Apart from their usefulness within a geographic space, paintings because of their universal appeal have the ability of connecting peoples across political and geographical divide. It can create a platform for artists, connoisseurs, audiences, and others in the cultural arena. The impact of culture could be epic though its impact and influence are not generally recognized and acknowledged. As Wendy W. Luers, wife of U.S. diplomat William Luers, said that the power of culture can often be “underestimated as a diplomatic tool, but cultural exchange can not only serve as a universal icebreaker, it can tear down walls and build bridges between the most hardened of enemies. It may not turn foes into instant friends, but it does allow nations to find points of commonality that transcend politics”<sup>7</sup>. Finding commonality helps among others breaking a particular image as Wendy W. Luers concluded from the impact of the cultural events

---

7 Wendy W. Luers, Soft Power of Art: Lifelong Cultural Commitment Pays Diplomatic Dividends, Huffpost, <http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/785711>



organized by the U.S. Embassy in Venezuela that the events “were an invaluable public diplomacy effort that showcased American culture and belied the image of the United States as merely a commercial and military heavyweight<sup>8</sup>”. This is in particular important and relevant for Bangladesh since the country suffers from an image crisis abroad.

Bangladeshi paintings and painters are yet to make mark internationally. Same goes for sculpture. Domestic market has changed significantly with an expanding collector community in Bangladesh. However, the paintings are mostly sold to private collectors not through the auction houses which means that Bangladeshi paintings are yet to receive wider exposure and recognition in the international market. The upside is that the international collectors look for new artwork from new places. Of late India and PRC have joined the market. This leaves a space for the Bangladeshi paintings too. But it is unlikely to be easy as the market is competitive. The painters can not bank on the hope that they will be discovered<sup>9</sup>. The situation is changing though the pace of it slow. As an item on Bangladesh’s artwork carried by *New York Times* commented, “A contemporary arts scene began to grow in Bangladesh 20 years after a bloody war of independence separated the country from Pakistan in 1971. Since the 1990s, more artists have graduated from the country’s art academies and universities, and new art avenues have sprouted up.<sup>10</sup>” The contemporary art scene, as depicted by the *New York Times* article, in Bangladesh includes photography as well. Recognition of this art form will add depth and value to the art landscape of Bangladesh as this field of creative art has started attracting talents.

---

8 Wendy W. Luers, Soft Power of Art: Lifelong Cultural Commitment Pays Diplomatic Dividends, Huffpost, <http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/785711>

9 CNN Report: Bangladeshi Art Trade Looks to Gain Western Exposure <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=psLqTA7gqtU>

10 ‘In Bangladesh, a Vibrant Contemporary Scene by Amy Yee’, *The New York Times*, March 13, 2014. Also see ‘Putting Bangladesh on the Arts Map by Gayatri Rangachari Shah’, *The New York Times*, December 4, 2013.

Besides the painters living in Bangladesh, the expatriate Bangladeshi painters can also feature importantly in using paintings as a tool of soft power diplomacy. Having a database of the Bangladeshi painters both at home and abroad and putting in place a network among the painters may help design a model to utilize this particular resource to Bangladesh's advantage. Government of Bangladesh may also make deliberate investment in attracting talents to Arts college and help launching their career. Bangladesh Embassies (through its cultural centers designed in line with centers such as Alliance Française), where possible in collaboration with local host/s may organize on a regular basis painting exhibitions of Bangladeshi painters keeping in mind a specific target group. Asian Biennale organized by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy may be designed to take it to the next level so that it features as an important event in the calendar of world paintings rather than an important event in Dhaka and for a limited audience.

### **3.2.3. Cuisine**

In reviewing the stories by the Indian writer Jhumpa Lahiri it has been shown by Wulandari that the characters of the stories curb out in a Diaspora setting their identities and Asian-Indian food plays an important role by being part of their past and food is part of forming identity. This identity does not remain regional but moves to the country<sup>11</sup>. That means food do not represent a particular Indian State rather it relates the characters of the stories to their greater Indian identity. Food can play similar role for a country. It can be linked to a country's identity in an international setting as it does play that role for an individual in a Diaspora setting. 'Food is an important way in which nations define themselves and national cuisine is a marker by which a people self-identifies'<sup>12</sup>. Connection between food and nationalism opens the possibility to 'consider the potential of using this link as a tool of international relations' which leads to the

---

11 Wulandari, Retno, Food: Memory and Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine and Hell-Heaven, [http://eprints.undip.ac.id/39304/2/Food\\_and\\_Memory\\_Retno.pdf](http://eprints.undip.ac.id/39304/2/Food_and_Memory_Retno.pdf)

12 Chapple-Sokol, Sam, 'Culinary Diplomacy: Breaking Bread to Win Hearts and Minds, The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 8 (2013), <http://culinarydiplomacy.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/hjd-off-print.pdf>

concept of Culinary Diplomacy<sup>13</sup>. Culinary Diplomacy, the ‘use of food and cuisine as an instrument to create cross-cultural understanding in the hope of improving interactions and cooperation’, is divided into private and public culinary diplomacy, the latter belonging to the category called public diplomacy<sup>14</sup>. American University in Washington DC is offering courses in culinary diplomacy and conflict cuisines, recognizing the growing importance of the food industry around the world. Culinary diplomacy is demonstrated by the ‘governmental outreach programs like those undertaken by the Thai and South Korean governments’<sup>15</sup>. Culinary diplomacy, also known as Gastro-diplomacy was first used by Thailand. The Thai government decided in 2002 to launch the Global Thai program as the government saw they witnessed Thai restaurants were becoming popular around the world<sup>16</sup>. The government’s program became a success with the increase of restaurants to 13000 all over the world by the year 2009<sup>17</sup>. South Korea, Vietnam, India and others from Asia have joined the fray to make their own cuisine popular. Bangladesh with its rich and distinct cuisine can cull out its own space in the international cuisine architecture. There are best practices for Bangladesh to follow and Bangladesh has to go through a trajectory for the purpose of making its cuisine popular. To use food as a tool of soft power a nation ‘requires a national cuisine upon which to establish itself’

---

13 ibid

14 ibid

15 ibid

16 Public Diploamcy, <http://pdgc2013b.wordpress.com/2014/02/06/gastronomic-diplomacy/>

17 Chapple-Sokol, Sam, ‘Culinary Diplomacy: Breaking Bread to Win Hearts and Minds, The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 8 (2013), <http://culinarydiplomacy.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/hjd-off-print.pdf>

and when ‘a national cuisine has become established, it can be exploited as a facet of a nation’s brand’<sup>18</sup>. The challenge for Bangladesh in this particular area, among others, is to have a cuisine which is distinct from the cuisine of its neighboring India.

#### **3.2.4. Music particularly Devotional Music**

The genesis of Bangladesh witnessed an extraordinary demonstration of the power of music. During the nine month long war of independence a radio station called ‘*Shadhin bangle betar Kendra*’ or Free Bangla Radio Station at Kalurghat in Chittagong district transmitted inspiring patriotic songs. The musicians and others working at the radio station have come to be known as ‘*Shobdo Shoinik*’ or ‘Word Soldier’ because they opened a war front against the enemies and proved to be effective in their efforts in keeping the morale of the freedom fighters. The world famous *Beatles* led by George Harrison and legendary Indian musician Pt. Ravi Shankar organized on August 1, 1971 the now famous ‘The Concert for Bangladesh’ at the Madison Square Garden in New York to raise international awareness and fund relief efforts for the refugees who have fled to India from the then East Pakistan.

Bangladesh has a rich treasure of music with a wide range and variety including Baul, Bhatial and Lalon songs. Apart from the music played throughout the country, there are regional variation and style. The target audience has been and remains the Bangladeshis living within and outside the country. Bangladesh is yet to make its musical presence felt outside the confines of the country and to the foreign audience. To widen the audience coverage especially foreign audience Bangladesh would need to employ strategies to connect to non-Bangla speaking audience. It would also need effective marketing strategies. Government, the private business and the musicians will need to become an integral part of a plan of action to tap the potential of this creative genre.

#### **3.2.5. Drama**

---

18 Chapple-Sokol, Sam, ‘Culinary Diplomacy: Breaking Bread to Win Hearts and Minds, The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 8 (2013), <http://culinarydiplomacy.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/hjd-off-print.pdf>

Drama can be a medium to project a country's soft power. At the same time, it may also portray crassness or bankruptcy of a society and cause damage to a country's image. Many U. S. television dramas shown in culture not quite similar to that of the U. S. might be viewed as lewd and crass. As Mika Aaltola states: "There has been considerable concern in the US over the negative and ugly image of the States that is being disseminated by American popular culture. There are worries that trashy reality TV together with violent movies and computer games are turning public opinion in many regions against the US and its interests" (Altola, Mika 2014: 6). Japan, primarily known for its high quality electronic products, exercised soft power in Bangladesh through two popular drama serials namely *Shogun*, based on the adventures of English navigator William Adams to Japan, and *Oshin*, based on the life of Shin Tanokura during the Meiji period upto the 1980s.

Bangladesh has its traditional drama called Jatra. This particular drama form has distinctive features. One of the characteristics of this traditional drama is its ability to adapt. Over a long period of time, Jatra has made transition from religion based themes to secular theme showing its inner strength to adapt. This essentially speaks of this creative media's potential.

### **3.2.6. Festivals including *Pahela Boishakh***

The Bangladeshi Diaspora in Japan organizes an annual event to welcome the Bangla New Year at Yekebukoro Park, at the outskirts of the Capital Tokyo. The event draws not only the members of the expatriate Bangladesh community but also the Japanese nationals many of them are married to Bangladesh nationals. The event has been projecting Bangladesh in multidimensional aspects including showcasing its music and cuisine among others. Pohela Boishakh is perhaps Bangladesh's biggest secular collective celebration. This image stands in contrast to the other image: a country with extremist ideology or as sometimes Bangladesh has been called the next Afghanistan. Pohela Boishakh can indeed be a powerful tool to project Bangladesh's secular identity to the outside world. This can especially be done in London, New York and Toronto.

### **3.2.7. Religious Events/Festivals including *Biswa Ijtema***

Following examples in other parts of the world, Bangladesh may develop multiple religious sites belonging to different religions. One of them could be the Biswa Ijtema or Global Congregation, an annual Tablig Jamaat Islamic movement congregation held at Tongi by the river Turag. This is the second largest Muslim congregation after the Hajj. The local police estimated the number of attendees of 2007 ijtema was 3 million while in 2010 the number of attendees was 5 million. Despite the large number of devotees living within a confined space, generally there is very few problems of sanitation, cooking, and internal movements. It is believed to be possible because of the minimalist approach adopted by the devotees. Devotees have reduced their own requirements and developed a respect for others' requirements. With requisite infrastructure, the Biswa Ijtema may develop as an internationally recognized site for religious tourism which will not only brand Bangladesh as a site for peaceful practice of religion but will also contribute significantly to the national economy. Similar attention may be given to Langalbandh fair which is held every year during the Bengali calendar month of *Chaitra*. Thousands of Hindu devotees gather at Langalbandh (in Dhaka district and near the Dhaka-Chittagong highway) on the bank of the river Brahmaputra for a ritual bath. To mark the occasion, a three day fair is also held.

### **3.2.8. UN Peacekeeping**

Military is generally identified as the instrument for exercising hard power. "Military force is obviously a source of hard power, but the same resource can sometimes contribute to soft-power behavior. A well-run military can be a source of prestige, and military-to-military cooperation and training programs, for example, can establish transnational networks that enhance a country's soft power. The U.S. military's impressive performance in providing humanitarian relief after the Indian Ocean tsunami and the South Asian earthquake in 2005 helped restore the attractiveness of the United States; the military's role in the aftermath of the recent Japanese earthquake and tsunami is having a similar effect." (Nye., Foreign Policy 2011).

It is said that diplomacy without military power is like music without instruments. In case of Bangladesh, the hard power e.g. military power is employed in the business of diplomacy in a nuanced manner. The fact that Bangladesh is the largest troops contributing country has earned name for Bangladesh. The Bangladesh contingents have also taken the opportunity of their participation in the UN Missions to add value to their work. One example has been Bangladesh's contribution to Quick Impact Projects (QIP). This is an exercise in soft power diplomacy at grass

root level. Bangladesh may prepare templates for the contingents going to UN missions for the implementation of the QIP. Data and information from the earlier experiences of the Bangladesh peacekeeping missions may be utilized for the template.

## **HOW TO INCORPORATE SOFT POWER IN THE DIPLOMACY OF BANGLADESH**

### **4.1. Institutional Recognition of Soft Power**

Bangladesh is deficient in hard power in the sense that it can not be utilized fruitfully for the purpose of diplomacy and hence the need for the employment of soft power in Bangladesh's diplomacy. In the case of the great power and the aspirant great powers, the necessity emanates from the limitations of using hard power and also from a realization that employing a combination of hard and soft power will accrue better gains in diplomacy. From Bangladesh's point of view, it is the deficiency in hard power (which happily is used rather innovatively in the context of a changed world as mentioned before) that makes a revisit of the traditional understanding of power imperative.

The starting point for this is the need for recognition to revisiting the concept of power as is understood by the policy makers and the academia. It also calls for re-focusing the task of public diplomacy. At the moment the government of Bangladesh's public diplomacy aims at showcasing and branding Bangladesh and its people to the rest of the world and disseminating information through media and communication networks on the government's domestic and foreign policy initiatives and successes (2009-2013: A Four and a Half Year Overview of Foreign Office Activities, January 2009-September 2013: 177). The purpose, as has been spelt out, is to showcase, brand and disseminate. It does not entail the concept of influencing targeted constituents in other countries. This stands in contrast to U.S. public diplomacy which is as follows, "The mission of American public diplomacy is to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world." (U.S. State Department website [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)). Bangladesh's next door neighbor India is yet another example that has adopted an approach clearly recognizing the importance of soft power

in diplomacy. In fact, the government of India used the term ‘soft power’ in its official website. According to the website of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the External Publicity & Public Diplomacy Division’s work includes publications, documentary films and other publicity material aimed at projecting India’s soft power (MEA website [www.mea.gov.in](http://www.mea.gov.in)).

The government of Bangladesh recognizes the importance of public diplomacy. But as of now, it is more focused on disseminating government’s achievements and successes. This is a one way flow of information and as of now is not designed to receive a feedback. The main task of public diplomacy is to influence public opinion in other countries. It also aims at engaging the domestic audience. It is not a passive act of sharing information rather an active plan of action to ‘influence public attitudes with a view to ensuring that they become supportive of foreign policy and national interests’ (Tharoor, Shashi 2012: 296). In the context of interest in foreign policy issues, the government has to compete with other sources of information including its critics and rivals, ‘government information must be packaged and presented attractively and issued in a timely fashion’ (Tharoor, Shashi 2012: 297). From the current approach of sharing information on successes and achievements to reaching out to targeted audience to influence them will need willingness, confidence and preparedness. The purpose will be not only to disseminate information, to be ‘packaged and presented attractively’ in view of competing streams of information from other sources including from the critics, but also to listen to the targeted audience for their inputs. Essentially public diplomacy, if it is to serve the purpose of influencing targeted audience, must be a two way engagements.

## **4.2. Designing Soft Power Diplomacy including Institutional Setup and Allocation of Funds**

Employing soft power as a tool of diplomacy requires a deliberate effort to design it. It also requires setting up an institutional arrangements and budgetary allocation for the implementation of different projects and tasks. Bangladesh may look at the best practices by others and adopt it to Bangladesh’s own circumstances and requirements.

Initiating a new approach may not be easy. Practitioners of diplomacy and other actors relevant in the field may find the old way as the best way and may therefore resist a new approach. In case of applying soft power it is all the more difficult because of the predominance of hard power



and its apparent success in inter-State relations. As mentioned in Chapter 3 above, during President George W. Bush's tenure a Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy recommended to the US Secretary of State to create a cultural diplomacy architecture and policy for the twenty-first century. The adoption and reliance on unilateralism by the Bush administration stood in contrast to this recommendation because the essence of cultural diplomacy was to reach out to others to win their hearts and minds. For generating soft power, 'consultation and listening' are essential components (Parmer, Inderjeet and Michael Cox (ed.) 2010: 11). State apparatuses may not be enthusiastic to consult and listen and do the opposite<sup>19</sup>. It took a change in U.S. leadership to take the course of consultation and listening to others and thereby make an effort to rediscover itself after 'its infatuation with the 'unipolar moment and the new unilateralism' (Parmer, Inderjeet and Michael Cox (ed.) 2010: 11).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper has the following recommendations for the foreign policy makers:

1. A consensus on the importance and necessity of soft power at the policy making level is imperative. This will help boost any efforts at employing soft power in Bangladesh's diplomacy.
2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs may establish a separate wing dedicated for research and execution of soft power. The wing may be suitably named. The suggested name is Public and Promotional Diplomacy Wing for Peace and Better Understanding for Humanity (PPD in short). The nomenclature embodies one of the core principles of Bangladesh's foreign policy namely peace. Emphasis on better understanding for humanity is value driven and reflects an aspiration for a normative world. This is commensurate with

---

<sup>19</sup> International civil servant turned politician Shashi Tharoor while discussing about public diplomacy in the context of India referred to bureaucratic apathy to such undertaking. He once asked a senior diplomat why a certain country is hostile to the government of India and were not the messages from India getting across. The diplomat replied: 'I don't know, and I don't care'. This demonstrates rather dramatically the attitude of bureaucracy towards public diplomacy.

Bangladesh's past initiative of cooperative collective ventures such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and current proactive role at regional and international fora for cooperation within regional and international cooperative framework.

3. PPD Wing will identify current efforts at soft power diplomacy by Bangladesh Missions abroad and by the private sector (such as in the area of branding). The Wing will make an assessment of soft power friendly information on the web/internet including information on Bangladesh's strengths and achievements in different sectors and areas, and weaknesses such as lack of travel related information (by air etc.), useful information on tourist/historic/religious sites. To illustrate the point, though Biswa Ijtema is the second largest Muslim religious congregation after hajj, there is very little information on this religious gathering on the Net. In addition to identifying the paucity of information on such religious gatherings the Wing may also examine the ways through which news of such gathering spread, as of now, to draw Muslims in such large number from around the world. Websites may be useful by furnishing information relating to soft power. PPD wing may suitably design its segment in the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bangladesh Missions and the proposed Cultural/PPD Centers abroad may incorporate requisite information in their respective websites in consultation with the PPD Wing.
4. The Wing will study and examine the best practices at soft power diplomacy by other countries with inputs from Bangladesh Missions abroad and through interactions with the officials of cultural centers of different countries based in Dhaka and also with officials of those countries based at their respective headquarters. The Wing will arrange brain storming sessions, seminars etc. and where necessary will engage think tanks to design the Wing's work.

5. PPD Wing in consultation with other relevant Ministries and Departments will identify short, medium and long terms tasks/projects in the area of soft power diplomacy commensurate with the foreign policy objectives of Bangladesh. They will continuously assess the progress made in different areas of activities.
6. The Wing will bring out monthly and annual publication on promoting Bangladesh with information on different sectors. It will design detailed plans for the dissemination of the publication in fulfillment of the Wing's goals which will be set in line with the foreign policy of Bangladesh.
7. PPD wing will coordinate with relevant Ministries and Departments. A number of Ministries and Departments/Directorates/Institutes might feature more prominently than others in this regard such as the Ministry of Tourism (for promoting select tourist sites with adequate logistics in place), Ministry of Cultural Affairs in particular Shilpa Kala Academy under the Ministry (for promoting music and paintings), Ministry of Religious Affairs (for promoting Bhiswa Ijtema) and Ministry of Home Affairs (for ensuring security related to 'soft power sites' within Bangladesh), Armed Forces Division and MIST (for UN peacekeeping related soft power) and Bangla Academy and International Mother Languages Institute (for promoting language martyrs' day and international mother language day). The wing will be headed by a Director General with Directorates under him responsible for identified areas (such as Directorate of Music and Painting, Directorate for Better Religious Understanding etc.). Each Ministry and Department/Directorate/Institutes will nominate a focal point. The focal points will meet on a monthly basis (and also as and when required) to identify specific task, execution plan, monitoring of tasks and review). The Director General of PPD Wing will chair. He will report to the Foreign Secretary.

8. In line with British Council, Alliance Française and American Center a number of centers may be established in select countries. These centers will act as the field office of PPD Wing and may be named Bangladesh Center to make the name popular among the local population. The centers will be headed by a Director (a Counselor level officer) with adequate personnel and funds allocated for the centers. Their activities will be reviewed and monitored regularly by the PPD Wing. The centers will report to the heads of Missions of the respective Bangladesh Embassies/High Commissions. Depending on their successes their activities may be enhanced or reshaped.
9. Bangladesh Diaspora/Non-Resident Bangladeshis may be engaged where possible for the promotion of Bangladesh's foreign policy goals by engaging the local politicians and legislators. Diaspora particularly where they are an influential force in the adopted countries' political life may become a key component in pursuing foreign policy objectives. Intellectuals, academics, members of the civil society can have an influencing role on the government.
10. Adequate Budget must be placed to the PPD Wing for the successful implementation of the projects undertaken as part of soft power diplomacy. It may be noted that through soft power diplomacy Bangladesh will also be able to attract foreign direct investment and promote the country's trade and commerce. This may be a justification for the Ministry of Finance to allocate the funds for soft power diplomacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The coinage of the new term soft power coincided with the end of the Cold War. In fact, the term came into currency a year after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 symbolizing the end of the bitter, fierce and dreadful competition between the two superpowers. The horrific attack on the mainland of the U.S.A. on September 11, 2001 and the developments thereafter was a setback. The world witnessed more of hard power in the war on terror particularly in South Asia with the

involvement of the lone superpower, the U.S. The use of hard power and the resulting limitation as tested on the battlegrounds of Afghanistan prompted a conversation on the wisdom of relying solely on hard power. In the same vein, the conversations highlighted the importance of soft power for the desired foreign policy outcome. With the change of guard in the U.S. leadership with President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the helm of affairs, the U.S. foreign policy witnessed a change in emphasis with inclusion of soft power as a tool of diplomacy. The new thought has affected countries in Europe, and Asia as well particularly China and India, the two emerging powers on international plane.

Bangladesh being a hard power deficient country has an opportunity to incorporate soft power in its diplomacy. While the concept of soft power opens an opportunity for Bangladesh, the matrices developed to measure it, poses challenges for the country and hence the necessity to develop an index for countries like Bangladesh. Developing a matrix that would be useful for Bangladesh to assess its soft power capability will help its deployment in the country's diplomacy. The matrices for the developed countries are meant to peck them in an order where worldwide interests and operation remain the key consideration. Bangladesh does not need to undertake a worldwide diplomatic engagement at this stage. The country's diplomatic engagement is different in scope, nature and operational field.

As of now, the issue of soft power's inclusion in Bangladesh's diplomacy has not received serious attention of the policy makers and the opinion makers/builders. To incorporate soft power in the country's diplomacy would require a deliberate departure from depending solely on hard power. It would require an institutional awareness of the importance and necessity of soft power in the business of diplomacy. It can be followed/accompanied by putting in place the requisite institutional arrangements and budgetary allocation. Employing soft power in diplomacy is likely to enhance Bangladesh's diplomatic capability manifold in achieving its foreign policy goals. The 'power of attraction' or soft power will have a transformational impact on Bangladesh's image abroad. This in turn will attract tourists including the tourists for religious purposes. The country will also be able to draw foreign investment from a wide variety of sources since Bangladesh can reach out not only to governments but also to multiple linguistic communities.

The paper attempted to cover wide grounds and therefore left a number of areas out of detailed research. The following areas may be considered for further research:

- This paper has attempted to dwell on the topic of the potential of soft power for the diplomacy of Bangladesh. It has identified different potential areas that can be explored for the conduct of soft power diplomacy. As mentioned, the list is not an exhaustive one. It can further be improved and expanded. More research work can be done on each area in order to identify its potential and to suggest ways and means for their implementation.
- This paper also addressed in brief the issue of connection between hard and soft power and attempted to demystify the predominant argument that soft power depends on a country's hard power. This is an important area and extensive research may be conducted on this topic so that Bangladesh can proceed in incorporating soft power in its diplomacy on the premise that Bangladesh being a hard power deficient country can indeed benefit from soft power diplomacy.
- The other area of research could aim at developing a measurement scale or index and a related area of assessing success of soft power diplomacy. Such research will contribute in designing, executing, monitoring, and evaluating soft power in Bangladesh's diplomacy.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

Cooper, Andrew F et al (ed.) (2013): *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Biswas, Asit K. and Uitto, Juha (ed.) I 2001: *Sustainable Development of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Basins*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi

Brezzezinski, Zbigniew (2004): *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, Basic Books, New York

Chauhan, Kirti Singh (2012): *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh*, Kaveri Books, New Delhi

Crow, Ben, Lindquist, Alan and Wilson, David 1997: *Sharing the Ganges: The Politics and Technology of River Development*, University Press Ltd., Dhaka

Fukuyama, Francis (2007): *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroad*, Profile Books, Noida

Goldstein, Joshua S and Jon C. Pevehouse (2008): *International Relations*, Pearson Longman, New York

Haider, Zaglul (2006): *The Changing Pattern of Bangladesh Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of the Mujib and Zia Regime*, University Press Ltd, Dhaka

Jackson, Robert and Georg Sorensen (ed) (2010): *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York

Kabir, MG and Hassan, Shaikat (Ed) 1989: *Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy*, Bangladesh Society of International Studies, Dhaka

Li, Mingjiang (ed) 2010: *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics*, Lexington Books, Maryland

Nye, Jr., Joseph S (1990): *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, Basic Books, New York

Nye, Jr., Joseph S (2003): *The Paradox of American Power; Why the World's Only Superpower Can't go it Alone*, Oxford University Press, USA

Nye, Jr., Joseph S (2004): *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York.

Nye, Jr., Joseph S (2011): *The War on Soft Power*, Foreign Policy April 12, 2011

Nye, Jr., Joseph S (2010): *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt Ltd, New Delhi

Parmer, Inderjeet and Michael Cox (ed.) (2010): *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York

Raj, R and N.D. Morpeth (ed.) (2007): *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Management: An International Perspective*, CAB International, Oxfordshire

Sobhan, Farooq (Ed), *Bangladesh-India Relations: Security Perspectives*, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute and Academic Press and Publishers Library, Dhaka

Rashid, Harun Ur (2005): *Bangladesh Foreign Policy: Priorities and Challenges*, Academic Press and Publishing Library, Dhaka

Tharoor, Shahsi (2012): *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Penguin/Allen Lane, New Delhi

Rashid, Harunur (2004): *International Relations and Bangladesh*, University Press Ltd, Dhaka

## **Websites**

[Wikitravel.org/en/Tokyo/Ikebukuro](http://Wikitravel.org/en/Tokyo/Ikebukuro)

Bryane Michael, Christopher Hartwell and BulatNureev, *Soft Power: A Double-Edged Sword*, <http://bricsmagazine.com/en/articles/soft-power-a-double-edged-sword>

Kalathil, Shanti, *China's Soft Power in the Information Age: Think Again*, May 2011, [http://isd.georgetown.edu/sites/isd/files/Kalathil\\_Chinas\\_Spft\\_Power.pdf](http://isd.georgetown.edu/sites/isd/files/Kalathil_Chinas_Spft_Power.pdf)



McClory, Jonathan, The New Persuaders III: A 2012 Global Raking of Soft Power;

[http://www.google.com.bd/url?](http://www.google.com.bd/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CBoQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.instituteforgovernment.org.uk%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FThe%2520new%2520persuaders%2520III_0.pdf&ei=XA2dU6HfCsK8uASFIYKwDA&usg=AFQjCNGYAx6jtJlucFCkV5BHUHMFIL30Zg&bvm=bv.68911936,d.c2E)

[sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CBoQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.instituteforgovernment.org.uk%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FThe%2520new%2520persuaders%2520III\\_0.pdf&ei=XA2dU6HfCsK8uASFIYKwDA&usg=AFQjCNGYAx6jtJlucFCkV5BHUHMFIL30Zg&bvm=bv.68911936,d.c2E](http://www.google.com.bd/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CBoQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.instituteforgovernment.org.uk%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FThe%2520new%2520persuaders%2520III_0.pdf&ei=XA2dU6HfCsK8uASFIYKwDA&usg=AFQjCNGYAx6jtJlucFCkV5BHUHMFIL30Zg&bvm=bv.68911936,d.c2E)

Aaltola, Mika 2014: Drama Power in the Rise? US Soft Power May Increase as a Function of Washington Dysfunction, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki, [www.fia.fi/assets/publications/wp80.pdf](http://www.fia.fi/assets/publications/wp80.pdf)

### **Government Publications**

External Publicity Wing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka 2013: 2009-2013: A Four and a Half Year Overview of Foreign Office Activities, January 2009-September 2013

The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002 [www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf)

### **MINI BIOGRAPHY**

Director General Md. Jashim Uddin  
Course Member 2014  
National Defence College (NDC)  
Bangladesh

Date of Birth: 13 December 1967

Date of Joining Bangladesh Civil Service: 24 April 1994

#### **Professional Career:**

Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka (April 1994-September 1996 and September 1997-February 2000)

First Secretary/Counsellor, Bangladesh High Commission, New Delhi (March 2000-October 2003)

Counsellor, Bangladesh Embassy, Tokyo (October 2000-August 2005)

Director (South Asia), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka (August 2005-February 2008)

Counsellor/Minister/Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangladesh Embassy, Washington (February 2008-August 2012)

Deputy High Commissioner, Bangladesh High Commission, Islamabad (August 2012-May 2013)

Director General (South Asia), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka (May 2013-February 2014)

Currently a Course Member of NDC 2014.

Had been member of Bangladesh delegations in bilateral negotiations.

Education: BSS (Honors) and MSS in International Relations, Dhaka University

MA in Modern International Studies, Leeds University, UK

Marital Status: Married. Has a son and a daughter.

Hobby: Reading and listening to music.