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South and East Asia Report

(FOUO 6/81)

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BANGLADESH

BANGLADESH'S ERSHAD INTERVIEWED ON MILITARY'S ROLE

PM081125 London THE GUARDIAN in English 8 Oct 81 p 10

[Peter Niesewand Dispatch: "Bangladesh Army to Seek Greater Role in Politics"]

[Text] Dacca--The chief of staff of the Bangladesh Army, Lieutenant-General H. M. Ershad, has called on politicians to consider important constitutional changes which will actively involve the military in the country's affairs and ward off the possibility of future coup attempts.

In a forthright interview at his home in the Dacca Cantonment, General Ershad pointed out that sections of the army had assassinated two Bangladeshi presidents--Shaykh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, and Ziaur Rahman in May this year. There had also been other coup attempts.

"My army has got involved," General Ershad said. "It is my responsibility. Obviously, we have to approach the next president. In a developing nation, the army does play a very high role in the stability of the country. To stop further coups, if the army participates in the administration of the country, then they will probably have a feeling they are also involved, and they will not be frustrated."

General Ershad stressed that while he was prepared to take an initiative after the presidential elections on 15 November, any constitutional changes that resulted have to be endorsed and carried out by the civilian government.

Although General Ershad said that morale in the army was "absolutely all right," it is now clear that last month, in the final weeks before the hanging of 12 officers for mutiny leading to the assassination of President Zia, a dangerous situation had arisen within the ranks.

On 7 September, General Ershad ordered that a message be read to soldiers assuring them that the officers would be executed.

The chief of staff maintains that his "order of the day" was not a challenge to the high court or the supreme court, which at the time were considering petitions asking them to rule that they had jurisdiction over the fate of those tried and sentenced by the secret court martial.

However, restless Jawans who listened to his message would have been forgiven for thinking that General Ershad was promising to hang the officers, regardless of the findings of the civilian judiciary.

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In his message, General Ershad said: "I want to assert again that we consider it against our constitution that a matter concerning military affairs should be dragged into the high court, and we consider it also a threat to the discipline of the armed forces. We really hope that law will take its own course. I would like to tell our soldiers in all ranks that the sentences given by the court martial will be implemented. Let there be no doubt of suspicion about it."

The message also said he would not permit "the activities of the armed forces to be used for political purposes. The wrongdoers must be punished," he added. "We hope God will give us courage to perform our responsibilities."

In the event the courts ruled that they had no jurisdiction to intervene, and helicopters immediately took off from Dacca to the different gaols where the condemned officers were being held, carrying with them signed death warrants. The hangings were over in 12 hours.

In his interview General Ershad explained: "It was my internal problem. It was an order of the day to say 'just have patience, I am sure the high court and the supreme court will give the correct verdict, and whatever judgment is passed by the army they will not do anything against it.'"

Asked if he would have hanged the officers anyway if the courts had ruled differently, the chief of staff laughed and said: "This is a very difficult question."

Informed sources said that "the basis of the Jawans' unrest was not only their love for the assassinated president, but also the feeling that if ordinary soldiers had been responsible they would have been executed with little ceremony, and possibly--as has happened before--not even a court martial.

And the chief of staff told me: "I had to give them this message. This was an 'officers versus the other ranks.' Most of the people punished were officers, and there was a feeling that just because they were officers we were going to protect them."

General Ershad defended his decision to try the officers for mutiny--which allowed him to hold a secret court martial--rather than for murder, which would have been dealt with by an open civilian court.

"A trial in a civil court takes a very, very long time," General Ershad said. "A trial for murder would have taken months and months and months, and I would have had a great problem with the army. Ultimately it would have been very dangerous for the country. The president was very much loved by the troops, and naturally the feeling of the troops was very high."

On a possible future constitutional role for the army in Bangladesh, he said that he had discussed the merits of the Turkish system with the late President Zia. "But ultimately we discarded it," he said. "We are a different nation. Our people are politically very, very conscious. I should say it is a volatile nation."

General Ershad said that the military was "absolutely neutral" in the presidential election, although he did admit having intervened personally to persuade the sick and reluctant acting president, Justice Abdus Sat Tar, to stand as a candidate.

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He said he had done this merely to ensure that, during the vital interregnum, the ruling Bangladesh nationalist party did not fall apart while bickering over rival candidates.

It would have been possible for the army to have declared martial law, General Ershad went on, but they wanted the constitutional process to continue.

"Martial law is never the answer," General Ershad said. "Pakistan of course is continuing with one after another. But does it ultimately pay? It does not. The army's role is different from running an administration. If you get involved in this, ultimately you destroy the army."

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INDIA

REPORT ON 'ASAHI SHIMBUN' INTERVIEW WITH INDIRA GANDHI

OW251215 Tokyo ASAHI SHIMBUN in Japanese 23 Sep 81 Morning Edition p 7

[Summary of an "exclusive" interview with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by Teruo Kunugi, chief of ASAHI SHIMBUN Asian General Bureau and Fumishige Yoshimura, chief of the daily's New Delhi bureau, on 21 September in New Delhi]

[Text] Question: It is said that because of the Reagan Administration's hawkish posture, the era of detente is now dead. What is your view?

Answer: It is true that an atmosphere of tension and confrontation is building up, but I do not think that detente is dead or abandoned.

Question: You have lately often referred to an international crisis, prime minister. By that you mean that detente is on the decline, do you not?

Answer: Detente is indeed on the decline. If one side makes an advance, the other side will do the same in response so as to counter it.

Question: You have just mentioned a response to cope with the other side's action. The industrialized nations of the West at their Ottawa summit meeting noted the Soviet threat and agreed to take a firm stand against it. That was their response to Soviet policies.

Answer: Who is responding to whom? The Soviet Union sees itself encircled. The West European countries were on the side of the United States. Even Iran was closer to the United States. In addition, the Nixon administration established friendly ties with China. The Soviet Union, thus finding itself encircled, was compelled to respond.

A superpower is increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean. An act of a superpower would naturally invite a response from the other superpower. It is like climbing a ladder, each trying to climb a step higher than the other. The eventual outcome will be a war and nothing else.

Question: In your view, how firm are the foundations of China's modernization policy?

Answer: China is in a state of confusion. Both the people and the party are divided and polemics are continuing. The leaders may be laying emphasis on economic

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and technical development but not all the people seem to be in accord with the new position of the leadership. China has entered its most difficult phase now. Personally, I wish it success but I do not want to see China drawn into something like an alliance.

Question: But the United States and Japan are promoting China's modernization and some people have come up with the "China-U.S.-Japan axis" concept. What do you think of that?

Answer: I prefer the word "alliance" to "axis" but it is a dangerous one. If one alliance is created, it will be followed by another to resist it. However modernized China may become, it cannot expect future national developments so long as it forgets the principle of self-reliance, relies on other countries or keeps itself pre-occupied with disputes.

Question: Nevertheless, we think that China has chosen the West European type of development for itself. What is your view?

Answer: China may be headed in one direction today but in another direction tomorrow. It may not be as bad as that, but I do know that each nation should explore its own path and no other nation should meddle in it.

Question: What do you think is the best way to prevent nuclear proliferation?

Answer: The only way is to press for general disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament. The continuing buildup of nuclear arms attests to the failure of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty.

India conducted a nuclear explosion test once in the past, solely for peaceful purposes. Scientists wanted to find out if nuclear power could be used in building a large dam or some such project. It was an underground test and a clean one.

The reason why India is not a signatory to the nonproliferation treaty is that the treaty is of discriminatory nature.

Question: What is the possibility of further nuclear testing?

Answer: If it becomes necessary, that is, if a scientific need arises, I will consider it. India will conduct no nuclear testing for political reasons.

Question: If Pakistan should possess nuclear arms, will you consider nuclear arming for India, too?

Answer: Our policy is not influenced by what Pakistan does. If there should be a war between India and Pakistan--although we do not want to see it happen--it would be fought with conventional weapons.

Question: Would you comment on India's foreign policy.

Answer: India has consistently striven for world peace, for promoting friendly relations and alleviating hostilities wherever they emerge. Nonalignment is also one of the major features of our foreign policy.

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International confrontation and the arms race are dangerous to world peace; the widening gap between the rich and poor nations is equally dangerous. Therefore, North-South dialogue is important. The role of the nonaligned movement is to concentrate on the basic question, that is the question of war or peace, and to tackle problems relating to the economic development of developing nations. This is a contribution to peace.

Question: You say that "India is not pro-Soviet," but many nations regard it as being pro-Soviet rather than pro-U.S.

Answer: India is neither pro-Soviet nor pro-U.S.; it is neither anti-Soviet nor anti-U.S. It is not anti-China either. It is Western media and leaders that are painting a "pro-Soviet" image of India.

At the time of independence, the United States refused to give assistance to an iron-works construction project in India, saying that it could not aid enterprises under public management. However, the Soviet Union aided us. India will never allow Soviet aid to influence its thinking, judgment and behavior.

Question: You mean that there is a difference between the present view among nations and reality. Are you going to leave the mistaken view as it is?

Answer: What more can I do about it? India has been striving to diversify the sources of aid in its industrial development programs and it has been successful in this area. Even in its purchase of arms, it has been buying them from various countries so that it is not dependent solely on the Soviet Union.

Question: India's aim in its recognition of the Heng Samrin regime of Kampuchea was to play the role of a mediator, was it not?

Answer: I only fulfilled a campaign pledge. There was no hidden intention whatsoever.

Question: World public opinion and feelings over the issues involving Afghanistan and Kampuchea have it that they cannot support a regime created by the military force of a foreign country....

Answer: They say so but Western nations have been continuing their interventions in Central and South America, Asia and Africa, changing governments there. It is unreasonable to use a different yardstick under a different circumstance.

When the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan, most of the countries condemned it. They got nowhere, however, but made a settlement more difficult. The stationing of troops is not in the interest of the Soviet Union. The USSR want to withdraw its troops. The important thing is to create an environment for the withdrawal.

Question: What is the basic philosophy of India about economic development?

Answer: India pursues a so-called mixed economy. Capitalism cannot solve our problems. India must develop its own socialism, not the kind of socialism in the USSR and other countries. Socialism means equal opportunity for the people and bringing an end to old economic and social injustices.

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These goals cannot be attained if the economy is left to be controlled by the principle of the market. If political awareness is enhanced in the course of development, if development results in an increasing imbalance between the rich and the poor, the poor people will not tolerate the development itself. In that case, we will have to slow down the economic development.

Question: What do you expect Japan to do in the area of economic relations?

Answer: Japan is India's second largest trade partner. It is the third largest country in terms of assistance. We are deeply grateful to it for the assistance. It is encouraging that Japan takes a positive stance on North-South dialogue. I think that India and Japan can cooperate in the energy field, too.

Question: We are sorry to say that no Japanese prime minister has visited India for some 20 years. Prime Minister Gandhi's visit to Japan was back in 1969. Foreign Minister Sonoda in one of his recent remarks referred to the possibility of Prime Minister Suzuki visiting India....

Answer: If Prime Minister Suzuki visits India, we will extend the highest level of welcome.

Question: We hope that you also will visit Japan to realize a mutual visit by the prime ministers....

Answer: I will be happy to visit Japan. I visited Japan three times in the past since I first accompanied my father (the last Prime Minister Nehru). I am all for mutual visits by the prime ministers.

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