

Account

The Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, D.K. Power and the Food Secretary of the East Pakistan Government, Ghiasuddin Ahmed, arrived within four days to inspect our relief activities and damages to the Central Food Storage depots located in Chandpur. Power, who chose to stay in the Government launch overnight, stay pointedly advised me to pay rent for the days my family and I had to stay temporarily in the guest apartment of a private company in the town. That was expected of and done by an 'officer and a gentleman' those days! Despite the scarcity of Government funds and the usual delays in the Public Works Department activities, the SDO's bungalow was repaired within a month.

Chandpur had a famous high school in Matlab thana which I visited a couple of times and had the opportunity to meet with the Headmaster, Patwari. Students from the school were regularly placed on the merit list in the matriculation examination in united Bengal before 1947 and also in East Pakistan. I admired the dedication of the teaching staff and the discipline and perseverance of the students who were from rural areas. Across the SDO's bungalow on the banks of Dakatia river was the Puran Bazar which was a large trading centre for all sorts of agricultural produce. Chandpur abundantly produced fine quality jute and there were many buying houses, mostly British. The British left behind the Chandpur Club with a fine billiard table and a caretaker whom the SDO had to pay from a trust fund. Unfortunately, only the SDO had access and authority over the club and even though we would use it for occasional meetings, it could not be opened for general use.

During my time, the East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (EPIDC) in collaboration with W. Rahman and Sons decided to establish a jute Mill in Puran Bazar area. With the help of the District's Land Acquisition Officer, I had to acquire a large plot of land for the Mill. This was accomplished and compensation

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(based on average market value of the last three years) was paid. The W. Rahman Jute Mill was eventually established.

An annual football tournament in memory of a local East Pakistan Rifles' officer Tofayel, who lost his life in an encounter with the Indian Border forces, used to be held in the Chandpur Aziz Ahmed Maidan. Aziz Ahmed ICS, who later became East Pakistan's first Chief Secretary and subsequently Pakistan's foreign Minister. He was known for his assistance to the Chief Minister of Bengal, A K Fazlul Huq in implementing the Debt Settlement Board activities which largely relieved Muslim peasantry from the crushing (often unfair) debt owed to mostly Hindu landlords and money lenders. Another of my predecessors in Chandpur was SK Dehlavi, ICS who later became an Ambassador and also Foreign Secretary of Pakistan. He had left behind a school in the interior in the name of his mother Lady Dehlavi and once wrote a letter to me in that connection. I was impressed by the fact that he maintained interest in his old sub-division even after such a long time. During my time, I sent invitation to the first Bangali Army Major General and Commander of the 14th Division in Dhaka, Khwaja Wasiuddin (son of Khwaja Shahabuddin of the Dhaka Nawab family and a minister in many Governments) to

distribute the prizes of a sports tournament. To my delight he readily accepted and in fact sent an advance party to survey the area. The general arrived by an army launch and stayed for a day. The tournament drawing teams from many districts was a grand success.

Those were Basic Democracy days and the SDO was not only the chairman of all schools, colleges and public institutions, he was also *ex-officio* Chairman of the municipality. The council members were elected representatives and elected a vice-chairman from among them. The SDO, however, exercised supervision and control over the municipality as *ex-officio* chairman.

During my short tenure, I visited all the thanas, many of the *tehsil* offices, most of the schools and the Baburhat orphanage and the development projects. I raised donations and got a Basic Democracy Hall built on the top of the existing Ansar Office for holding civic functions. I understand that the Hall is still in use.

The author is a former civil servant and a retired member of the World Bank Staff.