

## My memories of Bangladesh

The people of Bangladesh are courageous, hard working and industrious. The economy, earlier based on its farming expertise, particularly of rice and jute, is diversifying into industries and infrastructure. Bangladesh has emerged as a major exporter of textiles and knitwear, outperforming her neighbour India. Jute and leather industries are flourishing.

J.F.R. JACOB

My first contact with the people of what was to become the state of Bangladesh was in 1943 during World War II. My battery was moving by road through Bihar, undivided Bengal into Arakan in the then Burma. I was appalled by the starvation I saw. It was pathetic. We tried to help by cutting our soldiers' rations in half and distributing it to the people en route. It was a matter of great anguish to me to see the disappointment in the starving people around our field kitchen outside Dhaka when the food for each man, two chappatis and dal/bhaji, ran out. I decided to get more food to distribute.

I remember that there was an army supply depot near the ferry site on the outskirts of Dhaka. I approached the officer in charge of the depot to take one week's rations for my men. I did not tell him that I intended to distribute it to the starving people in the area. He declined. A heated argument took place. I insisted. He then produced vouchers in triplicate and asked me to sign them. We were proceeding into an operational zone, and there was no peacetime accounting and my signing of vouchers would not be questioned.

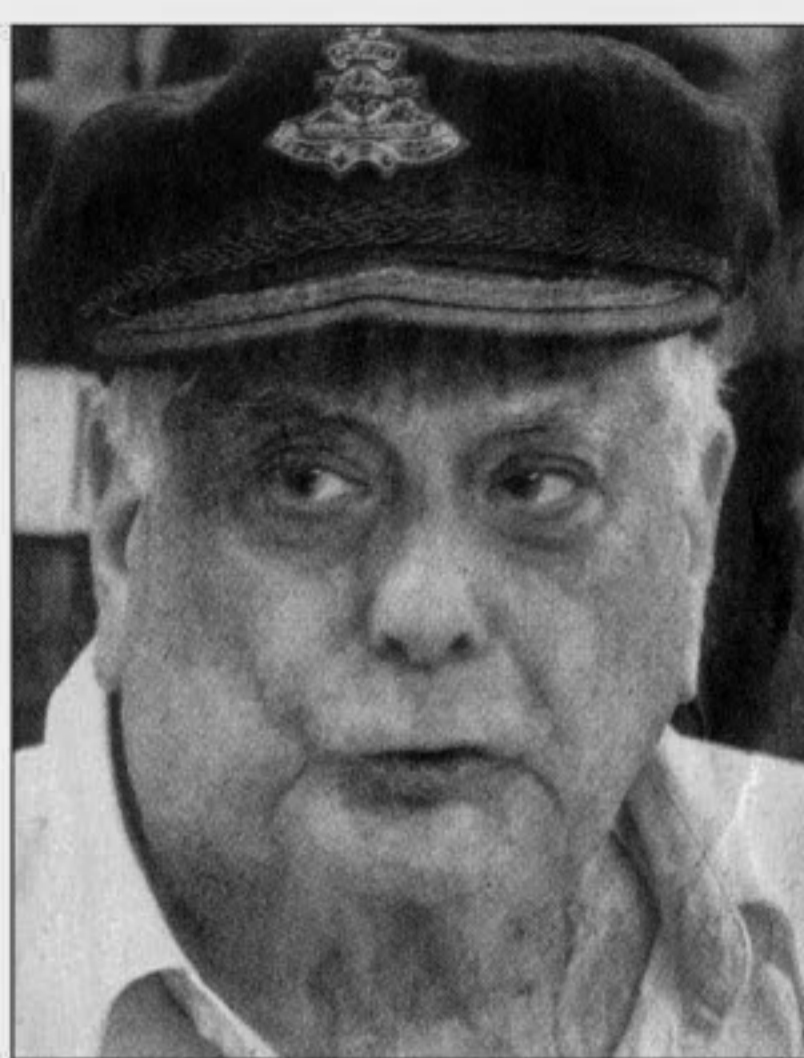
We distributed the rations for some 200 soldiers at campsites outside Chittagong

and Cox's Bazaar to people in need, and proceeded to Arakan. We heard nothing of our unauthorised drawing of one week's rations for 200 men which we distributed to starving people.

There was to be a long gap before I was to get involved again with the people of the future nation of Bangladesh. I arrived at Fort William in May 1969. Events were moving fast in East Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib was insisting on the six-point programme that he had spelt out in Lahore in February 1966.

There was a disastrous cyclone on November 16, 1970. The government of East Pakistan failed to take effective relief measures. There was enormous suffering but hardly any remedial measures. It was a case of apathy and indifference towards the suffering of the people by the East Pakistan government. The people in West Bengal were appalled by the callousness of the East Pakistan government.

The elections in December 1970 gave Sheikh Mujib a thumping majority, winning 160 seats in the National Assembly and taking all but two seats in the East. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party won 81 out of 138 seats in the West. The people and the government of West Pakistan did not want to see Sheikh Mujib as prime minister. Yahya Khan announced that the national assembly was to meet in March. This was later postponed. There were



Gen. J.F.R. Jacob

hartals and resistance across East Pakistan.

Lt. Gen. Sahebzada Yakub Khan was appointed as governor of East Pakistan. Yakub was mild and considerate to the people. This was not liked by Rawalpindi. Yakub was replaced by the "butcher" Tikka Khan after a month. Incidentally, in August 1947, Major Tikka Khan was a student in the gunnery staff course that I was taking in Deolali. He, with the other Pakistanis on the course, went back to Pakistan. I remember little of Maj. Tikka Khan. I found him then to be unimpressive.

Meanwhile, a concerned Indian government suspended overflights over India. On March 23, Pakistan day, Bangladesh flags were flown all over East Pakistan, and independence was proclaimed.

On the evening of March 25, Yahya Khan flew back to West Pakistan via Colombo. Tikka had issued orders for the

crackdown to commence at 0100 hours on March 26. It was called "Operation Searchlight."

Sheikh Mujib made an announcement proclaiming the independence of Bangladesh and exhorted the people to fight until the last Pakistani soldier was driven out. Mujib was arrested at 0100 hours on March 26 at his residence, and flown to Karachi some three days later. Most of the other Bangladeshi leaders escaped and reached India.

I was able to listen with difficulty to the orders being given by tank commanders at Dhaka University -- "traverse left, open window, fire" and so on. Resistance was brutally squashed.

The refugees started to pour in. It was a pathetic sight. They came carrying whatever little possessions they had.

The East Bengal Battalions moved into India. I went to the border to help extricate them when they were trying to enter India. At Benapole, I had deployed an infantry battalion to cover their movement into India. Tajuddin was to hold a meeting with Griffiths, a British member of parliament, at the customs post inside East Pakistan. Pakistani guns were shelling the area.

I urged Tajuddin to leave the customs post, where a Bangladesh flag was flying. We got Tajuddin to safety after the meeting. Pakistani troops were approaching. I ordered the battalion to fire at the Pakistanis who were trying to take down the Bangladesh flag. We did not allow the Pakistanis to remove the flag, which flew throughout until the slaughter.

By the end of March, a number of Bangladesh leaders arrived. Prominent among them were Tajuddin Ahmed, Nazrul Islam, Qamruzzaman, Mansur Ali, Col. Osman and Wing Commander Khondkar. A government in exile was formed. We allotted them a bungalow in 8,

Theatre Road. They started to function immediately.

I set up the Mukti Bahini. Initially, 8 camps were organised. Sector commanders were appointed. They directed their fighters with great competence. The Mukti Bahini and the East Bengal battalions played a major and decisive role in the freedom struggle. They attacked the Pakistanis everywhere, and severely damaged their infrastructure. They created an environment that completely demoralised the Pakistan army. Due credit must go to them for their enormous contribution towards the defeat of the Pakistan army and the creation of Bangladesh.

A lightning campaign was launched from December 4. On December 14, Niazi asked for a ceasefire under the UN, and handing over of the government to the UN. This was rejected on December 15 by Bhutto, who vowed to fight on. I drafted the instrument of surrender and, on December 16 at Dhaka, compelled Niazi to accept an unconditional public surrender in front of the people of Dhaka. I made him face the people whom he had treated so badly.

The atrocities committed by the Pakistan army are well documented in Bangladesh. In the space of four hours, a ceasefire was converted into an unconditional public surrender, the only one in history. The Hamoodur Rehman Commission asked Niazi: "General, you had 26,000 troops in Dhaka and the Indians a few thousand outside, and you could have fought on for at least two more weeks till the UN session. Had you fought on even for one more day the Indians would have had to go back. Why did you accept a shameful unconditional public surrender?" Niazi replied that he was compelled to do so by Gen. Jacob, who blackmailed him into surrendering. The

state of Bangladesh was born.

Regarding what the future has in store for Bangladesh, I see a vibrant people led by a pragmatic leader Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and a rapidly expanding economy. Bangladesh has emerged as a powerful nation, and has become an increasingly important regional power. Bangladesh is now the world's 48th economic power, and is rising fast to overtake others.

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There are inadequate reserves of oil and gas. However, there are ample reserves of coal. Coal could produce the power required for industries and homes. New coal-based power stations are planned. Regarding the infrastructure, Bangladesh is taking positive steps to accelerate work on roads, bridges, ports, and railways. Roads are being planned to link up with North Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura and Myanmar along the old Arakan road.

Bangladesh is expanding her maritime resources and projecting her presence aggressively into the Indian Ocean. Bangladesh has a well-trained army, which has made substantial contributions to UN peace keeping.

Finally, I see Bangladesh, under the pragmatic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, emerging as a regional superpower.

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## Societal awakening is a must

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It sears the conscience. Beyond that there is a general sense of alarm across the nation aroused by a recent spurt in dastardly crimes as stalking of school and college going girls. The situation is no less frightening in villages and towns. Stalking and sexual advances, the most menacing crime these days, have introduced another form of criminality like killing the near and dear ones of the victim.

Champa Rani Bhowmik, mother of two school going girls run-over by a motorcycle because she protested the stalking of her daughters. A few days ago, stalkers ran over a college teacher in Natore because he tried to resist such dastardly acts of some hoodlums. Both the alleged assailants Rajon and Asif have now been arrested.

A report published in a news daily on October 26 indicated that Majedur Rahman Chand, Natore district AL vice-president and also principal of Tamaltala Agriculture College in Bagatipara upazila, seemingly close to Rajon, the main accomplice in the attack, has termed Mizan's death as an accident.

But an eyewitness report said he was severely beaten after being run over by motorbike. Autopsy report also revealed that the deceased's body bore marks of

injuries and bruises. The supreme sacrifice made by these people in an effort to protect women folk from humiliation and abuse epitomises the kind of protest sensible citizenry have in their heart.

A newspaper report quoting Ain-O-Salish Kendra revealed that, in the last nine months, at least 25 women, mostly young school and college going girls, committed suicide to escape the horror of abuse while nine males lost their lives for standing up against the stalkers. A father also committed suicide, being unable to withstand the humiliation of his daughter. The entire nation has been traumatised and feels outraged at the bestiality and savagery perpetrated on women by a group of deviant youths.

Despite the fact that the whole country is seething with rage and hatred and indignation against these abusers, there has been no let-up in their dastardly activities. What these barbaric actions have made clear is that these *mastans* are having a field day under the nose of the law enforcers while innocent men and women continue to suffer not only at the hands of these goons but also at the hands of the authority mandated to protect them.

What ails our society? Why are such criminal and murderous instincts getting the better of self-restraint, ethics and religious virtues? Something seems

to have gone awfully wrong with our society, leading to ever increasing instances of depraved behaviour. Every time such dastardly acts, often leading to death, take place, people are naturally outraged and loud protests are voiced all over the country. But when the alleged offenders go away with impunity, the perpetrators feel emboldened to commit crimes of greater enormity.

What is chilling about many of the young criminals is that they show no remorse or conscience, at least initially. How could this be happening? The experts offer a raft of reasons, everything from physiological and psychological abnormalities to family and cultural decay.

The reason is that children do not get the nurturing, guidance and supervision necessary to instill a set of values and a proper code of behaviour from the formative years. But a life of privilege can also be corrupting. Children who have everything given to them may come to believe that they are entitled to anything, and that they are above their fellow human beings and above the law. And yet their busy parents may not be giving pampered teens what they need most: attention and supervision. "Neglect is abuse," so says a social scientist of the country.

In most cases, such derailed youngsters learn about sex and other immoral and unethical activities from one another, and look to their peers for a sense of belonging and approval. But the group's influence is often treacherous. In many instances, the violence is often fueled by easy access to drugs.

And if teenagers often get their values from peers, then just what are those values? In our society the emphasis is

less on caring for others than on getting money and instant gratification. If the big shots can take what they want, often by illegal means, then a teenager may think he should be able to grab the spoils in the only way he knows how. As Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles says: "Our culture accentuates instinct instead of inhibiting."

We must all assume responsibility for being indifferent to the circumstances that breed crimes of this sort. Communities are taught to blame everyone but themselves. Trisha of Gaibandha and Sema of Narayanganj took their lives in protest against societal indifference. There is a rather big difference between suicide and homicide. For some, the distinction is not obvious. They must be taught that, or else they will grow up in a moral vacuum. Moral vacuum produces moral monsters.

Why are our leaders not able to control a handful of hoodlums who seem determined to impose their medieval barbarity on us? Sadly true, it is now barbarity and muscle flexing activities that appear always to win.

The society as a whole must try to root out the fast spreading cancer that threatens to unsettle the very foundations of morality. The security of children is the most essential part of the growth of a democratic and healthy society, and should be considered sine qua non to any civilised order and must be guaranteed by the state.

When such violence keeps on occurring one is led to think that, apart from individual aberrations, a lot of other things are wrong with the society and the social culture that leads to such perverse propensity. People are led to believe that the increasing drug-crime nexus that



has spread from the urban centres to rural outbacks is exacting its toll. It may be that due to social conflict and unrest, some individuals are being dehumanised fast.

Excessive wealth, made mostly through corrupt means, is making people insensitive to all tenderness and human values to the point that animal lust is getting the better of inhibitions.

A report published in a Bangla daily indicated that a stalker in Chittagong was arrested by police on the basis of a complaint lodged by the girl in Bandar thana, but he was fined just Tk.100 when produced in the Metropolitan magistrate court and released. All the evidence indicates that there are gaping holes in our legal system, which the previous government did not amend despite a series of tragic death at that time.

It makes us shudder with shock and trepidation to see how innocent people are suffering owing to the malignant social growth -- the emergence of musclemen and godfathers in almost every locality. The situation has come to such a pass that a vast section of the country is hostage to these evil forces since law enforcers have failed to improve the crime situation so far.

Some people have offered a solution: locking up parents. The US state of California, it is learnt, has done that. Under a statute there, parents can be held responsible for the criminal activity of their offspring. A parent violating the parental responsibility law faces a year in jail and a \$2500 fine.

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## A question of loyalty



This column is dedicated to humanity's best friend, a poor dumb animal found in an increasing number of homes in Asia. It may not be intelligent, but it is loyal. It might not be able to express complex sentences, but it can communicate a bit by growling, howling, etc. It can be smelly, furry

and unsightly, but many people are willing to overlook such shortcomings for an animal, which is simple, faithful and predictable. I overheard my wife telling a friend the other day, "They're no trouble, as long as you remember to feed them from time to time."

I am talking of course, about the Modern Adult Male Human.

We men are intensely loyal about things we find important. I kept my lucky Star Trek T-shirt for years and I still have the soft toy I slept with since I was three, despite the smell.

We men know every goal our favorite team ever scored, every hit our favorite band ever had, and we will talk for years about the time we cooked dinner and it

wasn't that bad.

We keep our favorite jeans for YEARS, sometimes on our bodies. Human males have only one rival in the extreme loyalty stakes: dogs. In America, they celebrate Old Shep; in the UK, Greyfriars Bobby; and in Japan, Hachiko. All three were dogs that waited years at railway stations or elsewhere for their masters to come home, not having read the obits.

What about guys who own dogs? Why no movies about us? We have WAY more loyalty than pooches. My new hero is Edwin Fry, 73. This man was in the news in the US last week because of how he reacted when dogcatchers put his poodle, Buddy Tough, in the dog pound. Mr Fry rode into Oklahoma on his lawnmower and used bolt-cutters to

spring his only friend out of doggy jail. Even more astonishing was the case of Ronnie Gilbertson, 42, of South Australia. When his dog Max was put on death row, not only did he break into jail and rescue it, but also he abandoned his wife and children to go on the run with it. The pair was fugitives for six months before the law caught up with them last week.

Now here's the shocking bit. Both these stories have the same ending. Instead of being feted for their faithfulness to their four-legged friends, the two men were jailed. And the dogs were killed.

One of the newspaper reports said fugitive poodle Buddy Tough "was euthanised." Newspapers should not use loaded, emotional words like that.

They should be clear and factual. I would have written, "Buddy Tough was brutally murdered by heartless, state assassins who should be strung up by their reproductive organs." Not that I'm biased.

The whole thing about dogs being more loyal than dog owners is an evil slander against us owners.

Last week, I let my dog off the leash. I spent half an hour playing with it to come back. The dog just gave me a look, which said, "Just because you spend your life feeding me and picking up my poop, it doesn't mean you own me." You know what's really weird? My children say "exactly" the same thing.

Next time you see me in the park, pat my head and say, "Good boy." On unrelated matters...

I am packing my bags, about to head off to Europe on a book tour. I hate cold weather, so am not really looking forward to it. But my hosts have warm hearts, and hopefully central heating. Thanks for the additions to the "half-full glass" story -- I think we definitely did the "definitive" version of that motif, milking every single angle out of it!

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Beginning today, we are serialising articles by eminent foreigners that appeared in the special supplement brought out by Prothom Alo on its 12th founding anniversary, by courtesy of the paper.