

Mujib-Indira border agreement

A 'dream line' of peace

M SHAFIULLAH

INDIA is a huge land mass of 12,70,000 square miles whereas my country is only a 55,000 square miles territory. I have no land to concede yet please take my pen to draw line demarcating the border..." Bangabandhu made a gesture to hand over his cross ball pen to Mrs.Indira Gandhi. The Indian Prime Minister held back from the spread map in embarrassment. The friendly encounter took place on the last day of the 1216 May 1974 Summit between the two charismatic leaders of the Sub-continent at the Irwin Suite of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. Few of us were bystanders.

The emotive appeal was made at the exclusive meeting in a final bid to recover some territory earlier conceded to India in an agreement between Pakistan Home Minister General Sheikh and Indian Foreign Minister Sardar Swaran Singh in the sixties' when Field Marshal Ayub Khan was President. Pakistani Central Government had made a number of adjustment of border in the Eastern region for a better bargain with India-West Pakistan border. Bangabandhu even wished to renegotiate entire boundary issue but the die had already been cast before Bangladesh was born.

The scheduled departure of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh was delayed for hours to narrow down the areas of discord. At mid day a number of accords were signed in the Asoka Hall including Agreements to exchange the enclaves and demarcation of remaining portion of boundaries with provision of ratification of those by the Parliaments of the respective countries.

Under the agreement Bangla-

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desh would retain de-facto possession of Ashalong along Tripura-Bangladesh border. Bangladesh would also be in possession of Pathuria forest, Latihitila village along Sylhet border. She would retain Dahagram [overwhelming Muslim majority population] and Angorputa enclaves. In addition India would lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh an area of 178 / 85 meters near Tin Bigha to connect Dahagram with Panbari Mouza in Bangladesh mainland. In exchange India would retain south half of South Berubari [Hindu majority population] and adjoining enclaves measuring approximately 2.64 square miles. It was considered that Bangladesh had made certain territorial gains in the adjustments.

Prior to the Summit, in March Foreign Secretary Fakhruddin Ahmad and his Director-General Barrister A.K.H.Morshed, conducted arduous negotiation with the Indian team who have had long and rich experience in border negotiation with other neighbouring countries. The acumen of Foreign Minister Dr. Kamal Hossain, a legal luminary, was in full use in determining Bangladesh position. In his memoirs CRITICAL TIMES, Fakhruddin recorded, "At the Delhi meeting he[Bangabandhu] repeatedly asked before agreeing to put his signature on the boundary agreement that we must be absolutely sure that there was no prospect of gas or oil in the sectors we had agreed to demarcate. This was



Mrs.Indira Gangdhi leading Bangabandhu to Asoka Hall, Rashtrapati Bhavan for signature ceremony of the border accord. The author is seen on extreme left.

typical of his stiff attitude on negotiations with India."

The other vital issue of intense discussion at the Summit and which continued almost till Bangabandhu's departure time was the sharing of the Ganges water at Indian Farakka Barrage upstream. No amicable agreement could be reached. The Joint Declaration stated that the water sharing at Farakka Barrage should be approached "with understanding so that interests of both the countries are reconciled and difficulties removed in a spirit of friendship and cooperation".

A former Indian Foreign Secretary, J.N.Dixit, who was Bangladesh desk officer during our Liberation War and subsequently served in Dhaka as Deputy High Commissioner from February 1972 to March 1975 was a critic of Bangladesh Prime Minister. In his book LIBERATION AND BEYOND published in 1999 he observed "He [Sheikh Mujib] was of the view that while pending issues should be resolved amicably through political dialogue, there was not going to be any compromise on the part of Bangladesh on issues which could affect Bangladesh's vital interests as perceived by him. The appreciation or gratitude towards India was not going to cloud his perceptions of Bangladesh's interest nor reduce his determination to stand firm on fulfilling these interests."

Bangabandhu reached Dhaka in

the evening of 16 May 1974. Soon after return to Dhaka the Prime Minister took legal and legislative steps necessary to make over the enclaves to India as stipulated in the agreement. Bangladesh Parliament also ratified the agreement in 1974. India, however, did not reciprocate during the life time of Sheikh Mujib ostensibly "due to pressures of West Bengal politics and court cases". The Tin Bigha corridor was handed over only in May 1994, after some twenty years of the Agreement.

The 4000-kilometer Indo-Bangladesh border is not a natural boundary but a bias legacy of British colonial past. Sheikh Mujib and Indira Gandhi in their foresight agreed to make adjustment where possible to remove irritants envisaging a frontier of peace and friendship. It is revolting to see decomposed human bodies and recurrent skirmishes between BDR and BSF on such a 'dream line' driving the villagers out of hearth and home.

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It was so fated that May 1974 Summit was their last. Both the leaders are dead. To prevent further death on both sides of the border, THE DEAD MUST BE HONORED.

Former Ambassador Shafiullah was Information Officer to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from late 1972 to mid 1975.

Games men and women play

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

writes from Princeton

HAVING lived in three different countries Bangladesh, England and America on three different continents, the writer can vouch for the truth in the Beatles song (I paraphrase) "people are the same all over the world." The other day I was engaged in a discussion on matrimonial acrimony with a few male and female American colleagues. As we were all spilling out our guts, I realized that I might as well have been talking to Bangladeshi males and females.

Perhaps actress Katherine Hepburn, who never married, was

LETTER FROM AMERICA

"The reason for nagging is that women want to remain the centre of attention at all times," offered a male colleague...A female colleague, who has three sons, conceded that sometimes she does feel left out at home. "When my husband and the three sons engage in deep male talk, I have no choice but to interrupt."

right when she said that men and women were not meant to live under the same roof as husband and wife; it would have been much better, Hepburn said, if the husband and the wife lived next door to each other and visited each other occasionally.

(The British were on to something with the mid-1970's comedy, "My wife next door.") It is not easy for two human beings with independent personalities, strong likes and dislikes to live in perfect harmony. A common complaint women

have is that men do not help them with the household chores or doing the dishes. I remember that in the late 1970s, the Principal of my wife's college at Oxford invited us for lunch. My wife was complaining that I make so much mess doing the dishes that she had decided to do the dishes herself. The husband of the Principal drew me aside and congratulated me: "Why didn't I think of that? You are a genius!"

"Men are lazy!" commented a female colleague during our discussion. "They will delay doing the dishes forever, knowing that it bothers me, and that in sheer frustration I will do the dishes myself," she complained. "Women are dictators," countered a male colleague: "I am watching a basketball game with the score tied and five seconds remaining in the game. My wife expects me to get up and do the dishes with the game on the line. I don't mind doing the dishes; but it has to be on my own schedule, not my wife's," he emphasized.

"I don't mind cooking either," the same male colleague continued. "When I cook, however, my wife always interferes. Although I am the expert on a particular recipe, my wife will always offer unsolicited advice: 'Turn up the heat, Joe. Did you remember to add salt? I don't think you are stirring enough.' I never interfere when she is cooking!" the colleague lamented.

"Men are dirty!" complained another female colleague: "They like to leave piles of dirty clothes all over the house, and expect me to pick'em up! My house is not a pig's sty!" Shot back a male colleague: "Men are not meant to live neat and

tidy, or be domesticated. Go visit a bachelor's house and then you will know how a male was supposed to live. Only gay men are neat and tidy!"

"If men are so flawed why do you marry them?" I asked. "Because we are romantic fools," answered a female colleague adding, "we still believe in the Knight in the shining armour rescuing us!" A male colleague disagreed: "No, you marry so that you can have children. We the male species have some use for you, you know! Marriage is not necessary if someone does not want to have children."

That probably is true even in America. The interesting part of procreation is that both the father and the mother are so excited by the birth of their children. The child becomes the centre of their life, the core of the family's existence. It is not until much later that both the father and the mother realize (as comedian Jerry Seinfeld has said recently), that the children are our replacement on earth!

"The worst thing about women after marriage is their nagging," was the opinion of another male colleague. He added: "In the prenuptial agreement, there should be an anti-nagging clause! Why can't women be as nice after marriage as they are during courtship?" A female colleague countered: "Without nagging, men will do nothing. Besides, there are good nags and bad nags. Nagging the husband to go to his doctor's or dental appointments are examples of good nags," she explained. Added another female colleague: "The one thing that is worse than female nagging is male

nagging!"

"The reason for nagging is that women want to remain the centre of attention at all times," offered another male colleague. He continued: "When I go out to play with my buddies, my wife prays that the weather turns lousy, my team loses badly and that I have a miserable time. She cannot stand the thought that I may be enjoying myself without her being in the picture."

A female colleague, who has three sons, conceded that sometimes she does feel left out at home. "When my husband and the three sons engage in deep male talk, I have no choice but to interrupt." Women are very good at snide remarks observed another male: "The other day I was watching television, and my wife said with mock horror, 'You have taken to watching golf now!' I was thinking, why didn't my male colleagues quote Rex Harrison's famous line from the film 'My Fair Lady': 'Why can't women be ?more like men!'"

There is a common belief that the ideal family is the one with two boys and two girls so that the two boys and the two girls can keep each other company. The other day I complimented an American mother of a friend of my son, who has two boys and two girls (the writer has two boys), I was not ready for the barrage that followed. "Consider yourself lucky," she said. "Boys are nice; they are very forgiving. Girls! They remember every little thing, and can be very mean!" If ever it was necessary to lend credence to the commonly held view that mothers favour their sons, and the fathers favour the daughters, this lady just provided it! Through the behavioral patterns of the daughters that the mother so disapproved of, and of the sons the father no doubt would censured had I met him, it is possible that unwittingly the young boys and young girls are also sharpening their knives for their own matrimonial battles that lie ahead.

Excerpts from the 'declassified' main report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission

POLITICAL BACKGROUND-XXVI

THE case of General Umar is in a category of its own. He was ostensibly only the Secretary of the National Security Council but, as we have seen, he performed other and more important duties for General Yahya under cover of this assignment. He held large sums of cash, which were certainly no part of the official budget of his department and the source of which has not officially been explained to us. Indeed both he and General Yahya deny the existence of any such secret funds. There was no official accounting of the expenditure of these moneys which were obviously spent on the instructions of General Yahya himself or for purposes generally or specifically designated by the General. On the other hand there is a large body of evidence which proves that he was in close

contact with various political personages to whom he would either go as the President's emissary or whom he would attempt to persuade to a particular course of action in order to promote General Yahya's policies. In our examination of the events during and after the election campaign we have seen that General Yahya did not support any particular party but rather that he was expecting an election result in which no single party would emerge as a force strong enough to dictate its own terms and that a number of comparatively small parties would be thrown up. Since money were collected by General Umar well before the election and utilised during the election clearly they must have been spent in furtherance of this aim. After the election again the effort of General Yahya was to nullify

the election results by playing off the parties against one another. During this period too General Umar cannot therefore be described as doing an ordinary and straight forward job in the service of Government; he positively and by the commission of illegal acts aided and abetted General Yahya in retaining power which he had illegally usurped. He had also the same motive for doing so as General Hamid and Pirzada, that is perpetuation of his own privileged position.

We are, therefore, driven to the reluctant conclusion that in the illegitimate usurpation of power these four Generals were active and consenting agents.

NEXT: CHAPTER ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOM & JERRY

