

**BANGLADESH**

**COUNTRY READER**

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**MICHAEL H. NEWLIN**  
**Senior Political Advisor, USUN**  
**New York (1968-1972)**

*Ambassador Newlin was born in North Carolina and was raised there and in the Panama canal zone. After graduating from Harvard he joined the Foreign Service in 1952 and was posted to Frankfurt, Oslo, Paris, Kinshasa and Jerusalem, where served as Consul General. During his distinguished career, Ambassador Newlin served in several high level positions dealing with the United Nations and its agencies and NATO. He served as Ambassador to Algeria from 1981 to 1985 and as US representative to the United Nations Agencies in Vienna, 1988-1991. Ambassador Newlin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.*

*Q: It was sort of the Bangladesh war.*

NEWLIN: The Bangladesh war, that's right.. And of course the Soviets were supporting India. The Chinese were strongly supporting Pakistan. George Bush got a call from the Department instructing him to call U Thant, the Secretary General and urge U Thant to call for an immediate cease fire between the two. So he did get U Thant on the line, and U Thant was very dubious that this was something he ought to do. I broke in and said, "People are dying. This is something that the UN should do." He said no, that he really didn't think the situation was one that he could take this initiative. So we reported that back to Washington. Then we got word of a telegram from Islamabad saying that the U.S. could call for a cease fire. The State Department shot back and said, "Do you formally request the United States to call for a cease fire?" Then the answer came back,. "Yes. We formally ask the United States." So then we issued the call for a cease fire. It came into being. Then we had a Security Council meeting the next day to bless the outcome of the war and say that Bangladesh was independent. Bhutto, by that time was president. It was very interesting. I went with George over to the hotel to meet with Bhutto. He was an interesting character because he had been very anti American.

*Q: Oh he was?*

NEWLIN: Yes. But he was very smooth and everything. Then in the Security Council meeting the next day, he denounced the resolution that provided for Bangladeshi independence and for the cease fire and the negotiations. He ripped up the resolution and threw it into the Security Council well. He had had many harsh things to say about India and about a lot of people. Then Bhutto got up and walked out of the Security Council. Then later in the afternoon I saw him walking in the hall outside arm and arm with the foreign minister of India.

*Q: Well did you have a problem during this time because there was the famous thing with Kissinger was tilting towards Pakistan and sent I think the Enterprise, the aircraft carrier task force into the Bay of Bengal and all. Did that cause problems in the UN?*

NEWLIN: No. Things were moving so fast and everything. It was clear there was going to be a war between India and Pakistan. Bangladesh, they were all in favor of leaving Pakistan. They were a majority. People said this is what is going to happen.

*Q: Did you get involved, was there the Zionism is racism business?*

NEWLIN: That was later. George Bush was such a, to show you what sort of person he is. He met with the Israeli permanent representative. The Israeli representative said, "Have you ever been to Israel?" George Bush immediately said, "No I haven't been to Israel, Ireland or Italy. I haven't been in national politics before."

**G. JONATHAN GREENWALD**  
**Legal Advisor, Near East South Asia**  
**Washington, DC (1970-1972)**

*Born and raised in Pennsylvania, Mr. Greenwald earned degrees for Princeton University and Harvard Law School. His first government assignment was General Counsel in the Department of the Air Force. He later transferred to the Department of State, where he served as legal advisor as well as Political Officer, both in Washington and in various assignments abroad. His foreign posts include Germany (East and West Berlin), Yugoslavia, Hungary and Belgium. He also had assignments concerning anti-terrorism.*

*Q: It also, just in the context of U.S.-Turkey relations or Turkey's relations with Western European nations and the United States, eased the problem that had been building and, as you say, put it into a multilateral context, not just focused on Turkey. Okay, what other things did you do while you were in this office? This was the time you were involved a bit with the Rogers Plan. This was the period between '67 and the '73 war. It was also a time when Bangladesh achieved its independence. I don't know if there were other things like that that you were involved with a bit.*

GREENWALD: Well, I had a chance to see a bit of them. I didn't work terribly closely on the Bangladesh problem, but I do remember sitting in a staff meeting of the Office of Pakistan Affairs. One of the senior experienced officers who had spent a lot of time in that area, a fellow named Craig Baxter, said, "In six months there will be an independent country in east Bengal," and at time everyone heard that with shock and horror, and it turned out he was right, almost to the day. It was one of the things that contributed to the growing respect I had for the quality of the people in the Foreign Service and contributed to making me feel this was something I really wanted to explore further.

**JOSEPH F. STEPANEK**  
**AID Officer**

### **Dhaka (1971-1972)**

*Mr. Stepanek was born in Houston, Texas and was raised primarily abroad. After earning degrees from the Universities of Colorado and Minnesota, he joined USAID and was sent to Bangladesh as economist. Subsequent assignments took him to Washington DC in USAID's policy bureau and as Chief of the Development Planning Office for Latin America. His foreign assignments were to Indonesia as Mission Economist, to Tanzania and to Zambia, where he was USAID Mission Director. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.*

*Q: Regarding the family planning program in Bangladesh, I gather that what you're saying is that it began during your time there. What was involved in getting this program launched and how was it received?*

STEPANEK: I don't know this as well as I know the food assistance program. Mike Jordan and Dallas Voran were staff people under Tony Schwarzwald and Joe Toner who worked hard on the family planning program. Joe is the person who, I think, deserves most of the credit for appreciating that Bangladesh could not just go on "growing more people." They had to deal with both sides of the equation of food and people. They simply had to grow more food and had to make family planning services available.

Joe Toner did something that is more or less unheard of these days. He went on a personal campaign to the capitals of the donor assistance countries, making the case for family planning "or else." He said that donors had to be very tough minded. I recall that he went to Bonn and London, as well as one or two other capitals. I think that Joe felt very disappointed when he came back from this trip. I think that he felt that he had been out "at the end of the plank," as it were. He felt that there weren't many voices helping him along.

*Q: There wasn't much reception for his support for family planning.*

STEPANEK: Not at the time. Today, looking back on it, making family planning an issue as he did, in his meetings with President Zia of Bangladesh and with every senior civil servant that he could talk to made quite a difference. The Bangladeshis themselves also made a very special contribution. They developed a cadre of women family planning workers. That one step, over and above the "push" from the aid donor countries, also explains why family planning is taking hold in Bangladesh today. The "contraceptive prevalence" or use rate among married couples in Bangladesh is as high as 45 percent today. It is a remarkable achievement. Birth rates are coming down.

*Q: Is the family planning program sponsored by a government ministry or were there private groups involved?*

STEPANEK: There is a private element involved in this program as well. As I'm sure you're aware, most of these family planning programs are, in fact, financed by a blend of public and private resources. Probably most of the money is provided by the public sector, using public

officials. There are condom sales through private mechanisms, using advertising. It is a multi-faceted approach.

*Q: Was there any cultural resistance to this program that you recall?*

STEPANEK: Bangladesh is a Muslim country. I recall that there was resistance. However, basically the civil service and the political leadership supported the necessity of the family planning program.

I can digress from this for a moment and tell you how this was dealt with. In Tanzania Julius Nyerere called all of the church and religious leaders together to talk about family planning. They had a very low key program in Tanzania funded by the NGO's [non governmental organizations] throughout the socialist experiments in the 1960's and 1970's. They had nothing but disdain for Western family planning programs. The Tanzanian Government treated our program with great suspicion at first. President Nyerere called the religious leaders together and talked about the importance of family planning and voluntary acceptance of it. He said that Tanzania couldn't go on doubling and tripling its population. Well, the Protestant and the Catholic representatives in Tanzania stood up and, in effect, said: "Nuts to you!" The Muslim representatives also said: "Nuts! We don't believe in family planning." At the end of this meeting President Nyerere said: "I'm glad that you all agree with me. We are going ahead with family planning. Thank you very much." That's leadership.

*Q: Well, we're getting off the subject a bit, but we'll come back to it. What convinced President Nyerere of the need for family planning?*

STEPANEK: I can only guess. The world has changed so fast from the point of view of world leaders. In their lifetime they can see this. President Nyerere must have seen this. He was the founding father of an independent Tanzania, when the population of the country was 10 or 11 million people. Today the population is 29 million. The GNP [Gross National Product] is flat and per capita income, nutrition levels, and literacy are declining. You would have to be awfully dumb not to see that things are "out of line."

*Q: Back in Bangladesh what was Joe Toner's line with the Bangladeshi leadership in trying to convince them? Were they hard to convince or was it pretty obvious to them?*

STEPANEK: I think that his determined "push" behind the family planning program, year in and year out, made a difference. His argument was two-fold. One, there was a food-population problem. Secondly, Joe also drew on USAID's worldwide experience. We know about voluntary family planning. We know about family planning services. We know about counseling. There is nothing that is cohesive about it. There is nothing "mechanistic" about it. It's simply a question of making family planning services available for people who may or may not be interested. The truth of the matter is that if the men of the world would just get out of the way, it is now clear in the 1980's and 1990's that family planning is very quickly accepted, once women have a chance to make a judgment on it. This is happening in Tanzania and Zambia, and it's beginning to happen in Egypt.

*Q: You talked about this women's group in Bangladesh. Was it part of a government agency or were they just on their own?*

STEPANEK: I'm sorry. You may have misunderstood me. Where I'm working now, IFPRI, Nurul Islam, who was then Chairman of the Planning Commission in Bangladesh and is now here in Washington, working with the International Food Policy Research Institute, said to me, right out of the blue: "You know, Joe, the thing that made the difference is that the Bangladeshi Government decided to hire women and not men as the outreach component of the public, family planning program." So, right off the bat, you had women carrying the family planning message. You can imagine that it would be a very different story if the outreach component of the family planning program were exclusively made up of men.

*Q: That's right. Was family planning linked in with general child care and the health program, or was it a separate effort?*

STEPANEK: In the early years I believe that it was linked with the MCH [Maternal Child Health] program, but not with general health reform. I don't exactly know. I think that it was child-focused on family planning and general health. However, it was not specifically linked with the health sector as a whole.

*Q: Was USAID in Bangladesh involved in the health sector?*

STEPANEK: I believe that we are now. I don't recall that we were so involved in the Bangladeshi health sector at that time. We contributed to the health sector through the Cholera Lab. We supported the first oral rehydration experiments, and the eradication of smallpox. There are major success stories in these areas. I've talked to my friends who are involved in health matters and have urged them to start writing about it. The health stories are as exciting as some of the agricultural stories. I don't believe that they've been written up. They deserve wide, American understanding. Around the world the USAID health contribution has been dramatic.

*Q: Right. There is a general presumption that Bangladesh is in perpetual crisis from floods, storms, and so on. Masses of people are wiped out. Was there any effort to try to minimize the damage of these periodic disasters? People talk about all sorts of public programs.*

STEPANEK: I recall working on early warning systems and training for early warning. Our earthwork projects involved the construction of some major embankments, but I don't recall any large scale, USAID funded program. I think that there is an appreciation that Bangladesh is, in fact, frequently "on the edge" of disaster and that its ability to deal with extra high floods and storm surges out of the Bay of Bengal is quite beyond any engineering capacity.

When Bangladesh was still East Pakistan, we had tried to build shelters. I think that just after the independence of Bangladesh we built a few more shelters, so that people who lived down on the lowlands, called chars, would have a place run to in case of a high storm surge. In retrospect, I think that they were very modest contributions.

*Q: I've heard that there were major efforts by the World Bank and others to develop some sort of structures that would help to minimize the flooding and so forth. I don't know whether this was a wise decision or not. Some people debate that.*

STEPANEK: Yes. I was involved in a major policy debate within the USAID Mission on exactly this point. The World Bank, working with East Pakistani engineers, had designed a program of building "polders" in all of the flood-prone area of Bangladesh. That basically involved building protected islands, wherein there would be embankments to provide protection against major storms. There would be drainage and irrigation facilities provided. In other words, donors would have to design a system for flood-prone Bangladesh to protect it against floods, to provide ensured drainage, and irrigation in the dry season. When all was said and done, it became extraordinarily expensive to attempt to control Mother Nature. My philosophy was to live with Mother Nature and not to fight her. I remember distinctly that this was a hotly debated issue within the Mission. We had major discussions, and a lot of ill will was generated.

You've probably heard the names of some of the people involved in these discussions. I don't need to mention the names to you. Our Director was a diplomat and a gentleman who didn't take sides. However, he vetoed this project for what he probably considered were his own good reasons. He saw something that I had not appreciated. That is, this kind of project of providing major protection for flood-prone areas of Bangladesh would have required a very large, American staff out in the field, implementing this project.

*Q: This would have involved the construction of dikes and such things.*

STEPANEK: Yes.

*Q: What is the alternative? I gather that you have a different idea.*

STEPANEK: The alternative is to recognize that Bangladesh is normally subject to flooding, every year. About 60 percent of the country goes under water normally, every year. In the light of that fact Bangladesh rice is either planted and harvested before the floods or some of it, the so-called "deep water rice," grows with the floods. The "deep water rice" of Bangladesh contributes a significant amount to the total food basket. In other words, Bangladeshi cultivators, over the millennia, have gradually selected "deep water rice" seed varieties, which are now new and improved, for these "deep water" situations.

Having said that, I would add that the Bangladeshi private sector has picked up where the government has allowed the decontrol of irrigation equipment. The private sector is now providing pumps for dry land agriculture during the winter. So areas that had been dry and fallow before are now producing rice, wheat, vegetables, and all kinds of other crops. That's another way of accommodating Mother Nature in Bangladesh.

*Q: Were we heavily involved in agricultural education and extension programs?*

STEPANEK: I don't believe so. I don't believe that we got involved in agricultural extension programs as such.



*Q: How did we get involve in distributing the new varieties of seeds and introducing them to the farmers?*

STEPANEK: I think that the World Bank, British aid, and one or two, other donors had a major involvement in the extension program. Quite honestly, I'm not much of a fan of public extension programs to extend improved seeds. Farmers basically copy what they know to be good practices. You don't need to convince them if you've got something to "sell." They will buy it. Bangladesh is a fairly small country, and the seed research people go everywhere, involving farmers directly.

*Q: Were you involved in agricultural research efforts?*

STEPANEK: Yes.

*Q: In what way were you involved?*

STEPANEK: There were American scientists from The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), who conducted research, training, and seminars.

*Q: Not from U.S. universities.*

STEPANEK: In the 1960's we were involved in institution building for agricultural research. As part and parcel of American "land grant" support for Indian universities we supported the University of Mymensingh. I'm sorry to say that I think that that effort was a "bust." I don't know that much came of it.

The seed research center was a separate institution which had separate USAID and Ford Foundation funding.

*Q: Do you know the name of the center or what it was called?*

STEPANEK: It was the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, or the BRRI. It was a sister organization to the IRRI [International Rice Research Institute at Los Banos in the Philippines]. Like everything else, I've sort of lost touch with the BRRI. I heard a comment recently that some of the senior BRRI research scientists have been "enticed away" to the international system. If this is true, it is potentially worrisome.

*Q: Did we have anything in the way of educational or training programs of any kind?*

STEPANEK: I don't recall. I think that we sent a few participant trainees to the U.S. in the 1970's, but I don't believe that we had a major training program, as such. We did not have curriculum reform programs for the school system or for the universities.

I think that what we did, Haven, was to spend an awful lot of dollars on food and also on fertilizers. You know, these are "big ticket" items. They really used up the money. As I recall it, family planning "commodities" also "chewed up" a lot of dollars.

*Q: Do you remember what the total program amounted to? What magnitudes are we talking about?*

STEPANEK: I don't remember. If you'd like me to track it down, I'll be glad to do so.

*Q: The idea is to give people who read this interview some sense of the scale.*

STEPANEK: The overall USAID portfolio in Bangladesh in the late 1970's approached \$1.0 billion annually in total over these early years. It was very large. Food aid was a little more than half of that. AID in project form provided about \$200 million a year.

*Q: That was a very substantial program.*

STEPANEK: Yes, it was.

*Q: We were the biggest aid donor, apart from the World Bank?*

STEPANEK: We were the biggest, bilateral aid donor. Right, including both dollars and food aid, as I recall.

*Q: On the fertilizer side, were you also involved in the privatization effort? How did you go about that process and make it work?*

STEPANEK: Dean Alter was the staff person who led the way in this direction. We did it in much the same way that we handled the introduction of wheat to stabilize urban prices. We agreed with the Bangladeshi Government to try this out, on a pilot basis. So we agreed to the "private sale" of fertilizer in a few, selected districts, just to see if it would work. We didn't pretend that we knew it would work. We just said: "Let's give it a whirl."

The Bangladeshi Government sensed that the fertilizer administration and the fertilizer subsidy were bankrupting the civil service and the budget.

We worked hard with people from "Muscle Shoals," Alabama, who were brought out to Bangladesh by USAID. They were instrumental in convincing the Bangladeshis on the basis of their worldwide experience that it would work. It has faced problems, just as the public distribution of fertilizer in Kenya has faced problems. You know, the vested interests and sometimes the military get involved. I think that there were some "reversals" in the 1980's. I believe that that has now been sorted out.

*Q: Were private companies formed, and so on?*

STEPANEK: There were dozens and dozens of them established.

*Q: I mean, private sales companies, not companies processing fertilizer.*

STEPANEK: There is a parastatal fertilizer producing company in Bangladesh which we helped to finance and build, using locally produced, natural gas. It was done in part with our money, but the World Bank was in the lead on this project.

Regarding fertilizer privatization, we tried this at the retail level first. From that point we worked toward the wholesale level and to importation. It was a gradual process. In retrospect, Haven, I think that that kind of incrementalism is terribly important. That is, the willingness to say: "We don't know for sure if this is the right path, but let's try and experiment." That is, the willingness to start small, to reverse course if you make a mistake, and the willingness to go on pushing if it looks as if it is working.

I think that we learned an awful lot about the concept of structural adjustment in the government administration of Bangladesh two decades before it became popular, say, in Africa.

*Q: So you persisted in trying out an idea and kept it going long enough to be really sure that it was a good one. But then you imply that the climate was right, that there was a government which sufficiently recognized the importance of allowing this to go ahead or even to experiment. This is a situation which you do not often have in some countries?*

STEPANEK: Yes. One of the things that I concluded, as I said, in Chapter IV of my forthcoming book is that the Bangladeshis had to make this "vision" their own. Otherwise, this program would not have gone forward. There is a certain role for a "push" from the aid donors, and there is a certain role for a unilateral kind of donor "push." However, after a certain point the national government has to feel either that the program is theirs or is not theirs.

*Q: Were there any particular techniques that you used to persuade the Bangladeshis to feel this kind of "ownership" of an idea?*

STEPANEK: We used every trick in the book. We cajoled and lectured them, traveled together, drank together, visited the field together, looked at evidence from other countries, sent them on trips to other countries, and used every possible device, including setting conditions on our aid.

*Q: Did you find that that worked?*

STEPANEK: In this particular case I think that it was part of the jigsaw puzzle. It's one of those "tricky" situations. They know and you know that you're not going to cut off aid and go home. So you know that you have to negotiate carefully and convincingly.

*Q: By the way in connection with the food aid program there used to be very substantial conditions and precise requirements, as I recall. You had all of that to contend with?*

STEPANEK: Yes, the conditions were difficult. I recall vividly that occasionally a cable would come back from USAID in Washington or from the Department of Agriculture that said: "Well,

that's not good enough. Stiffen it." This was all very well and good, but in some cases we had spent months negotiating particular language covering an agreement with the Bangladeshis. We then found it extraordinarily difficult to go back at the eleventh hour to the Bangladeshis and say: "Sorry, but Washington tells us that this language is not good enough." So there was both a risk of being too "gentle" and a risk of being too "tough."

*Q: Is there anything else that you'd like to mention about your Bangladeshi experience you want to refer to at this point? You can always add it later on.*

STEPANEK: This assignment to Bangladesh taught me a great deal. For myself and my family it was a wonderful first posting. It was extraordinarily demanding, but we didn't seem to realize that. We just did our job.

*Q: Did you have much contact with the Embassy, apart from the Agricultural Attaché?*

STEPANEK: We did. The Economic Officer, Don Born, in the Embassy was a "friend in court." I spent a lot of time working with him. As I recall, the Ambassador and the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] were helpful. I saw some of the political reporting. My views were often asked by Embassy officers. There were the usual tensions and strains with the Embassy but, by and large, we functioned as a team.

*Q: Apart from the jute bags being shipped to Cuba, were there other instances where U.S. political and security interests were overriding or undercutting what you were trying to do?*

STEPANEK: The jute story is the one little "crisis" that we had. The other, general or generic problem was that the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] was rather late in "getting on board" with respect to the purpose of Title III of PL 480. They were very happy with Title I transactions. They could sell commodities under Title I wherever they could sell them. Title III transactions were another matter and that situation was aggravating.

*Q: But on the State Department side, the political side, what were our interests in that part of the world?*

STEPANEK: I don't recall. As we all know, Bangladesh was not on the "front burner" of American foreign policy interests. The period of which I am speaking was the height of the Cold War. We were still in Vietnam, and our interests were elsewhere. I think that the senior level in the State Department felt that Bangladesh was part of India. India was to be "brought along" gradually, but our "ally," so to speak, was Pakistan. So for several reasons Bangladesh was not high on the foreign policy agenda.

*Q: Regarding relations between India and Bangladesh, were we involved in any of that?*

STEPANEK: I wasn't involved directly, but there were simmering tensions, particularly over water. There was the issue of the Farraka Barrage, a well known "flash point" between India and Bangladesh which has been resolved only recently. There was food smuggling across the border,

of course, as well as migration issues. Several factors led to tensions between the two countries. There were no large crises that I recall.

*Q: Unless there's something else that you want to add to your recollections of your Bangladesh assignment at this point...*

STEPANEK: I guess that I'm a little embarrassed that my recollections are so vague. I should have more of these numbers at my fingertips.

**LAWRENCE LESSER**  
**Bangladesh Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1971-1974)**

*Lawrence Lesser was born in New York in 1940. He received his BA from Cornell University and his MA from the University of Minnesota. He was in the Peace Corps in Enugu, Nigeria in 1964 and 1965. His foreign assignments included New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Brussels, Kigali, and Dhaka. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 12, 2002.*

*Q: After your six months, what did you do back in Washington?*

LESSER: I was then assigned as economic officer for India on the India desk in the NEA bureau. We had two economic slots for India. However, the second slot - mine - was abolished about less than six months after I occupied it and so I had to be reassigned. I then became the first and only economic officer for Bangladesh in the next-door office because Bangladesh had been part of Pakistan and it was in the office of Pakistan and Afghanistan affairs which now became Pakistan-Afghanistan-Bangladesh affairs. The U.S. was going to have an important place in a system of development of Bangladesh coming back from our having favored keeping Pakistan united before the Bangladeshis gained their independence. So, okay, Bangladesh gets independent and the U.S. becomes the country of last resort for humanitarian assistance immediately and development assistance a little further along and we needed an economic officer on the desk alongside the political officer for this new country. I was in the position before we diplomatically recognized Bangladesh. Out of that slot I became the first U.S. diplomat to visit the newly independent Bangladesh. I may be misremembering that, but I know I had some peculiar status when I made my orientation visit out there to an American office that had no official status of any kind - no longer a consulate in Pakistan and not yet an embassy, because we hadn't yet formally recognized independent Bangladesh. I stayed on the Bangladesh desk the rest of the time through mid-'74.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about India first. I would imagine this would be a pretty fascinating place to take a look at, you know this huge country. What sort of things were you doing vis-à-vis, India?*

LESSER: You know, Stu, I said I may have been there for five or six months, it might have been less than that and I remember that for part of that time - about six weeks - I was moved to be the

one and only officer covering Ceylon because the incumbent had a heart attack and was recovering at home. At that moment Ceylon decided to change its name to Sri Lanka. I don't recall that I did anything of significance, vis-à-vis India during that short period.

*Q: Well, India has survived nevertheless, despite a lack of concentration on your part.*

LESSER: Yes, I neglected it, but India may have been better for it.

*Q: Well, Bangladesh is no longer considered, but I must say people used to talk about Bangladesh as being the armpit of...*

LESSER: A nicer term that the World Bank came up with is that they call it the largest, poorest country in the world. So, if Upper Volta was one of the poorest countries, well, yes, but it's not large. Bangladesh was hit both ways. It had the seventh largest population in the world and it was among the poorest.

*Q: Taking a look at being the first person to really kind of look at it specifically, what were we seeing as our responsibility and what we can do?*

LESSER: Well, we said over and over during that period that our interest was not strategic in the Bay of Bengal and in Bangladesh in particular, that we had a humanitarian interest. I think that was a fair way to put the priorities, although I think realistically you can't disassociate the development aid from the humanitarian aid for very long if you have a friendly relationship with the country and you're providing food to feed people. You've got to think about what you can do to improve their agricultural productivity so that they can feed themselves. Alternatively, that they can develop products for export and can generate revenue so they can buy the things that we're giving them. That is the way things evolve. We started with a strong humanitarian thrust that was fueled in part - the Bangladeshis believe that it was fueled entirely - by a kind of bloodguilt because we had not supported them in their just war of independence and we owed it to them, they would say and to some degree we would not argue the point. We owed it to them to be responsive to their needs and we could afford it. We sent in massive amounts of food aid in the first year of their independence.

*Q: Were we looking for ways to make these people self-sufficient, you know the green revolution, the fancy rice, this sort of thing, or did you see this as being a solution?*

LESSER: I couldn't really say with certainty. To the extent that it would be realistic to make themselves self-sufficient, we would want to do that, whether people analytically believe that was realistically possible anymore is another question. At the turn of the 20th Century, East Bengal in the Indian subcontinent was more than self-sufficient. It was a net food exporter. The population was a small fraction of what it became. Modern technology is a blessing and a curse. It doesn't work in a coordinated fashion and so life expectancy and infant survival moved ahead faster than food production and for that matter educational infrastructure and stuff like that. So, Bangladesh by the '60s was a country that was carrying a very large population while their productivity hadn't been able to keep step and they'd suffered from the period of independence after the formation of Pakistan as the neglected half economically of Pakistan. So, could

Bangladesh be self-sufficient? I don't know. They're actually done a lot better in the last ten years than they were doing at the time I was there in the mid-'80s. But that gets ahead of our story. We're back in the early '70s.

*Q: In the early '70s you really I mean this would seem like it would be a bottomless pit, didn't it?*

LESSER: It looked like that might be the case, but look first they had just been through an extremely damaging war. Hundreds of bridges were destroyed. Bangladesh can't survive without bridges because it's all a delta country and so if you're going to build roads, they're going to be constantly crossing streams. (Of course, commerce also takes place by boat along the rivers.) The economy, which was in lousy shape to begin with, had been very severely disrupted. Large numbers of people had fled the country, including especially highly trained people. Furthermore, once the West Pakistanis left, well, that meant that a large number of the upper bureaucracy and the technocracy also left and thus the management class had been decimated. I mean there were plenty of Bangladeshis, but at best there were now half as many qualified people in there as there had been before. There was not a comparable inflow because the fact is relatively small numbers of Bengalis had been in West Pakistan and large numbers of West Pakistanis had been in East Pakistan. During the time that I was on the desk, which was the first couple of years after independence, the thing was to stop the bleeding.

*Q: Now, was India playing any role in this?*

LESSER: India played a significant role. India made it possible for Bangladesh to succeed in breaking away from Pakistan and India. India tends to be somewhat imperialistic vis-à-vis Bangladesh and after all at some point the same forces that had made India and that had divided India in 1947 were going to come back into play. Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country and India, notwithstanding that it has more than 100 million Muslims, is a predominantly Hindu country. That's what defines those countries. That's what made them separate countries in '47, and in '71 when Bangladesh broke away India supported them for good political reasons to divide their enemy Pakistan. But once Bangladesh was independent a certain amount of difficulty was bound to creep back into the relationship. India was quite generous in many ways, but gradually less so as the relationship became more normal. So, they've got decent and correct relations and maybe closer than that, but they can't expect over the long term that India will make things much better for Bangladesh.

*Q: Well, here's a new country that's developed, you know - I'm talking about the American bureaucratic side in NEA - and then you're over in the South Asian part of NEA. Was it a little hard to, I mean did you feel that you were the outcast of this NEA? Everything that has been pretty well, I mean it's really India and Pakistan and Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.*

LESSER: And Nepal.

*Q: And Nepal, but I mean all of a sudden your group springs up. Did you all feel like the new boys on the block?*

LESSER: Well, we were new boys, but we got our share of attention. The Bangladeshis, not surprisingly, were somewhat politically naive. They thought they could - you know it was Bhutto in Pakistan who said the American cow can be milked, and he wasn't politically naive, but you can say that and be naive. The Bangladeshis said, look you owe us and then they shrewdly said, look at all the aid you're giving us. You can't tell us that we're not important to you because if we weren't strategically important, you wouldn't be doing this. And we would tell them, no, no, we're doing it for humanitarian purposes and if you want to believe that some of it is because we feel badly that we didn't support you before, throw that in, but that's the reason; it's not strategic. Here's the danger of thinking that you're really important. You were the disaster country of 1971 and we ran to do something about it. There's going to be an earthquake in Central America one of these days. There's going to be massive flooding somewhere else. There's going to be ethnic conflict somewhere else which is closer to our strategic interest and we're going to shift our attention, we're going to shift it away from you. It's inevitable. So, why don't you consider while you've got our attention, show us some gratitude and make us want to stay to build in some institutionalization of this relationship? The father of independent Bangladesh, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, was a street politician, very successful in rallying people and inspiring them to achieve their independence, but he wasn't any good at understanding that kind of analysis of the politics of the world. He couldn't stop himself from berating us constantly and making it hard for the U.S. government to feel any more sympathetic than it did initially. So, whereas, Indira Gandhi and the Indian government kind of unnecessarily rubbed the American noses in it and made us angry, but okay, India is a world class power. Bangladesh was a country on its back, with no leverage on global affairs. My boss in Ouagadougou sometimes referred to Upper Volta as a beggar country and I had been a little offended by the sound of that. But if you take the insult out of that, as a strategy, some countries have to be beggar countries and they should behave like they appreciate it when you do something nice for them. In the early days the Bangladeshis weren't good at that and indeed what was bound to happen, happened. They sort of faded from view and we started treating them like a regular country.

*Q: By the time you got there, by the time you were doing this, were you able to sort of sharpen your economic teeth on the problem and all?*

LESSER: You're a little concerned that I should really become a good economist with practice. I don't think that happened.

*Q: I was just asking.*

LESSER: I was dealing with economic policy matters and there's no clear dividing line between that and political policy matters, particularly in a country where our political interest was that Bangladesh not give us problems in the UN and not oppose us on world issues and economically that they not fall apart and become a failed state. The term wasn't in use yet, but we've seen since then that failed states are a real phenomenon and you can't simply ignore them. They have consequences for the countries that haven't failed, but I wasn't doing economic analysis. We had guys in AID who did that and the World Bank does it and the IMF does it and I was supposed to take economic considerations and factor them in and make sure they were factored in to our policies and our activities there.



*Q: How about the Bangladeshi Embassy, brand new, did you find yourself spending quite a bit of time sort of guiding them around?*

LESSER: Less than I thought I would. We knew the people at the Bangladesh Embassy. They had their own problems of just keeping body and soul together because they were clearly underfunded and you can't help suspecting... (I say this because my diplomatic style of speech has stayed with me in my years of retirement.) You can't help suspecting that they were making up the difference between what they were paid and what they needed to live by selling duty free goods and stuff like that and black market activities. If they didn't do that I would be surprised. We were not investigators. Their embassy didn't have that strong an agenda. I remember very well that one day my main contact at the Bangladesh Embassy, their economic officer, told me, "We've got a problem. The Soviets have promised us grain, but it isn't going to reach for months and we've got an immediate crisis. We've been told by our capital that we have to ask the Americans to come and help us. The way we'd like you to do it is, we would like you to divert ships and bring in 100,000 tons of wheat and we'll repay it. The Soviets can then deliver wheat to where you would otherwise have gone instead of to us, that is to places that don't need it right away." I said, "Well, have you talked to the Soviets about that?" He said, "Our relationship with the Soviets is very delicate. They've been extremely helpful to us." (The Soviet Union supported Bangladesh independence when the U.S. didn't.) My Bangladeshi colleague said, "We don't want to ask them for stuff, we hope you'll work it out with them." Oh yeah, great, we're still in the height of the Cold War, we're supposed to work out with the Soviets an arrangement that will help Bangladesh because the Bangladeshis are shy about approaching their Soviet benefactors. "I don't think that's a good strategy." In effect, my Bangladeshi diplomatic colleague was saying, "Well, but you've got to do this because you have bloodguilt because you didn't support us when we needed it." I told him, "I have a feeling that that's not going to carry the day on this one."

I'll turn this into a lovely anecdote about life as a diplomat. It worked out that the Bangladesh Embassy was going to make a request to the State Department that we support them in rearranging the schedule for humanitarian deliveries of wheat, to provide it faster. This nice young man from the embassy said, "Any suggestions on how we handle it?" I said, "Well, your ambassador can ask for a meeting. He probably won't meet with the Secretary of State, but he'll meet with somebody high ranking. My suggestion is that you keep it to nuts and bolts as much as possible, i.e. here's what we need, here's the situation. And don't bring in the blood guilt business because it's not going to fly, but just show that you're going to be businesslike." He said, "Thank you very much." A few days later we got a request and the Secretary of State asked through his staff that Under Secretary for Economic Affairs William Casey (later the head of the CIA) receive the Bangladesh ambassador. Casey's office sent a notice down to the desk saying he was going to be seeing the Bangladesh ambassador and give us a briefing paper. I wrote the briefing paper, saying he's going to be asking you for food aid and blah, blah. We can tell him this and don't tell him that. We sent that up to Casey's office. Then a couple of days later we get a notice saying, well, send your economic officer for Bangladesh up as note taker. Well that's me. So, I go up as note taker and the Bangladesh ambassador talks to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. The Bangladesh ambassador tells the Under Secretary what I told him to tell him, and the Under Secretary tells the Bangladesh ambassador what I told him to tell him, and we didn't actually need a note taker. Even more, Casey kind of nodded off during the meeting. There were just three people in the room, so I picked up and told the Bangladesh ambassador

some of the talking points, while Casey caught a few winks. We didn't need the meeting at all. I could have written the whole thing up because I was the mover and shaker and indeed we did end up doing what they asked and it worked out fine. I thought this must be what it's like to be a real diplomat.

*Q: You left there when in '74?*

LESSER: '74. Left the desk.

**FRANK G. WISNER**  
**Political Officer**  
**Dhaka (1973-1974)**

*Ambassador Frank G. Wisner was born in New York in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1961. He was stationed in Saigon, Dinh Tuong Province, Tuyen Duc Province, Tunis, Algiers, and Dacca. He later served as Ambassador to Zambia, Egypt, the Philippines, and India. Ambassador Wisner was interviewed by Richard L. Jackson on March 22, 1998.*

*Q: Your career to date that we've been talking about seems to have been marked by a series of shortened assignments, probably a sign of rapid advancement. But tell us a little bit about the year in Bangladesh.*

WISNER: Well, as I took off for Bangladesh, you were looking at a brand new country.

*Q: It had gained its independence very shortly before?*

WISNER: Correct. The events that led up to Bangladesh's independence were increasing disagreements between the Bengalis on the one hand and the Pakistanis on the other. The Pakistanis simply couldn't see their way to allowing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to be the prime minister of united Pakistan. Denying the Bengalis a real place at the top of Pak politics, whether this would have worked in the end or not, was a fundamental illogic between the Muslims of east Bengal and the Pakistanis of Pakistan. The Punjabi dominated Pakistan. The Pakistanis resorted to the very heavy-handed tactics of oppression. You had the two personalities, Mujibur Rahman on the one hand and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on the other, hardly two characters who could stand at the center of the same stage at the same time. And then you had Indira Gandhi in Delhi and her determination to give the Paks a proper pasting. The Paks played into it. The repression led to a liberation attempt by the Bangladesh side. Mujibur Rahman ended up in India, tens and tens of thousands of Bengali refugees crossed the border, and the Indians began stoking up an insurrection, the seeds of which insurrection were very richly fertilized already inside Bangladesh. This then went straight down the tubes towards a war in which the Indians invaded and beat the Pakistanis, captured their approximately 80,000-man army and severed, broke Pakistan into two pieces. The United States at this period stood, under Henry Kissinger's diplomacy, by Pakistan. We had done that not out of enmity toward India, but we did it more as part of our own rapprochement with China, which had its own important dimensions flowing from the Vietnam War and repositioning at that stage in the Cold War. It was more a reflection

of our Cold War desires than our views about the subcontinent. The Indians, of course, found that hard to stomach or understand and for many years took badly to it, reading our actions as hostile to India. In fact we were trying to open to China and needed Pakistan's help.

With the independence of Bangladesh, we opened a new embassy, changed the staff that had been there in the old Consulate General in Dacca days and set the stage for a new American ambassador, the first American ambassador. We had a large AID presence. If you recall, in those days, Bangladesh was considered the basket case of the world. A large AID presence aimed at dealing with important matters like population and food. On the political side, we were trying to get ourselves on a stable footing with the new government. For the Awami league of Mujibur Rahman, it was hardly certain that the United States was a friendly element, but increasingly, as their historic tensions between east Bengali Muslims and Indians broke out, they gradually moved towards accommodation with us, and we developed and enjoyed a good relationship with Bangladesh ever since its independence. While I was there, in the beginning it was not a particularly well-run country. Mujibur Rahman was a great opposition politician. He was not much of a ruler, and he paid for his incapacities, as well as Bengali fractiousness, with his life later on. I left the country just before he lost hold on power. The time I was there I would consider -- in addition to the basic work of trying to put together a relationship with this new government -- I felt that it was right and proper that we have a strong relationship between the AID mission and the embassy and that we decide what our economic priorities needed to be, very closely related with our political priority. I regarded the single most important fact in Bengali life, the priorities that East Bengal had to face, as the population priority. Together with the brilliant AID mission director, Tony Schwarzwald, I developed an elaborate strategy, putting population right at the top of the agenda of our relationship with this country and putting it at the center of our diplomacy, of our advocacy for the kinds of policy changes needed and using our AID program as leverage and influence to try to give greater impetus to policy, to population policy. My more classical colleague, Dan Newberry, the chargé d'affaires, found this a strange way for a foreign service political officer to be arguing things and took the argument back to Washington to the country director, Peter Constable, who was much taken with it, and I think we had some influence. We didn't have anybody agree that this ought to be the sole or the top priority of the United States but, frankly when one looks back now at that time, the Bengalis grasped the nettle in a very effective manner and produced one of world's more successful family planning programs and have managed to get the rates of population growth down and their rates of agricultural production up. The country, despite a certain amount of political chaos, has done reasonably well economically and now has a real chance, with the emergence of large holdings of natural gas, to make some big steps forward.

*Q: Did you in your time go through the one of the classic floods?*

WISNER: No. I didn't actually have to experience one of those. I was there before one and another broke out after I left. I'm afraid that's part of the nature of geography and a fact of life that can never really effectively be changed. But, no, I didn't actually experience one.

*Q: And so you were pulled out to come back as....was it Deputy Executive Secretary?*

WISNER: No, no. I had to leave early, but it was for a medical reason.

**ARNOLD SCHIFFERDECKER**  
**NEA, Afghanistan Desk Officer**  
**Washington DC (1973-1975)**

*Arnold Schifferdecker was born in 1934 and attended the University of Missouri. After service in the US Navy, Schifferdecker joined the Foreign Service in 1964. He served overseas in Turkey, Israel, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Morocco. Schifferdecker also served on the Board of Examiners for the Foreign Service. Schifferdecker was interviewed by C. Edward Dillery in 1996.*

*Q: I am afraid with the budget strains we are having less and less of that, if any at all, now. Then you went back to the Department. How did that assignment process go and how did the system work in getting you an assignment from your university training?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: I was programmed into the position of Afghanistan desk officer almost as soon as I got to Princeton. The vacancy was coming up for assignment and it was felt by a number of people who were familiar with my work in Kabul that I would be the appropriate person to take over the desk. So, I was consulted this time ahead of time and it became a natural fit for me coming out of Princeton and taking over the desk. I felt it might be too narrow being associated with one country for four years, but while I was Afghan desk officer in Washington, I was also given responsibility for part of the Pakistan portfolio. So, I had a little broader duties.

*Q: The whole office was what?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Well, the office was NEA/PAB, which was Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, Bangladesh being the new boy on the block having become independent two years earlier. I immediately began my duties as desk officer by going to Kabul to fill in during the summer for the political section where one officer had left a year early and the counselor was taking home leave. They put me in the job to hold down the political section for three months until the political counselor and another officer returned. It was at that time that the coup by Muhammad Daud took place in 1973. I reported on the coup, its implications for us and for the region, and the usual things you report when a new government is established and we establish our relations with that government. So, that was very much appreciated by the Department and I got one nice compliment from Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was our ambassador in India at that time. He thought it was some of the best reporting he had seen in that type of situation. I felt coming from Moynihan, a political appointee that it was doubly a compliment for me.

*Q: A nice person to have one from, Daniel Patrick. Going back to a situation like that, did you find that it was good having all your contacts, etc.?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: It was like I had never left, Ed. Somehow I just fit myself right in with the situation, which was calm and peaceful the first couple of weeks until the coup occurred. Then there was a lot of chaos and uncertainty for a while and then excitement. But, I did look up all

my old friends, or as many as I could, until the coup occurred and then many of them withdrew from contact not knowing which way the wind was blowing. It was tough for a while.

*Q: Were any of the coupists among your friends?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Yes, especially those who were in the Foreign Ministry. There was one particular person who was involved in the coup who I had been friendly with and many of the other embassies didn't even know because he was somewhat of an outcast with the previous regime. He became the acting foreign minister which was very handy. Although I had very little access to him because the coup planners and plotters were all in meetings every day, meeting among themselves and not with foreigners particularly. So, it was up really to the ambassador to make contact with the new powers to be in the ministries during those early days. Of course, I had to leave and go back and be the desk officer.

*Q: Who was the ambassador at that point?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: It was still Bob Neumann, but he was leaving and going to Morocco, so as soon as I got back to Washington I began briefing Ted Eliot who was selected as our new ambassador and getting him out to post subsequently.

*Q: It strikes me that so often when there is some kind of emergency we are changing ambassadors. I don't know if we plan it that way what?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: I guess what frequently happens is that we make our orderly plans but the world is so disorderly that it looks like we haven't planned our part properly, when in fact we have just been overtaken by events.

*Q: So what impact did the coup have on US/Afghan relations?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Initially, there was a lot of suspicion that the US was against the coup plotters, that we were pro-monarchy, so we were handled with some coolness and there wasn't a very friendly relationship in the beginning. And, of course, because we were changing top level staff at the embassy as well, there was a diffident period, you might say, in our relations. But, there were no basic changes on the ground. The new regime wanted us to continue our development assistance. They were a little bit chary of our Peace Corps operation, but in the end they allowed that to continue. It was cut back a little bit in size for a while, however. The basic interests that we had in the country, that Afghanistan continue to be an independent state and not be beholden to any one power, such as the Soviet Union, were not damaged by this coup. However, the abolishment of the monarchy created a political vacuum in the country that eventually was filled by the Communist coup of 1978/79 and the Russian invasion which really ended for a period of time Afghanistan independence and its stability. It still is a fractured country today.

*Q: What about the effect of the 1973 coup on regional relationships?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: There was initially a period of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan and also with Iran. At that time Iran was still a friend of the United States and we put a lot of stock in our relations with Iran and didn't want to see tensions with Afghanistan or with Pakistan, for that matter. So, there was a period of time when we felt that this new regime of Muhammad Daud was behaving in ways that cranked up the existing tensions between the two countries. Afghanistan also had problems with Iran on the division of waters between the two countries, the Helmand River. The tensions with Pakistan over Pashtunistan issue were larger and created more problems. What happened was that in both countries, relations were repaired and made actually stronger. Bhutto came to Afghanistan on an unannounced visit. He flew from Pakistan to Kabul giving one hour notice that he was coming and the Afghans were unable to say "no" and it turned out to be on a smaller scale, a Sadat visit to Jerusalem. In any case, because of Bhutto's charisma and personality he was able to overcome some of the tensions that the two countries had. Later the Shah of Iran began offering economic assistance to Afghanistan which the Afghans became interested in and that tended to diffuse some of the tensions between those two countries.

*Q: So actually it was sort of similar in the case of both the important neighbors and us in terms of a little dip and then a resumption of kind of normal, positive relations?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Yes. Except in the case of Iran. I mentioned earlier that there was some Russian suspicion that Iran was acting on our behalf to wean the Afghans away from Russia and that may have contributed to nervousness on the part of the Russians that when their cohorts staged a coup they felt constrained to protect that investment they had made in Afghanistan and come to the aid of the fledgling Communist regime in 1979.

*Q: A couple of other questions about Kabul that come to mind. What were our relations with the Russian embassy there during that time?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: They were cordial but not real friendly. Remember we were still in the period before the Gorbachev era that loosened things up 10-15 years later. So, we maintained some social contacts, but not warm and fuzzy types of relations on a personal basis. They were more or less correct and cordial but not warm. All U.S. officials were required to report to the State Department any contact with Russian or Soviet bloc officials.

*Q: How about the British with their role in regional interests? Were they an actor at all?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: The British were quite active in Afghanistan at that time, subsequently they have become less concerned and involved. But at that time they maintained a small, but effective embassy staff and a small assistance program, primarily cultural and educational rather than the kind of development aid that we were providing. The British orientalist connection was very useful because they did train their officers in Afghan Persian or Dari, and had a couple of officers who spoke the language and were quite well plugged in. So, we had good relations with the British then which was mutually beneficial in the exchange of information.

*Q: Any other major foreign players? What about the Indians?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: The Indians and Pakistanis both had well staffed embassies, in Kabul. India provided some aid, mainly agricultural assistance. Pakistan did not have an aid program, as I recall. Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan during my time were cool. Relations with India were warmer.

*Q: After your three months you went back to the Department and joined PAB. What did you find when you got there?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: I found that we were getting ready to change ambassadors for one thing. We were dealing with an entirely new government in Kabul that we were still feeling out. There were some visits by Afghan ministers or deputy ministers and some other functionaries to the United States that the embassy was pushing. They relied very much on me to help develop a useful productive program for them that would help to reinforce, shore up our ties with the new government. We found, also, that one of the big Afghan bilateral problems was their tolerance toward farmers growing opium poppies, increased acreage, including on some of the land that we had helped reclaim and irrigate in the Helmand Valley. Now those poppy fields did not exist when I was there but in a space of a year or two they began to develop. They had had some traditional cultivation closer to Pakistan in the Jalalabad region, but this was something new and something that we really began to remonstrate with the new government about, to cut back those newly blooming fields of opium poppies in the Helmand Valley.

*Q: Were we successful?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Never completely. I think while the Daud regime was in power we were able to get their attention and get them to take some action. But in the traditional poppy growing areas of eastern Afghanistan we made very little headway. A lot of this cultivation was off the main roads, difficult to survey and to see. At that time almost all of the opium gum was exported into Pakistan where labs had been developed in the tribal areas on their side of the border to refine opium into morphine and heroin.

*Q: They were the only products from opium poppies I guess.*

SCHIFFERDECKER: No, there is a legitimate use for morphine base by the pharmaceutical industry for codeine and one of the Tylenol products and other such products, pain killers. But, most of our purchases of pharmaceutical opium were from India, where the cultivation was more controlled and from Turkey, after the Turks decided to control their cultivation in the 1970s.

*Q: What are your observations of the role of a desk officer?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: The State Department desk officer has to be a jack of all trades, has to be an outgoing person having to deal with a lot of agencies of the US government, with the private sector, with the general public. It is amazing how much correspondence a desk officer gets from who knows what sources, schools, etc. for information on the country. The main job I felt I had to do in my stint as desk officer for Afghanistan, was to keep my embassy informed about developments in Washington that affected what the embassy was doing and to keep all of the agencies of the US government informed about what was going on in Afghanistan and what we

thought we should be doing in order to support our interests in the country, our interests in the larger region and also to support our objectives in getting the country, itself, in this case Afghanistan, to support our initiatives in other than bilateral forums, like the United Nations.

*Q: What kind of communication did you have with the embassy in Kabul? Only by telegram or did you have telephone?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: We had very poor telephone service with Kabul. Maybe that was a blessing in a way because we weren't always second guessing each other every morning or late in the afternoon, whenever it would be the right time to communicate with each other on the phone. In an emergency we did communicate by phone, but it wasn't the usual way. We normally communicated by official-informals and by regular State Department telegram. Official-informals were cables that had limited distribution.

*Q: Did it really have limited distribution? Did those ever bounce and cause problems?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Not in my experience. But there was a potential for it, I suppose.

*Q: Now we have e-mail, I guess, with everybody, so it is a whole different world in terms of communications. It was a lot more formal and on the record in your time.*

SCHIFFERDECKER: One of our highlights when I was on the desk was Henry Kissinger's interest in Afghanistan, the first time a Secretary of State had done so for quite a while. First of all we had to persuade Henry that it was in our interest and in his interest too that he visit Afghanistan while on a trip to India and Pakistan. It didn't take a lot of persuading because I think he understood the strategic position of Afghanistan as a buffer state between the free world and the Communists; also his curiosity I think got the better of him. He got quite interested in what made Afghanistan tick when he read a few of our briefing papers. While he was there he also was treated to an exhibition of that famous Afghanistan sport, buzkashi, which is a horse mounted sport involving the body of a goat which is used basically as a football between two opposing teams. Of course, Kissinger was also interested in Afghanistan's relations with Iran. He wanted Afghanistan to be supportive of our objectives in Iran and to be at peace with Iran. So, he spent a lot of his time in his official talks in Kabul trying to persuade the ultra nationalistic Muhammad Daud to be nice to the Shah of Iran.

*Q: And did he get along well with Daud?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Apparently they hit it off very well and Kissinger pronounced himself pleased with his visit there. Nancy Kissinger, unfortunately, arrived in Kabul with some bug she had picked up earlier.

*Q: And, likewise, Daud?*

SCHIFFERDECKER: Daud and his cronies were citing that visit for many years afterward as evidence of interest of the United States in Afghanistan, to have sent such a formidable personality and Secretary of State as Kissinger.



*Q: It only became less important in 1978, I guess.*

SCHIFFERDECKER: That's right.

**DAVID BLAKEMORE**  
**Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1974-1975)**

*David Blakemore was born in 1941 in New York State. He graduated from Valparaiso in 1962 and joined the Foreign Service in 1965. He served overseas in Saudi Arabia, India, Korea, Bangladesh and Nigeria, as well as the staff director of the Board of Examiners and Deputy Team Leader in the Inspection Corps in Washington DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in the winter of 1997*

*Q: Today is the 5th of December, 1997. Where did you go after you left Seoul?*

BLAKEMORE: I came back to Washington on rather short notice. I had some health problems that had to be dealt with here in Washington rather than overseas. On short notice I was assigned to the Bangladesh desk or as we called it, "the Bangladesk." I was the second of two officers. Bangladesh was a brand new country in 1975. I think the split with Pakistan was less than a year old when I arrived. The new country was faced immediately with a severe, widespread famine to which the world responded heroically and the United States very much in the lead. My year on that desk was largely devoted to the politics and logistics of food assistance.

*Q: Before we get into this, could you describe what the situation was as you saw it? It was a new country. You had been in Korea before. When did Bangladesh form? Just a very brief history and our attitudes towards the area and the type of government it had.*

BLAKEMORE: The war of independence, I think the Bengalis would call it independence from Pakistan, my memory is not very helpful but I think it probably ended early in 1975. I want to say perhaps February 1975. By the time I got there in the summer, the country was really just getting on its feet. Sheik Musib was the prime minister. He had been elected and was an extremely popular man in Bangladesh as independence leaders often are. I think the United States had accepted the inevitability of the division of Pakistan and had quite quickly recognized and established a formal presence in Dacca. All that felt like ancient history by the time that I got there in July 1975 because the famine loomed so large it pushed all those political considerations aside. As I recall, my entire year there was devoted to the famine issue.

*Q: What caused the famine?*

BLAKEMORE: I think that part of the world, and I had seen it in my own experience in Calcutta, is very much good news and bad news agriculturally. In good years that delta is capable

of producing three crops of rice in a single year which probably explains the heavy population density. On the other hand, flooding and drought are major problems. More frequently flooding and as I recall the whole Chittagong area, the whole Bangladeshi shore of the Ganges delta had been flooded and crops destroyed. That was at least a big part of the problem although the shortage of food was all over the country, upcountry as well as those areas near the sea. I guess I can't give you the full explanation but I do recall major flooding before I got there.

*Q: So it was basically acts of nature and not fouled up (inaudible).*

BLAKEMORE: Very much so but the limits on human response to hunger of that magnitude became clear very quickly. The number that I can remember is that the United States provided 18 million tons of grain to Bangladesh in the single year that I was there. It is really a staggering figure. Virtually all of it either AID or PL480 that is free in the short term. And PL480 has a 40 year pay-back which is virtually free in the long term as well. The world's ability and particularly the ability of the United States to deposit huge amount of grain in Chittagong in a short period of time was demonstrated. The Bengali government was not able, did not have the infrastructure or the organization, to move that grain from the docks to all the places that it was needed. You had the contradiction of continuing starvation upcountry while grain rotted on the docks in Chittagong.

*Q: You said you had to deal with the various aspects including the politics of the food aid. What were the politics of the food aid from your perspective?*

BLAKEMORE: I'm trying to remember. It seems like a long time ago. Maybe that was an ill-considered phrase. Because the need was so obvious, I don't think there was much resistance to the idea of moving as much PL480 grain to Bangladesh as possible so I probably shouldn't have said that. In fact, because the Bengalis like the kind of rice that we grow in Louisiana, we're talking about the days when Otto Passman from Louisiana dominated the foreign aid sub-committee in the House, even that problem did not arise. They were happy to have Mr. Passman's rice.

*Q: We've had problems with that particularly when you move farther east to Thailand, Korea and all that. They don't like Louisiana rice.*

BLAKEMORE: That's right they don't like Louisiana rice. During my first tour in Korea we sometimes insisted that if the Koreans wanted PL480 assistance from us it would have to include a significant amount of Louisiana rice which they did not want. But that did not apply in Bangladesh.

*Q: When you say you were involved, what were you doing on the desk?*

BLAKEMORE: It was a matter of working closely with the AID people responsible for South Asia to move along all the steps that are required to get PL480 shipped. Agreement that the Bengalis would get a certain share and then being certain that the formal country to country agreements associated with that were signed. Paying attention to shipping schedules, that kind of thing. The logistics of moving that much grain are staggering.

*Q: Was the internal distribution problem our concern too? Where we ready to go in or anybody ready to go in and help the Bangladeshis?*

BLAKEMORE: As I recall we did not in any significant way. It seems to me that we regarded that as their problem. It wasn't only a shortage of transport, it was a shortage of roads. The roads were inadequate so even if somebody had moved in trucks from the outside they couldn't really have solved the problems very well.

Talking about this I just recall that I have lost a year. I've been talking about 1975. That is wrong. We are talking about the summer of '74 that I arrived on the desk.

*Q: You were there a year. Did India get involved at all from your perspective?*

BLAKEMORE: No. One of the interesting things about being on the Bangladesh desk was that it was part of a larger country directorate that included Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was interesting to me and educational to eavesdrop on what other officers in the suite were doing on a couple of countries that I had known absolutely nothing about. My experience had been India and that was in the adjoining suite. We didn't talk to them. India, Nepal and Sri Lanka were in the adjoining suite.

*Q: What was the impression at that time of the prime minister Sheikh Mujibur.*

BLAKEMORE: I think we were very much impressed with him. We thought he exercised some excellent leadership in terms of rallying the country to deal with a very difficult crisis. I think he was a little short on administrative skill which is not a surprising development since he came to power as a revolutionary leader.

*Q: Was there any repercussions from the so called tilt being made towards Pakistan?*

BLAKEMORE: I don't recall that being a significant concern that the Bengalis were voicing to us anyway. They were very much in a dependent position toward us at the time that I was there.

*Q: During the time that you were there, how did the relief effort work out?*

BLAKEMORE: As I was saying, I think it was a mixed success because of the difficulty in getting the grain to the more remote areas. I think the northern part of Bangladesh suffered and the response that we made simply wasn't able to be effective for them. In the more populated parts of the country, I would say it was a great success.

*Q: How did you find working with AID?*

BLAKEMORE: I guess I was pleasantly surprised. I had not really had much contact with AID in my previous assignments, certainly no Washington contact. I found the AID office that I worked with, two of them a man and a woman on the desk on the AID side of the building, both

very effective and easy people to deal with. They were looking to do the same things that we were doing. Because it was a crisis perhaps, there wasn't really any divergence of objectives.

**DAVID EUGENE BOSTER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Bangladesh (1974-1976)**

*Ambassador David Eugene Boster was born in 1920. He served during World War II on Harvard's Communications Training Center Staff. His Foreign Service career included positions in Mexico, Poland, and ambassadorships to Bangladesh and Guatemala. Ambassador Boster was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

*Q: Your next assignment was as Ambassador to Bangladesh from 1974 to 1976. How did this assignment develop?*

BOSTER: The phone rang one day when I was in Warsaw and it was Walter Stoessel. He was at that time Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. He told me that the Department had decided to propose my name to the White House for Ambassador to Bangladesh. He wanted to know whether that would be acceptable to me. I swallowed hard, grumbled and asked whether there was any other assignment. When Mary and I had been in Kathmandu, we took a vacation one year to go Hong Kong. We decided to fly on Pakistani International Airways through Dacca which was still in Pakistan at the time. This was one way to expand our knowledge of local geography. We spent a day in Dacca, doing the usual tourist things. I remember that Dacca at the time was not a prepossessing place. I remember vividly commenting to Mary as we wound up our tour of the city that this was one post that could be scratched from our wish list. Stoessel said that there was nothing else; so I agreed to go to Dacca.

That assignment was made when Secretary Rogers was in charge. He resigned before I left Warsaw. Henry Kissinger, who replaced Rogers, stopped all, or almost all, Ambassadorial assignments then in process. He wanted to review them. They called me and said that my assignment was up in the air for the moment, but they thought it would be eventually approved. They suggested that I stay in Warsaw a little longer. I stayed a while, but my replacement was due to arrive. Eventually John Davis, then my replacement and now the Ambassador to Poland, arrived which made it very awkward with two DCMs at one post. So they decided to bring me back to Washington--EUR--over-complement. So I left Warsaw, flew to London for a ten day vacation--Mary and I toured around for a while. One day, after our return to Dick Luther's house where we were staying--he had been in the Embassy in Warsaw--came another call from Stoessel saying that Kissinger had asked George Vest, who had been the US chief delegate to the European security conference (CSCE) in Geneva, to return to be his press spokesman. That meant that the Department needed some one to replace Vest. Stoessel asked that I fly to Geneva that afternoon and take over the delegation, since Vest had already left. So I flew to Geneva and became the head of the delegation for about five months.

At one point in January 1974 , I returned to Washington on consultation about the conference. I had heard nothing about Dacca since going to Geneva. I took advantage of my visit to inquire about the Ambassadorship to Bangladesh. It was suggested that I see Larry Eagleburger, who was Kissinger's right-hand man. So I went to see him and talked to him about that assignment. He said he would look into it and, sure enough, shortly thereafter, I was back on track to Dacca. That is how I got to Bangladesh.

*Q: What were our objectives in CSCE?*

BOSTER: This conference had been in motion for a long time. I did not see myself as a conceiver of a new approach. We didn't really have our heart in this conference at that time. It was a secondary consideration for the U. S. We considered other matters more important than CSCE. The other countries wanted to have the conference and we were just going along with it to keep them happy.

*Q: George Vest would certainly agree. He felt that Kissinger, when NSC advisor, was much more interested in disarmament and felt that CSCE was getting in the way.*

BOSTER: I think that is a fair description of the situation. For example, every one of the 33 nations attending was represented by an Ambassador. The US delegation was headed by people who did not have Ambassadorial rank which was a deliberate way of indicating that this was not a major interest. My energies during the short time I was there was devoted to mastering the intricacies of the CSCE process, and keeping track of the issues of concern to us, reporting to Washington and playing a very low key role as desired by Washington.

*Q: When you arrived in Dacca in April, 1974, what was the situation?*

BOSTER: Very bad. The fundamental problem in Bangladesh is one of over-population supported by less than impressive resources. They had bad floods, starvation, famine. The US mission in Bangladesh was to a large extent reflected in the AID Mission. As I remember, there were more people in the AID Mission than in the rest of the Embassy. That is the way it should have been. We had a very large PL 480 program that supplied tremendous amounts of grain to the Bangladesh government. Our foreign policy interest was essentially humanitarian.

*Q: There was an earlier period when while the separation between Bangladesh and Pakistan was occurring that we were tilting toward Pakistan. Was there any resentment from the people over this while you were there?*

BOSTER: There were occasional references to that. Everybody had the story. But it didn't affect the bilateral relationship which was really quite good. They of course were very dependent on us. Kissinger came to visit Delhi and Islamabad--he apparently decided that he could not visit Pakistan and India and not go to Bangladesh. He was exactly right. He had a very successful visit. He and Sheikh Mujib got along beautifully. It was a one day visit, but he made a very moving speech at the Sheikh's dinner. So in terms of atmosphere and morale building, it was very successful.

*Q: How did you feel about Sheikh Mujib?*

BOSTER: He was a very charismatic figure, a wonderful man. You like this man instantly just by looking at him. You couldn't help being impressed. You go to see him and you would notice people from villages from all parts of Bangladesh waiting to see him and, I understood, getting to see him. That is the way things operated in that society. The same thing applied to his house. It was a very modest home, large by Dacca standards, but still certainly not a house for a President of a country. The general consensus in the diplomatic community and among Presidential advisors that here was a "father figure", a man who had a beloved place in Bangladesh history. He was the George Washington of the country who led them to independence, but did not have the managerial talent to administer the affairs of State. Some one with more managerial talent was required. They had that talent in Zia who eventually succeeded him. Mujib was a political success and a managerial failure.

*Q: While you were in Bangladesh, a number of coups occurred. Mujib was killed. What happened?*

BOSTER: It was a terrible tragedy. Army people came in to his house, which was not too far away from our house. Some of the women were reportedly killed by swords. Many people were killed, including Sheikh Mujib. They wiped out the family. It was brutal. The speculation was that the people who staged the coup wanted to remove any possibility of that family being able to reassert any claim to power.

*Q: What did the Embassy do during a coup?*

BOSTER: As soon as we heard the rumor, we sent an immediate cable to Washington, sketchy as our information may have been. I got a call from the DCM after my wife and I were awakened by gun-fire. He said that a coup had taken place and that I should come to the Embassy. We then looked at the question of recognition of the new group. We did continue relations with the new government and began to deal with them. It was very difficult dealing with the new crowd. They were not a very experienced group. They didn't last very long.

*Q: Did we have any major interests that would have made us interested in the continuing governmental instability?*

BOSTER: No, we didn't. We didn't approve of what had happened--that was terrible. But it had happened and we had to carry on with whoever was running the country.

*Q: How did you deal with the Indian representatives who undoubtedly had a special relationship with Bangladesh?*

BOSTER: We had very friendly relations with the Indian Ambassador and his people. As time went on during my stay, the tension between the Indians and the Bengalis grew. The Indians had played a special role in helping Bangladesh achieve independence. One might have thought therefore that the relationship would have been extremely friendly for a long time. In fact that

did not happen. They had border disputes which were pretty lively and not easily solved. The relations between the two governments became almost tense.

*Q: Were we able to remain distant from this tension?*

BOSTER: The Bangladesh government would complain to us about unfriendly Indian behavior. But we were not playing any mediating role.

**STEPHEN EISENBRAUN**  
**INR, Bangladesh Desk**  
**Washington DC (1975)**

**Political Officer**  
**Dhaka (1976-1978)**

*Mr. Eisenbraun was born in central Iowa in 1947 and graduated from the University of Northern Iowa and SAIS. He served in Dhaka, Lahore, Freetown and Mombasa. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

*Q: Today is the seventh of March, 2005. Steve, you took Bengali. In the first place, how was Bengali as a language?*

EISENBRAUN: It was wonderful. I had a tremendous time. Bengali, or Bangla, is a very beautiful language and related closely to Hindi, both of which are based on Sanskrit. The fact that I had had Hindi and then went into Bengali made me a better Bengali speaker, but it blew apart my Hindi.

But before I get into the language training, I want to spend some time talking about the four months I spent on the Bangladesh desk in the summer of 1975 before language training started in August. Can I go into that just now?

*Q: Yes, please.*

EISENBRAUN: I was pretty fortunate because they put me on the Bangladesh desk, and I began to learn a bit about how to work in the bureaucracy. That office was very good at integrating me. At the time I thought it was a crazy office, so busy. I learned the hard way that that office was merely typical of the way the building operated.

I remember hardly being there but a few days and they said, here, do this briefing paper for an official going off to Rome to a world food conference. I hadn't any idea what a briefing paper looked like, let alone the issues. They didn't offer anything either. There was about a four-hour deadline. Fortunately, the issues had to do more with AID (Agency for International Development) than it did anything else, and the AID officer for Bangladesh was quite helpful.

Miraculously, I discovered him and went over to his office and he specifically explained what I should have in this paper. So then I literally jogged back around to the fifth floor where the Bangladesh desk was, running down the hall, and then scribbled down what I thought seemed reasonable, ran back to his office for a clearance, then running around to a few other key offices to get agreement on the text, literally running, since there was so little time to get it all done. Somehow it got done and that was my introduction to the bureaucracy.

There was a new deputy assistant secretary for South Asia that summer, a senior officer named Adolph "Spike" Dubbs. You probably-

*Q: I know Spike, yes, we served together in Belgrade.*

EISENBRAUN: Well, you know, he wasn't a South Asia man, he was-

*Q: No, he was a Soviet handler.*

EISENBRAUN: Right. Yet he was the new DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) in charge of South Asia in NEA (Near Eastern Affairs). I happened to mention to my office director, Peter Constable, that I'd done this paper at SAIS only a few weeks earlier on the 1971 conflict between India and Pakistan and the American tilt toward Pakistan. He said, bring it in and we'll show it to Dubbs. He read it and then Peter Constable read it too and said it was accurate and not bad. So I felt pretty good that what I had done at SAIS immediately translated into the State Department.

I spent a few weeks on the Bangladesh desk, and then I went up to INR (Intelligence and Research) to work on Pakistan matters to give me a broader experience on South Asian matters. William Dean Howells was the director of the office, a real old-fashioned gentleman. I did a lot of reading about Pakistan and especially about Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Prime Minister. I did one short paper on him, and then I got this call to come back to the Bangladesh desk. This would have been probably about the first of July.

*Q: Thank you for relating that incident. Now, you were discussing previously that they asked you to leave INR and come back to the Bangladesh desk to work for the balance of the summer of 1975?*

EISENBRAUN: Yes, they said we'd like you to spend the rest of the summer on the Bangladesh desk as the acting desk officer because the regularly assigned desk officer wanted to travel to Bangladesh and then take a course at the Foreign Service Institute.

*Q: Who was it, do you remember?*

EISENBRAUN: Yes, her name was Ann Griffin, and she was really something. A relatively junior officer, but she was already a bright star. She left the Foreign Service a few years later; I don't know what she ever did then, but she was truly exceptional. She had good bureaucratic sense, she could draft fast and well, and she was already virtually fluent in Urdu. Actually, everyone in that office was impressive, and unfortunately, I know most have now passed on.



*Q: Everyone else?*

EISENBRAUN: Well no, Gordon Jones, he was the econ officer for Pakistan; he is retired and around town. I don't know what Ann ever did outside the Service, and she is likely still living because she was young in 1975. But everyone else, including secretaries, has passed on.

But at any rate, so, there I was, acting desk officer. I want to mention one or two things from that summer because they have some significance.

The first is more just a curiosity but one day a tasker came down from the seventh floor to do a human rights report on Bangladesh. This is now, remember, the summer of '75, and that was before the big exercise we now know as the Human Rights Report came into existence.

*Q: From the Carter administration. But this is a congressional mandate.*

EISENBRAUN: What I was asked to do was probably not because of a Congressional mandate, but it came about two or three years before the mandate we all now know so well came into existence. I work right now as a retiree in the human rights office at State, doing editing of the human rights reports on South Asia. But, in 1975, that was the first human rights report done on Bangladesh, and it took me all of an afternoon to do it. I showed it to somebody more senior and they said, it's not right. I was advised to concentrate more on the legalities such as the constitution of the country and the official safeguards for human rights, such as did the constitution guarantee freedom of speech and so forth. So I just did it over.

Then I was told to go around to this particular office and defend it. I sat first in an anteroom and there were two or three other desk officers waiting their turn and then we were called separately and grilled by three other more senior people about the paper. They commended me for being so candid about Bangladesh, although I didn't know any better and thought it was mostly a paper on the paper protections of human rights in Bangladesh. I tell this story only because in the official history of the human rights reports, they are said to have started in 1978. So what was I preparing in 1975? I don't know, but at least I can report that human rights was on the Department's mind even before the Carter Administration and the Congress made it more official and public in 1977-78.

I want to talk about something else, though, that really is important from a Bangladesh point of view. This material has been published by one or two journalists, but it isn't generally known. In the summer of 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the self-appointed president of Bangladesh, which had become independent only at the beginning of 1972. Sheikh Mujib was a Bangladesh national hero and had been the symbol for the resistance of the Bengalis against the Pakistanis, although he spent the time of the fighting in prison in Pakistan. When he came back to the new country of Bangladesh in early 1972, he was given a hero's welcome and was named prime minister. But he wasn't an administrator, and the country had great needs. He responded by consolidating power in his own hands. Bangladesh was falling into an autocratic form of government. It was terrible, actually, in the summer of 1975, I guess, to be on the streets of Bangladesh. Mujib had established his own private security force that ferreted out dissenters for punishment. The private security forces, called the Rakkhi Bahini, snubbed the army, which had

fought for independence, so eventually, plots of coups developed, even threats to Mujib's life. People in Bangladesh would whisper this to the embassy. This reporting was coming back to Washington so steadily that it became clear that this isn't idle chatter. Sheikh Mujib's life seemed in danger. I remember the discussion of whether we had an ethical responsibility to warn Sheikh Mujib about the danger to his life. The decision was that, yes, we did have that responsibility. And the Ambassador did go in-

*Q: Who was the Ambassador?*

EISENBRAUN: Davis Eugene Boster, who died only recently. He went in to Mujib, this would have probably been late July or early August of 1975. I might have drafted his talking points, but I can't remember for sure if I did. Anyway, the essence of what Boster was instructed to say was, we hear many threats of a coup and threats of violence against you. He didn't name names. He merely warned Mujib to be careful. As my memory has it, Mujib was casual about it and said, don't worry, I know my people; they love me and everything's under control.

Well, the last day of my assignment on the Bangladesh desk was Friday, August 15, and I had essentially checked out. All I had to do that morning was just come in and say goodbye because the next Monday morning I was starting Bengali language training at FSI. Ann Griffin as the desk officer had come back and taken over responsibility the day before. So I came into the office that morning to absolute hubbub. There was frenzied activity because Sheikh Mujib and all of his family had been assassinated a few hours earlier. Yes. It was a horrible massacre, where renegade mid-career army officers had come to his house in the middle of the night and shot him and his wife and all the children, probably well over a dozen people.

*Q: Does that fall within the culture, you know?*

EISENBRAUN: No, Bangladesh generally doesn't have that culture of violence, but there had been considerable violence since the struggle for independence, starting in 1970. People were desperate. There is, I guess, a history of sporadic but great violence all over South Asia that has broken out occasionally when the tensions have become too great to bear. This was one of those times.

*Q: I'm thinking of the family. I mean-*

EISENBRAUN: No, that is not in the culture. The coup plotters murdered everybody with automatic weapons. It seemed not so different from the killing of the royal family in Russia in 1918. My memory has it that the actual perpetrators, the majors who did it, were not necessarily the ones we'd been hearing about in the days before the coup. The Americans were caught as much by surprise almost as much as the Bangladeshis. I say this because there was one surviving member of the family, the daughter, Sheikh Hasina, who was not in the country at the time. In 1996, she became Prime Minister of Bangladesh when I was serving my second tour in Bangladesh, and I know that she believes the Americans knew about the assassination plot in advance and did nothing to stop it, and in fact may have had a hand in it. It's my understanding from working on the desk in 1975 that the Americans did warn Sheikh Mujib, as I described; but

that they were surprised by the people who actually carried out the coup and the assassination. Believe me, it was a shock on the desk that day.

*Q: Well now, was the Sheikh popular? I mean, were we seeing him warts and all or was he somebody we really wished would go away? Or how did we feel about him at that time?*

EISENBRAUN: Sheikh Mujib had no administrative ability, and as it turned out, an authoritarian streak. He was turning Bangladesh into a dictatorship and not addressing the tremendous economic development problems. .

*Q: Well, how were we looking at him? I mean, as somebody to be endured or were we hoping that somebody else would come in there and take charge. I mean, I'm just trying to capture kind of the American feeling-*

EISENBRAUN: Ambassador Boster wanted to keep the U.S. at arm's length from Sheikh Mujib, as Mujib became more and more authoritarian and was suspending rights and was developing his own personal army, practically. We had an economic aid relationship as we poured in a tremendous amount of resources, a lot of food aid because the needs were limitless. They were recovering from a devastating hurricane just before the war, then nine months of civil war and genocide; the humanitarian needs were infinite, and we responded generously. However, we made a distinction between the economic assistance and the political sphere. Mujib was willing to be friendly with the Soviets and the Soviets had a huge presence in Bangladesh. He talked socialism, which was not welcome in Washington. His comments on that score were essentially rhetorical, since I don't know that he particularly implemented any policies that you could say were socialist; he didn't have very much structure in his government, frankly; the Bangladeshis were still groping to put together a government. So our relationship was cool politically, and Kissinger hadn't the time of day as the Secretary of State for Sheikh Mujib.

*Q: Did you get any feeling, I realize you're the brand new boy on the block, but did you get any feel for the power relationship within NEA, one, for Bangladesh vis a vis India-Pakistan and two, India-Pakistan, well I mean, what we call the sub-continent and the Arab-Israeli problem?*

EISENBRAUN: Bangladesh didn't count in the power relationships within the NEA bureau. It was just a humanitarian disaster to deal with. Kissinger actually went out to Bangladesh; he stopped through en route to another destination and probably didn't even spend overnight. But he did show up and he made some comment, probably an aside, of Bangladesh as a basket case, and unfortunately, that's what stuck as the essence of the American policy attitude. Bangladeshis even today, 30 years later, remember Kissinger's basket case comment.

*Q: Well, you know, I mean, this is something that lingers on with me. I've never served there, or been there, but you know, I mean, it was kind of referred to as a basket case.*

EISENBRAUN: Well, it was economically. Their needs were infinite and they were confused, and mind you, the best of their entire generation had just been massacred by the Pakistani army, so there were really valid reasons why the country was in chaos. It's just unfortunate that Sheikh Mujib, who had such potential because of his initial popularity, squander his great opportunity to

start the country on a sound basis. Of course, within NEA, looking at South Asia, they were- it was always a balancing act between Pakistan and India, you know, trying to be friendly with both. In Pakistan there was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who was in charge and things weren't going so well over there either.

*Q: Yes. And you have the very chilly relationship with Mrs. Gandhi, I guess.*

EISENBRAUN: That's right. Mrs. Gandhi had no relationship with President Ford, but Nixon and Gandhi detested each other. Partly that's because they were two very powerful personalities, practitioners of real politic who probably were very similar and probably could have been good friends under other circumstances, but they were rivals in world politics. Nixon was certain that Mrs. Gandhi had misled him over Indian intentions of attacking Pakistan when she came to Washington in December of '71. And apparently she—we can check this in the archives, I guess—but she basically assured him that Indian intentions were not belligerent but that they couldn't live forever with the 10 million Bengali refugees in West Bengal, to say nothing of the political uproar on their Eastern border. The United States in the early '70s was quite partial to Pakistan, and Mrs. Gandhi couldn't stomach it. Pakistan under Ayub Khan, and Yahya Khan later, was willing to be friendly with the United States, and they were easy to deal with because they were relatively straightforward military men. We could provide them with military assistance, and India at the same time was friendly with the Soviet Union and the Soviets provided a good deal of military assistance and technology to India. So we had our own Cold War going on in South Asia. Bangladesh was essentially a humanitarian project, but we wanted to keep them at arm's length politically. We had no national interest in Bangladesh besides humanitarian.

*Q: Had you had any real contact with Bengalis before?*

EISENBRAUN: Before I went there?

*Q: Yes.*

EISENBRAUN: No.

*Q: So often one's first contact is with your language teachers. Were you picking up something about Bangladesh in your-*

EISENBRAUN: I'm glad you reminded me about my language instructor. Minoti Roy; she was Hindu and she was from Calcutta. She had never been to Bangladesh herself. She was brand new to FSI, and I was her first and only student for most of the year, except that a fellow named Ron Hagen came in for a few months about halfway through the year. Minoti and I got along really well. She took it upon herself to teach me about Bengali culture. Not Bangladesh culture only, but the culture of greater Bengal, which included the Indian state of West Bengal with its capital of Calcutta. Historically, the whole area of East India that was Bengali speaking was called Bangladesh, or the land of the Bengali or Bangla-speaking peoples. The West Bengal state in India as well as East Pakistan, it was all known as Bangladesh in the old days. She stressed to me that the Hindus of West Bengal in India felt a little bit put out that these upstarts, when they

declared their independence in 1971, called their country Bangladesh, because the Indians in Calcutta said, we're Bangladesh, too.

Minoti decided it was her mission in life to make sure that I spoke the best Bengali I possibly could and to make sure my accent at least was right. I'm a pretty mediocre language student, but I'd had the Hindi study, and she said that that made me sound more like a Hindi speaker trying to learn Bengali, rather than an American. I thought she was being nice and just trying to build up my confidence, but in fact I heard this comment later when I got to Bangladesh. So, achingly, hour after hour, she worked on that accent. When I got done, those of us in the Foreign Service will understand, I ended up with a three-three in Bengali, but I had a better accent than that score would suggest.

*Q: You got to Bangladesh when?*

EISENBRAUN: July of 1976. There had continued to be political turmoil after the assassination in '75 and then, not to go into that whole story, it's very complicated, but essentially the enlisted men in the army came to a general named Ziaur Rahman, this was in November of '75, and they asked him, essentially, to lead them. The country was in chaos. More bloodshed had happened after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib and so the army stepped in and there was martial law. Now, there were three chief martial law administrators; one from the army, the navy, and the air force, but the army leader, General Zia, was the major one.

*Q: You were there from '76 to when?*

EISENBRAUN: '76 to '78.

*Q: Now, what was your job?*

EISENBRAUN: I was political officer, the junior one in a two-person political section. The chief was Craig Baxter, who arrived a few weeks after I did and left about the time I did too. Baxter was an institution in the Foreign Service because he was not only a diplomat, he was a scholar on South Asia. After his career in the Foreign Service, he taught at the college level for many years and published extensively about South Asia, including Bangladesh. I learned a great deal from him about South Asia and how to operate as a political officer.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador when you got there?*

EISENBRAUN: It was Gene Boster's last six weeks, so our paths hardly crossed at all. Then a man named Ed Masters took over from him for about nine months and then he went on to be Ambassador in Indonesia. I'm going to come back to Ed Masters because he and I had a relevant conversation about those years in Bangladesh just recently at a Christmas party. Anyway, Masters was replaced in early '78 by David Schneider. Of the three, Ed Masters was the one who was there during the most interesting times for me.

*Q: How did you find your initial assignment? How were you trained or did you just absorb being a political officer? What were you doing?*

EISENBRAUN: Well, frankly, there wasn't any training. As we all know, it's just figure it out for yourself. Baxter would offer some advice; usually after the fact. I would do a draft cable and then he would show me how it could have been done better. In a sense it was practically the perfect assignment for a junior political officer because it was just the two of us, and the whole country was our beat. I could do anything I wanted. I could talk to anybody just below the senior level. Baxter made clear that the senior people were off-limits; that was either Craig's or the Ambassador's province, but such a distinction hardly mattered, because senior people wouldn't talk to junior officers anyway in Bangladesh.

There was martial law in 1976, with a curfew from midnight until six a.m. Many of the major politicians from Sheik Mujib's Awami League were in prison or had fled the country, so there were few Awami Leaguers to talk to. This factor came up on a subsequent tour I had to Bangladesh between 1996 and 1998, when the Awami League was finally back in power under Sheikh Hasina, Mujib's daughter. I didn't know any of the senior party leaders, but I knew many people in the opposition. Anyway, back to 1976:

There were still politicians around that I could talk to, or whisper to. There was a clandestine sneaking around on their part. They acted nervous to talk to us, but they did it anyway. So it was just a matter of learning by doing. The embassy asked me, why not try to go around to the university and meet some of the students. University politics had been really important in the break with West Pakistan. The whole independence movement had exploded from Dhaka University. But to get to know students in 1976, I can tell you, was impossible, because the authorities were so strict and the students so cowed by the authorities that they all were afraid to talk to Americans. There was still suspicion about the Americans because we had supported Pakistan in '71, so the Bangladeshi students remembered this and didn't trust Americans.

You couldn't walk on Dhaka University campus. You probably would have had stones thrown at you; you just couldn't do it. There was too much antagonism. I was lucky in two regards, however. I got this idea that I wanted to study French more. I'd taken French in high school and there was a very active Alliance Francaise in Dhaka and all the students from Dhaka University were at the Alliance learning French. So, I got this idea, why don't I sign up and be a student over there too? I did that for about a year. I learned a little bit of French and I met some students. That worked a bit. I can't say that I got to be bosom buddies with anybody, but I met some students and there was some exchange. Then, luckily, I hooked up with a young assistant professor of political science who had been a student at Dhaka University. He filled me with good information, and eventually I knew practically everything going on at the university. So in the end I cracked that nut, but I didn't do it by walking on the campus.

Boster had resisted having a military attaché at the embassy, so in the early days of my tenure, there was this hope that I might get to know junior officers in the army. It was an absolutely forlorn hope, impossible to do. They were really well disciplined and they had orders, no talking to any foreign diplomat, and certainly no talking to Americans. So there was never any opportunity to meet or befriend anybody in the military.

*Q: One thinks of so many universities as being just, at their heart, anti-American because the kids, frankly, are going- this is on a worldwide basis, going through their Marxist phase and all that. Was this happening there?*

EISENBRAUN Yes, it was. It's fair to say that the politics at Dhaka University was quite to the left and Marxist oriented, and they were so antagonistic toward Americans. But at the same time, you know, I have to emphasize again, they're just such nice people that if you could spend 10 minutes with anybody you'd have a friend. But that first 10 minutes, at that particular time- and it was true later on in Pakistan, too; you couldn't just walk on a campus. I had a subsequent assignment to Pakistan; you couldn't walk on campus there either. You took your life in your hands if you did that. I had been on Delhi University campus some two or three years earlier and that had not been a major problem. I made some good friends at Delhi University, but it wasn't true in Dhaka or later in Lahore, Pakistan.

I want to say something about the atmosphere and what it was like in Bangladesh. First of all, it was a poor country, of course, and it had been devastated by the civil war a few years earlier. Then the country had descended into famine in '74 and '75 prior to Sheik Mujib's assassination and the whole country was traumatized over that assassination. The country was barely recovering, and I credit General Zia with much of the recovery; he was a solid administrator, a moderate who had logical policies and one who rallied the Bangladeshi people.

On a personal level, I had the sense of being as far away from home as I could possibly get. It was an exotic place, but it was also lonesome. But the exotic parts were something else; the main mode of transportation was by bicycle rickshaw, for example. I lived in an area called Farmgate, which no Western diplomat now knows anything about because it wasn't the area where Westerners lived.

*Q: Were you married?*

EISENBRAUN Yes, I was married. No children. So my wife Jane and I showed up there and they put me in this house; it was really quite a nice sprawling house with a beautiful garden in this busy area, a crossroads, actually. The embassy was going to give up the lease because previous people had flat out refused to live there. Well, we thought the house was great. So we said, hey, we'll live here. The embassy said, okay, thinking we were crazy to be in a congested area far from the area where the other expats and diplomats lived.

Farmgate was all Bangladeshis. The downtown area called Motijheel was where the embassy was located, and between Farmgate and Motijheel were a couple of miles of mainly bicycle rickshaw territory. I rode them a lot. Certainly around the embassy, a very crowded area, we used bicycle rickshaws to go into the old city. That was very exotic, believe me. And then, there was the climate. There were fierce storms that would pass over and the sky would become at midday as dark as night and there would be these ferocious winds and vivid displays of lightening. Unbelievable. But, when I returned to Bangladesh 20 years later, it was different. The climate didn't seem so dramatic. In 1976, there were a few window air conditioners but, in fact, we had such a beautiful garden, we at first turned the air conditioners off and tried to live without them. Hah. What a big mistake that turned out to be, because everything turned to mold in the house

overnight. We had to turn on the one in the bedroom and I think one or two others just to survive. Otherwise, I mean literally, you could get up in the morning and put on a dark suit coat, and you could write your name on the mold on the fabric.

Dhaka smelled nice in those days, with lots of flowers around. There was the tinkle of the bells on the bicycle rickshaws, and then as it got dark, the bicycle rickshaws would light their kerosene lanterns and it was quite pretty. It was just a certain sense of, boy, this is exotic. There was no traffic noise to speak of, except some buses going by near Farmgate, but fortunately, there were virtually no private vehicles on the road, just rickshaws.

I have something to say about the social life in Dhaka. Virtually in the first week, I would come home from the office; the embassy van would drop me off at 5:00 or 5:30 and I'd be tired and just want a cup of tea and a sandwich. And then, this is what would happen. My wife Jane, who was very socially oriented, would arrive home about that time and would be in a state of excitement, and say, I just met the most interesting ladies out shopping or whatever, and they're having a big party tonight and they invited us around. My attitude was, I want to go to bed early tonight. In the end, I always went to the party. This was how I learned about what was going on, socially and politically. We became fairly integrated into the Bangladeshi social life. Jane had the ability to meet interesting artists, and women of substance, such as those starting cooperative ventures in handicrafts who were ambitious and intelligent.

We'd be invited around to parties and be the only westerners there. The parties were quite fun. There'd be no less than 50 people and it'd almost always be the same 50 people at every party, but they were the young movers and shakers in Dhaka. They were mid-career and even some senior government officials; they were businessmen; they were lawyers and some politicians. Because of the terrible times and the genocide and what have you, that sector was pretty thin at that time. There was a sense of Roaring '20s about the social life, an almost unnatural gayness; many Bangladeshis were having romantic affairs and were flirting outrageously at these parties. This was a Muslim country coming out of genocide and civil war and famine. It didn't make sense.

Well, I'll jump 25 years into the future. I was having lunch with a Bangladesh lady here in Washington in about 2002. We were talking about old times in Dhaka, and she agreed that the social life in the 70s was frantic and unnaturally crazy. We remembered the dance parties that lasted all night and included breakfast, because of the curfew until 6:00 am. She said she thought that there had been some catharsis going on, that politics and life had been so awful, and then when political life began to settle down, the social life took off in some kind of explosion that didn't continue too many years afterward.

*Q: Well, how did the Muslim side of things impact at that time?*

EISENBRAUN: There was no Islamic-oriented politics. When I got there in '76, Islam was hardly a political factor. And the Islamic practices of the Bangladeshi people were more moderate than most other Muslim nations in the world. Bangladeshis are pious people, and the mosques are always full, and yet Islam was almost of no consequence in politics at that time. The Awami League had been taking the country in a socialist and secular direction in the early 1970s,



and when General Zia introduced politics back in 1978, he brought left and right together in a moderate party of his own creation.

In fact, there was an article in The New York Times Magazine just a few weeks ago about whether Bangladesh is ripe for a Taliban situation. I don't think that's the case, I hope not, but radical Islam is a growing factor in a part of the Bangladesh political spectrum. But it isn't indigenous; it isn't the sort of thing the Bangladeshis themselves would embrace, but then countries change. .

*Q: What about the hand of India while you were there?*

EISENBRAUN: India presumably did exercise a tremendous influence clandestinely in Bangladesh. We heard rumors, I can't tell you exactly how truthful those rumors were, that the Indian intelligence service was controlling a lot of political events and funneling money to leaders. The Bangladeshis felt intimidated by this great country around them.

*Q: Well, talking about Bangladesh being surrounded on three sides, what about these areas in India bordering on Bangladesh? Could you find out or?*

EISENBRAUN: I had no way of knowing from my posting in Dhaka what was going on in those states.

*Q: But was there any spillover?*

EISENBRAUN: No, there wasn't much spillover, although there were rebel insurgencies in some of the remote areas. They continue today. India was afraid that some of the remote areas of their northeast would break away, so they wanted to make sure that Bangladesh was within their sphere of interest.

*Q: Well, as a political officer in a country with quite tight controls under military dictatorship, what'd you do? I mean, were you just sort of reporting on general atmospherics or what?*

EISENBRAUN: Well, yes, there was some of that. There also were a whole lot of visitors from Washington. Steve Solarz was a Congressman interested in Bangladesh, and he visited several times during my tenure. There were lots of other officials coming out. The Peace Corps wanted to establish a program but it never did get established in that era. Muhammad Ali came out a couple of times, but he didn't ask anything of the embassy.

*Q: Boxer, huh?*

EISENBRAUN: He had his own people to organize him. But I did see him, bumped into him at the airport virtually. He had been defeated by Leon Spinks only days before, but he came out to Dhaka anyway and gave some exhibition rounds with Bangladeshi boxers. I was out at the airport at the VIP lounge to pick up somebody coming in from Washington and Ali was departing. This was maybe a week after he had been defeated by Leon Spinks and his face was

still so puffy and beaten up, I was quite shocked. He was immensely popular in Bangladesh. People went wild over him.

But, what did we do on the political reporting front? I traveled around the country a bit to remote areas in the south, and in Dhaka I had plenty of time to go around to meet political leaders in dark and grubby Chinese restaurants in obscure locations. We'd sit and whisper and they'd tell me what was bubbling under the surface. After about a year of this, I was getting bored because there wasn't much of a story to tell Washington. But there were some high points nevertheless. Shall I tell a story or two?

*Q: Sure.*

EISENBRAUN: In October of 1977, a terrorist group called the Japanese Red Army hijacked a Japanese airliner in the Middle East and flew it eastward across India. Nobody was giving the plane landing rights for refueling until Bangladesh did. It landed in Dhaka with a full international passenger list, including many Americans. Then began days of drama and tension as the Bangladeshis negotiated with the hijackers, as well as the Japanese Government, to release the passengers, to meet the hijackers' demands for the release of Red Army prisoners in Japan, and for the Japanese to pay a ransom of some millions of dollars. Then events got out of hand.

Do we have the time to go into that?

*Q: Sure, sure.*

EISENBRAUN Well, it fell to the head of the air force, General Mahmoud, to negotiate with the hijackers. He set up his command post at the airport in the control tower and his negotiations were carried live on Bangladesh radio. The whole country could listen to the negotiations: we in the embassy, the man on the street, everyone; the whole country listened and came to a stop. Foreign journalists poured into the country, and we were for days a center of international attention. There were dozens of Americans onboard, and because of the heat, many passengers were getting sick. General Mahmoud conducted very skillful diplomacy. Absolutely a textbook case; if it hasn't been developed by teachers of crisis negotiation as a case study it should be. He was brilliant in developing camaraderie and rapport with the hijackers.

The American Ambassador, Ed Masters, was in the middle of it, as you can imagine, trying to do all he could for the American citizen hostages. He was a good friend of General Mahmoud as well, and so he used every influence he could behind the scenes to try to get those Americans released. I bumped into Ambassador Masters only a few weeks ago at a Christmas party (December 2004) and we reminisced over this incident. He reminded me, which I had forgotten, that certain Americans were authorized to be released but there was another person, an elderly man, who was not among those to be included, but Masters demanded that he had to get off too, and it worked.

The Japanese brought a plane from Tokyo and theoretically it had the released prisoners and the money. The plane parked at the end of the runway. Why it was parked about two miles away

from the hijacked plane at the terminal we didn't know, but we could only imagine there were also commandos on the plane.

Well, about 5:00 am on the fourth or fifth day into this hijacking drama, a military coup broke out, led by enlisted men in the air force while General Mahmoud was in the control tower at the airport. Soldiers attacked the airport and were after Mahmoud to kill him. There was fighting going on between pro- and anti-rebel factions around the airport, and some of the rebels got to the radio station and announced they were taking over the country. Before he went off the air, General Mahmoud said to the hijackers, there is trouble here in the terminal and you may see some armed men running around near your plane, so defend yourselves.

The hijackers tried to take off. They revved the engines and they were going to just on their own try to get the plane turned around and tear away. But they couldn't. The Bangladeshis rushed some vehicles out to block the plane's movement. The hijackers were going crazy because they couldn't leave and suddenly their trusted interlocutor was gone. They wouldn't talk to anybody else, and there were still hostages on the plane.

General Mahmoud was not killed. He told me twenty years later that he was lined up along the wall to be shot, but one of the rebels said no, he's a good guy. So they spared his life. He told me this over tea in about 1997 when I was back on my second posting in Dhaka.

The coup was put down in a few hours. The enlisted men didn't have enough support. It was the air force which had mutinied, but the army, with the greater number of soldiers and equipment, stayed loyal. That afternoon, most of the hostages and the Japanese ex-prisoners and the money were exchanged. The plane was pushed away from the terminal and took off for parts unknown. It ended up in either Libya or Algeria, I can't remember which, where, in the end, the hijackers got away and the final passengers were released.

*Q: What had caused the coup?*

EISENBRAUN: There were parochial matters like pay and living conditions of the enlisted men. The rebels had obviously been disgruntled and probably thought that with all the senior leadership of the air force in one spot in the control tower, they could be killed and the takeover would be successful. But the army remained loyal and put the mutiny down.

General Zia showed another side to himself in the weeks after the mutiny. He had seemed a moderate political leader, but he was also ruthless in maintaining his power. He had men hanged right and left in the military who were suspected plotters. No one knows for sure, but probably hundreds were just shot or hanged one after another after another in the ensuing weeks. Very bloody and it was all totally secret. They had non-public military trials; I don't even think we knew much about it in the embassy. We heard some rumors about secret trials and executions, but we didn't know the whole story. That didn't come out until years and years later.

After the coup and the hijacking, Ambassador Masters was really impressed with General Zia. Masters thought that Zia was the answer to Bangladesh's troubles, its instability. And so if we heard rumors that certain people in the military were being tried, well, the embassy attitude was

that they probably deserved it. Masters worked with the State Department a couple of months after that, before he left post, to get Zia invited to the White House, at least for a luncheon. It didn't happen.

One of the reasons it didn't happen is that when I went back to Washington in the summer of '78 and Deputy Assistant Secretary Jane Coon took me to lunch, she told me that no way would Zia get invited to the White House. Jane was absolutely clear. She knew the rumors of the bloodshed following the coup attempt, and she said that because of Zia's human rights record, he's not going to get invited to the White House. She was the one in the Department responsible for stopping the proposal, and the White House may not even have known of Masters' efforts to get Zia an invitation.

Well, jump to Christmas, 2004. Masters and I were guests at a reception at Jane's home in Washington, and we were reminiscing over our days in Dhaka. I reminded him of his efforts to get General Zia to Washington to meet Carter. Masters replied, yes, but I never pulled it off. I said, well, I know who stopped it. He said, who was that? I replied, it's our hostess, Jane, and I related to him what Jane had told me some 26 years earlier. Masters looked over at Jane and said, rather bemusedly, is that so? He hadn't known. I told him I was doing this oral history and asked him if I could relate this story. He said OK, go ahead. By the way, Zia did get his invitation to the White House, however. Sometime after Masters left Dhaka, President Carter and General Zia met in Tokyo at the funeral for the Japanese Prime Minister. Carter and Zia hit it off, and Carter issued the invitation, as I understand it.

*Q: Did you get any feel for Bengali culture and all that while you were there?*

EISENBRAUN: Oh, a lot of it, yes.

*Q: One always thinks of, really out of Calcutta, the poetry, the movies.*

EISENBRAUN: Yes, Calcutta is the center of greater Bengali culture. In Bangladesh, the people would invite us into their homes and we went to endless weddings and traveled around and got to be friendly with lots of Bangladeshis, and I have to say, there's a soft spot in my heart for Bangladesh because the people are so nice. Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize-winning poet from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote beautiful poetry about shonar Bangla, golden Bengal, and I'm telling you, when you go out into the countryside in the Autumn and see the rice fields ready to be harvested, and it is golden. In fact, one of his poems, Shonar Bangla, is the national anthem of Bangladesh.

*Q: You know, when you talk about Bengal, as an uninformed reader of the paper, I would have thought that at least once a year you're at least up to your knees in high water or something like that. How about when you were there?*

EISENBRAUN: That's very true because about, oh, the southern 20 percent of the country is about one or two feet above sea level. It's a jungle, one of the few rain forests left –with a few Bengal tigers still prowling around. There are little islands in the general swamp, and there are people living on those islands. When the cyclones periodically come in off the Bay of Bengal, all

they have to do is raise the sea level five feet and you've inundated 100,000 square miles or something. I may be exaggerating, but yes, it's terrible. And that happens periodically.

When the monsoons hit, it's something to behold when rain comes and there's no proper drainage in Dhaka, and the place is mostly under water, it really is. The whole point of raising rice is that the rice fields are about four or five feet deep with water in the early stages. That's planned during the monsoon season and so you drive out onto the few roads that are built up above the rice fields and you see water everywhere. You'd think you're driving through an enormous lake or something. They have these low draft sailboats that are sailing across the rice paddies. Where is the country, you ask? It's all water. That's the way it is annually, and if there is any bad luck with storms, people die by the thousands.

*Q: When you were there what happened?*

EISENBRAUN: You mean with the weather?

*Q: Weather-wise.*

EISENBRAUN: Well, fortunately during that period there was no great storm. But I'm not finished with Bangladesh quite yet; I have two more stories.

*Q: Let's finish Bangladesh and be as complete as you want.*

EISENBRAUN: All right then. There was a mini Cold War going on in Dhaka between the Americans and the Soviets in the '70s. I heard that in the early '70s the Americans tried to recruit a Soviet as an agent, but it was botched and bad blood developed between the embassies. The Soviets had a large presence there, with the wall around the embassy topped with barbed wire. There were many Eastern Europeans in Dhaka too. Why those Eastern European countries were there, I never stopped to ask, let alone did I wonder what purpose the Soviets had in being in Bangladesh by the hundreds. Perhaps we were trying to figure out what the Soviets were doing in Bangladesh and they were trying to figure out what we were doing, yet there was no contact between the two missions. You'd never see Soviets on the larger social circuit except for one annual occasion.

The Iranian embassy, this is during the days of the Shah, would have a national day reception that would be a big bash, inviting literally a thousand people. They'd invite all the diplomats right down to the most junior of every embassy. They'd have it in this big field, and it was quite enjoyable because suddenly you were discovering all these attractive people, many from the Eastern Bloc and other embassies that you hadn't even known were in Dhaka.

I met a Soviet diplomat at one of these receptions, a young counterpart about the same rank as I. Nice guy, perfect English, and very friendly. He immediately invited my wife and me over for dinner at his home. Well, it was unheard of for such a thing to happen. I went back to the embassy the next morning and said, this is who I met, and he invited me to dinner. The senior people at the embassy speculated, what are the Soviets up to? Our people thought the friendliness was planned. The Soviet must have come with the intent of meeting some Americans, knowing

that the Shah's reception would be their one occasion to do so. Our embassy people told me to accept the invitation and see what he had in mind.

My wife and I went off and had a delightful and apparently harmless evening. We invited the Soviet couple to our house, and soon, I was being invited into the Soviet embassy itself to a Saturday night party. Here I was, the only American, in fact the only Westerner, there. And everybody in the embassy seemed to know my name and they'd shout, hey, here's Steve. It seemed that the purpose of the party was to get drunk as fast as possible. All this vodka, cold vodka, wonderful stuff, was passed around; shots of vodka everywhere. People would be toasting me from across the room; people I'd hardly met: Steve, Nostrovya, and down the hatch. I would fake it; there was no way that I could drink that much vodka. But they seemed to be doing it. The party almost immediately degenerated into just shouting and fun and laughter and singing and flirting, and I'm thinking, what am I doing here? Our embassy people wondered that too when I would come back the next morning and report the stories--there were rules requiring that all contact with Soviets and Eastern Bloc peoples be reported, so my reports were detailed. Suddenly, during this flirtation with the Eastern Bloc embassies, a Bulgarian diplomat and his Russian wife showed up at our house in a rickshaw one evening...

(End side one, tape three)

*Q: You were saying a Bulgarian and his wife arrived by rickshaw.*

EISENBRAUN: Yes, but on reflection, I don't think I should go into the details of that even now after 30 years, honestly. It has to do with U.S. privacy laws.

*Q: Oh, well, okay.*

EISENBRAUN: The political section, the Ambassador and so forth, were wondering what on earth could be going on. There was thinking that maybe this Soviet who first invited me over wanted to defect, because he would always ask me about our ability to travel freely, about being able to travel to Bangkok, which we did frequently. He asked me a great deal, in fact, about travel and the obvious freedoms that we had that they didn't. The thought occurred to people in the embassy that maybe this guy's considering defecting. Our continued contact was encouraged. It was toward the end of my assignment in the spring of '78, and it was the end of that guy's assignment too. As it turned out, he began to ask me for documents, unclassified things. He'd say, I understand that President Carter gave a speech the other day. Can you get me a copy of the speech? I'd go back to the embassy and find the document and pass it along, all with permission from the seniors at the mission.

*Q: Yes, sure.*

EISENBRAUN: Every move, every contact, was coordinated with Washington, and nothing at all was freelanced. Today, I don't think that guy was considering defecting, that was just bait; when I responded, I think the Soviets began an effort to recruit me. Who knows? I left Bangladesh at the end of my posting, and that was the end of the Soviet embassy fling. I have no idea whether any kind of rapprochement continued in Dhaka between the two embassies, but I

doubt it. When I left and the Soviet left his posting about the same time, my guess is that that little rapprochement came to an end.

I was bored with political reporting in the spring of 1978. As I said earlier, there wasn't much of a story left to tell. There was no open politics. I hit on this idea, however, of going around and looking up some of the historical figures in politics who were retired. About the third person I looked up lived in the old city. His name was Mashiur Rahman, known by his daknam (nickname) of Jadu Mia, the Magic Man. He had helped found the leftist National Awami Party in 1957 with Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. It seemed that Jadu Mia was retired from active politics and was living in the old city, smoking his hookah on his balcony. We sat together and shared impressions of Bangladesh politics. A week or so later, a young boy showed up at the embassy, saying Jadu Mia wanted to see me immediately. So I took a rickshaw to the old city, and this time, he was dressed in a beautiful starched white shirt and was clean shaven, which he hadn't been before. The hookah was gone. He had a twinkle in his eye and seemed a new man, despite his age, somewhere in his 70s.

He told me that General Zia wanted to start a political party, but he didn't know how, so he had gathered a few of the old timers in politics to meet late at night to give him advice. Jadu Mia named the others present, and I recognized that they were people from the left, such as Jadu Mia, and people from the right, which meant the Muslim League and other Islamic leaders. Practically everyone from the late 1960s on had been Awami League under Sheik Mujib, and now these were the people who were in jail or in exile around the world. The only political people in Dhaka were the far left and the far right, so Zia was bringing a handful of them together secretly in the cantonment, the military base, at midnight, to help organize a new political party. Jadu Mia said, I've been authorized to tell you this.

So, I went back to the embassy and told Baxter, who told the Ambassador. No one had heard anything about this, but we reported it to Washington nevertheless. A few days later I was summoned back to Jadu Mia and was told more about the secret night meetings, word for word supposedly of what was going on, and what Zia wanted to do. I then reported our conversations to Washington. Those curious today about this incident can look up these reporting cables in the archives, all these cables that were going out of the embassy in the spring of '78 on what General Zia was up to in starting a political party.

Well, as the weeks went by, the Ambassador began to pick up a couple of things, and Baxter began to hear a bit of the story. But I was continuously being given the specifics, not just rumors, about what was being planned. One of the imminent young barristers in Dhaka at that time was named Moudud Ahmed, who later became prime minister in a different government, by the way. Anyway, Moudud was one of those original conspirators in the creation of the new political party, soon named the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and I was told that Moudud took the lead in drafting the party constitution. Well, it got down to June of '78, and now the rumors were all over town. But I was still getting the inside scoop, to the point where Jadu Mia said, in a week or two, Zia's going to announce a cabinet, the formation of the new party, and the holding of parliamentary elections. Jadu Mia named most of the people who were going to be in the cabinet and what their portfolios would be. But he didn't tell me who was going to be chief

minister/prime minister. I asked him about that, but Jadu Mia said Zia hadn't decided who would be the leader of the cabinet.

The day I left Bangladesh, it was the very end of June, 1978, my house was all packed up, and before I left for the airport to catch the noon flight to New Delhi, I glanced at the newspaper and there was the story in big headlines: General Zia announces the formation of a new political party, a cabinet, and parliamentary elections to be held in the near future. The chief minister was Jadu Mia. I never had a chance to say congratulations. I heard that Jadu Mia had a stroke some months later, and he died in March of 1979. However, his organizing ability helped the new BNP win 208 of the 300 parliamentary seats in the election in February, 1979.

General Zia was murdered, viciously, in 1981, but Zia's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia, took over leadership of the BNP, and she's the Prime Minister of Bangladesh now, as we speak in early 2005.

When I went back for my second posting in Bangladesh in 1996, I was at dinner at the Ambassador's one night, early on, with some of the senior leaders of the BNP. I decided to tell the story of the party's creation as I knew it. I figured, well, it was really hush hush then, but eighteen years later, what does it matter? So I told this one gentleman, Khandakar Delwar Hossain, the party whip in parliament. He listened in rapt attention and hardly asked a question. When I finished, he commented, that's correct. That's the way it happened. .

*Q: Well, I think it is often junior officers, American junior officers, who can get out without causing a great deal of fuss or attention and talk to people and act as a conduit or a listening thing, you know, that the political counselor or the Ambassador couldn't, because this would draw attention. And in a way you're, you know, you're sort of sanitized, you're junior, you can talk to them, you know, and it's something that's often not appreciated when people look at how diplomacy gets conducted.*

EISENBRAUN: General Zia and others probably sat around the table at midnight, and Zia might have said, the Americans need to know what we're doing. Jadu Mia may have said, oh, I just met this young guy from the American Embassy. Zia probably replied, okay, that's about the appropriate channel at the moment to let the Americans know what we're up to.

*Q: By the way, while you were there, what was your feeling about the Carter administration and particularly his human rights stance and all? Was that having an impact on you all at the embassy?*

EISENBRAUN: No, no. It didn't have much of an impact at that time. I believe Carter made some reference to human rights in his acceptance speech the night of his election, and we heard that even in Dhaka, and Baxter said, mark my words, human rights will be important in this new administration. But I cannot remember that it filtered down to us in any practical way at the beginning.



**EDWARD E. MASTERS**  
**Ambassador**  
**Bangladesh (1976-1977)**

*Edward E. Masters was born in Ohio in 1924. He received a bachelor's degree from George Washington University in 1948 and a master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1949. Mr. Masters served in the U.S. Army for three years and then joined the Foreign Service in 1950. His career included positions in Germany, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh. He was interviewed on March 14, 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: How did that appointment come about?*

MASTERS: Well, I don't know all the inner workings of it. I have always assumed that Phil Habib had an important role in it, but I . . . I just got a telegram about it. And frankly, I was not filled with great joy. After all, I had been operating, in effect, as an ambassador to a much bigger country, and a much more important country than Bangladesh. And I grumbled a little bit. And I was told by Phil to shut up. He said, "Look, Masters, what you need is an embassy. It doesn't make any god-damn difference what embassy it is. You need to be an ambassador. If you do one, you might get a chance at another one. Take this one and shut up." I did.

*Q: Which is probably the best . . .*

MASTERS: He was absolutely right!

*Q: I was just looking--before this interview--I looked up Bangladesh, in the records. And when you come to Bangladesh, the words that come out are malaria, cholera, tornado, flood, starvation. I mean, these are--particularly in that time . . .*

MASTERS: Yes, well fortunately--yes, some of these things--all of those things happened in the one year I was there. But it was good time that I was there. The situation was politically stable. They had a big upheaval in '75, where they killed the prime minister and his family. I went in there in the fall of '76, and was there till the fall of '77. President Zia was in power. He was a good fellow; a remarkable person. He had a great feel for what needed to be done socially, and economically. He traveled; he got out among the people. [He] had good programs. He put his full weight behind family planning.

I enjoyed the tour there. The Bangladeshis are very nice people. God knows, nature wasn't kind to the country; they don't have much to work with. And I don't think you'd want to stay there too long; I think the magnitude of the problems would become pretty depressing. But I enjoyed it for a year, and I worked very closely with Zia. We did some reorganizing on some of our AID programs, and I think we made some real progress.

I guess the most dramatic thing that happened during that year was the aircraft hijacking. It was a Japan Airlines plane, but it had some Americans on it. And the result was that we got deeply involved in this. And Washington insisted on orchestrating everything from Washington. I won't

go into a lot of detail on that. But the plane had--I think it was 12 Americans, including several rather prominent Americans, that I won't go into detail on. Washington got upset and concerned about this, because of these rather prominent Americans that were on the plane.

There were three telephone lines out of Dacca International. Washington tied up one of those for five days, with my embassy on the other end--just to keep the line open. And I always had to have somebody--at one point I hung up on them. I said, "Look, the Bangladeshis need the line, and I need my embassy staff. I don't need them sitting on this god-damn telephone." They called right back again.

*Q: What was the pressure? Is this a feeling that at least a line there? I mean, everybody wanted to make sure that they show they were doing something?*

MASTERS: I think that was partly it. It was also a little because these people on the plane were politically influential. It was to be sure that Washington--yes, was able to tell--they were tied in to a prominent U.S. senator--was able to tell the senator that we were doing something; that we were in touch with the situation; and of course, to keep him informed as to what was going on. Actually, it worked out fine. It was a god-awful five days, but one by one, the people came off the plane.

This is also a story which should be written up sometime. It was the Japanese Red Army which had hijacked it out of Bombay, and forced it to land--of all places--in Dacca, which is about as poorly equipped to handle an aircraft hijacking as any place in the world. They parked the plane right in front of the terminal. And a friend of mine, who was the head of the Bangladesh Air Force--Marshall Mahmud--conducted the negotiations from the tower, to the radio in the plane. And of course, all of us in Dacca were listening in--monitoring the thing.

So the word from Washington was, "For god's sake, get those Americans off." Well, it was a Japanese plane. It was in Bangladesh. But fortunately, we had--I knew a lot of people, and we had influence. I worked closely with the Japanese ambassador, and with the Bangladeshis. And one of these Americans on the plane--a very sharp woman--claimed to be pregnant; I guess, sort of fainted away on the plane. And the Red Army let her out; she was one of the first people to come off--fortunately, a very astute woman.

So we got her together with the mug-books, on hijackers, and went through it. We identified exactly who was on this plane, and I tell you, they were toughies. One of them had been involved in the Lod massacre, and they had done this, and they had done that.

*Q: Lod was at the Lod Airport in Tel Aviv?*

MASTERS: Tel Aviv, yes. And so we knew we were dealing with a tough group, and a very professional group. Let's see, then another American--rather elderly--capsized from medical problems. No, his wife came off first--which was a woman of sixty-some years. She came off. I got her settled in a hotel. I got the young one, who identified the mug-books--got her settled in a hotel.

Then my friends in the Bangladesh Air Force told me that the husband had collapsed on the plane, and that they might let him off. So I dashed in the car, with the flag flying, to the airport. Picked up the wife. We ran to the airport just in time to see an ambulance going from the airport to the hospital. So we went around and followed the ambulance to the hospital. Got her in. It was her husband. Everything was okay.

So one by one, then, the hijackers were letting the passengers off. And it was down to the point where there were two Americans on board. One of them was the husband of this young lady, who had helped us with the mug-book. And the Japanese met the ransom demands of the hijackers. The plane is going to leave. The wife--maybe she was in the embassy. She was in and out of the embassy. Anyhow, she was very distraught. She said, "My god, they're going to take off with my husband. They'll kill him. I'll never see him again."

I called my friend, the chief air marshal, and I said, "Look, could you possibly make an effort to get this American fellow off the plane?" I said, "The family is distraught, the father is elderly and still in the hospital. It would be very helpful if you could get him off."

He said, "I'll try."

So I ran back to listen to the radio, to see what he said. Mahmud came on the radio to the hijacker, and to my great surprise, he said, "The American ambassador has asked me if you would kindly release Mr. So and So."

And I thought, "Holy Christ! They'll kill him. They'll never let him off now."

There was a silence that seemed like five minutes--it was probably 30 seconds--on the plane. And the hijacker said one word; he said, "Affirmative." They opened the door. They pushed this guy out. And they took off. Why? Interesting! (Laughs) You never know.

Anyhow, this American group thinks this is the greatest thing; it's, "My god, we've got wonderful ambassadors overseas. They get us off of planes. They do all these things." They thought it was terrific. In fact, I was written up in a congressional record for this. It's funny how these things work.

*Q: Yes.*

MASTERS: Why that terrorist let that American off, at the request of the American ambassador, I can't imagine.

*Q: Yes, because you would think it would be just the reverse.*

MASTERS: Yes.

*Q: Yes.*

MASTERS: They finally took off. There was still one American on the plane; he was an American official, who was with the Sinai--whatever that peace-keeping mission we had in Sinai.

*Q: Yes.*

MASTERS: And they let him go in Algeria, I think it was. Well, anyhow, Bangladesh was a hectic one year, but I enjoyed it.

**DAVID R ADAMS**  
**United Nations, Food & Agriculture (FAO)**  
**Dhaka (1977-1979)**

*Mr. Adams was born in Washington, DC and raised in Virginia and abroad. He was educated at John Carroll, William and Mary and George Washington Universities. Mr. Adams joined USAID in 1973 in Washington, DC. He served in Washington and abroad, dealing primarily with matters concerning Latin American countries and Kosovo. His foreign assignments include Bangladesh, Guatemala and Haiti, where he served as USAID Mission Director. Mr. Adams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

*Q: So you got your degree in '75. Then what?*

ADAMS: Then I was given a promotion at USAID, civil service. I was a management analyst which it was kind of dry work but it was still part of the bigger team that was doing development work. Interestingly I was accepted as a Foreign Service intern at the same time that I was accepted to a UN program that I had applied for as a lark almost. I say that because the UN program was called the associate expert program. A high falutin' title for intern. They were recruiting people from bilateral development agencies in various countries to work on a time limited basis in one of the 26 least developed countries. So if USAID had offered me the kind of job I had wanted, I would have stayed with USAID at that point, but they weren't...

I was accepted concurrently into the USAID foreign service intern program, and was called the IDI, International Development Intern program, and the UN Associate expert program. I was slated to go to Nepal. My wife to be and I were thrilled about that. We always wanted to hike the Himalayas and all that. We had a disappointment after we got married because I had already accepted the Nepal job and turned down the USAID offer and the UN decided that I should go to Bangladesh instead. It was the Food and Agriculture Organization was the agency, FAO that I would be working for. It was explained to me anyway I didn't have that much of an agriculture background but I was meant to be an assistant to the representative, the top person in the country. The person in Nepal was a Swede who I guess didn't have that much of an agriculture background himself and sent word back that he was looking for somebody else. He didn't want a generalist. So they offered me Bangladesh which I found ironic because I used to joke with my spouse to be, "Oh marry me and I will take you to Bangladesh," because it was in the news. The

civil war had ended a couple of years before that. Also the concert for Bangladesh and the famine and floods.

*Q: By some it was considered the armpit of the universe.*

ADAMS: I had a rough time for a bit because on the one hand I had my eyes, my sights set on Nepal, but on the other hand I said you'd be a hypocrite because you want to help those who are the most in need, so give it a chance. So my wife bless her heart, said, "OK," actually we had already gotten married, "give it a shot." Which was hard because her mother was a widow. Her father had died a couple of years beforehand. She was an only child, so she was leaving her mother by herself. I had a major guilt trip about that. Which led me to Haiti later. I will come back to that in a few minutes. So we just spent two years there. It was a very interesting experience. My first foreign service experience per se was with the UN in Bangladesh.

*Q: All right, let's talk, I mean there are two sides, one working with the UN and the other Bangladesh. Let's talk about Bangladesh first. What was, you were there from '77 to '79. What was the situation in Bangladesh while you were there?*

ADAMS: Well it had improved from the dire situation that of course they experienced after the war with the refugee issues and being very unsettled in terms of security issues. The Indians of course, had come in and kicked out the Pakistanis and helped the Bangladeshis form their own government and country. But it was peaceful, calm, very poor, very primitive. Its capital was unlike anything I had ever seen. Although Laos was very primitive but in a different way. It wasn't teeming with people. You hardly could go anywhere at that point in time without seeing at least one or two people. Because in an area the size of Wisconsin even back then the population was 55 million. Now it is about 130 million. Anyway so it was tough to take, especially for my new wife. She had studied in France. That was the extent of her overseas living experience was junior year abroad. But we made a go of it. Made a number of good friends. Did a lot of traveling. I had a very nice boss, now deceased. His name was David A.P. Butcher, Alan Palance Butcher. He was British. Before that senior agricultural advisor was basically a position under the UNDP resident representative FAO had a director general at the time, Eduard Saouma, who had been in that position many years and was determined to make the FAO more independent of the UNDP. So he had established a separate FAO representative slot, with people reporting directly to him. That created some tension. So David Butcher was being assigned to the new FAO representative position in Bangladesh. He had been running a big project in Indonesia before that. So we had to basically set up shop and he had to take over projects that had been run by the UNDP, that were now under him. There had been a senior agricultural advisor as I began to mention who actually worked in the UNDP Resident Representative's offices. One of the manifestations of this new independence was that we looked for a separate office down the street from UNDP, not very far away. An American was the UNDP resident representative, Bernard Zagorin, who I think had been a U.S. diplomat and World Bank Representative before that. But he was a bit of a legend. Anyway, so David and I set up this new office and hired Bangladeshi staff, and got to know the various projects and individual project directors. I did a fair amount of traveling in Bangladesh and went to China. I set up the trip as sort of a semi official UN tour with representatives from various UN agencies and went to China my second year. It was very interesting because there were very few foreigners especially Americans being allowed in there

unless you were some special connection or were with the UN. So we were the cutting edge of “official” tourism to China if you will.

*Q: Well what were the projects that you were involved with in Bangladesh?*

ADAMS: Well there was food security. We had for example another British advisor, Hugh Brammer, who had lived there many years, who was an expert on agricultural policy, who worked for FAO, was funded by FAO, but was assigned to the minister of agriculture. We had several people like that in key government ministries advising them on various facets of agricultural policy, food security policy. Then we had folks that were involved in fisheries development, warehousing, jute production, let’s see what else. I think those are the major areas, rice production and so forth.

*Q: When you say food security, what do you mean?*

ADAMS: Food security is in the context of where we were involved primarily from the standpoint of production and storage....saving food for a rainy day or lack of a rainy day. So it was to try to encourage conservation and storage techniques. Interestingly one of the fellows who ran that project was a Haitian, a former Haitian agriculture minister who got a job at the UN with a much higher paying salary, who I got to know and who piqued my interest in Haiti. His name was Ramon Tournier. But food security, there are different aspects of it, but it usually involved production techniques that will create higher yields....a green revolution type thing. Through those higher yields you do not have to consume as much of the crop on a seasonal basis. You can store it. Certain types of produce is more easily dried or otherwise stored. Rice for example, is one that can be stored for some time. Pest control was a big issue though.

*Q: When you talk about food security, one thinks of say in the problem of even a dry climate like the Soviet Union where they have a horrible problem, I guess had, some still do, of rodents and other things so that they lose about a third of their...*

ADAMS: Yeah, they do in Bangladesh too.

*Q: I would think that in a basically moist wet area you would have terrible problems.*

ADAMS: You have got humidity; you have fungi growth problems and also rats and various insects did their dirty work.

*Q: How did you find the Bangladesh authorities worked with you?*

ADAMS: Well it was a certain amount of the mañana culture. The higher ranking folks, the senior officials were very well educated, highly motivated seemingly, but as with many countries like Bangladesh was anyway, you didn’t have much of a bureaucracy underneath them. In other words the training and education was spotty. People had second jobs as happens frequently. So the dedication was not there, poor working conditions frequently with office space being minimal or not well lit. Forget about air conditioning, even fans depending on where you were.

This was the pre-computer age, at least personal computers. So not all the typewriters would work and so forth.

*Q: I think of at that time the image of an Indian office was a place of an awful lot of clerks running around moving piles of paper but not much coming out. But insistence on form and almost an overly developed civil service that didn't produce much.*

ADAMS: Similar. It produced a lot of paper. Back then, however, much of agriculture had some government oversight which made it not very efficient. Fortunately for Bangladesh that oversight in a practical sense it really hadn't been that much of an effect. The farmer was on his own. You had a nascent microcredit movement. This was when I think I remember meeting Mohammed Yunus way back when he was just getting off the ground with the Grameen bank. We helped to fund it. FAO helped to fund the bank. I remember meeting him, being very impressed because even back then he was beginning to get a name for what he was trying to do, but there wasn't much of it going on yet. The farmer had the benefit of very good growing conditions. He had very fertile soil, pretty much countrywide. That is how Bangladesh was able to make it with all those people. The fertility alluvial plain profited from the river flow coming down from the mountains. So they could pretty much grow rice just about anywhere, and lentils, and tea up in mountainous area. So there was agricultural production. Obviously it was low tech in many cases.

*Q: This was a period when the miracle rice and the green revolution was really beginning to kick in wasn't it?*

ADAMS: Not so much in Bangladesh though, elsewhere, Philippines, elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Bangladesh was behind the curve.

*Q: Well was it the thing behind the curve or they didn't need it because of their productive soil?*

ADAMS: Well in one sense the incentive wasn't there to do the experimentation but one thing I recall hearing from Hugh Brammer the advisor, the grand old man of agriculture in Bangladesh was on our payroll. I heard him saying that part of the problem was that basically they could have benefited from more experimentation to grow a more hearty variety that would be less susceptible to fungus and pests. That there were ways they could have been more forward leaning.

*Q: Well now was there any mechanism either to the UN or to the U.S. government or Philippine government, somewhere working on this problem and was the UN pushing research or not?*

ADAMS: Yes I think I think it was primarily through Hugh Brammer's relationship with the secretary of agriculture, Obaidullah Khan, and that he was advising them to be more forward thinking, but the problem was one of resources and one of FAO's weaknesses if you will was that as opposed to say USAID or the World Bank or even UNDP, but UNDP was in somewhat of the same boat. The actual resources for projects were quite limited. The UN, FAO in this case spent a large percentage of its budget, and I think that is probably still the case, on technical assistance and publications. One of the things I did, I liked handling and overseeing the local

staff in the office and to do a weekly report and then other similar reports on a less frequent basis on agricultural conditions in the country particularly looking at potential for disaster or drought or insect infestation. I would get data from people with real expertise in the projects and from this fellow Hugh Brammer and then I would put it together and then report back to Rome. So that was in terms of practical engagement of FAO, a lot of it was advice. In other words we couldn't help them finance commodity imports or research of their own to speak of; they would have to do it themselves. They would have to put out their own money, the capital, and they didn't have the capital either. So FAO's impact was somewhat limited. You had these other agencies like the World Bank and USAID were very much engaged. I think they were to some extent financing some of this research. Bangladesh to this day is still very well known however for research in the area of diarrheal diseases. They have an anti diarrheal center I think it is just outside of the capital. They have done tremendous work in pioneering oral rehydration therapy which was then replicated around the world. And also I think vaccinations among other things.

*Q: Well while you were there, Bangladesh has the unfortunate history of typhoons and monsoons and all. While you were there did any of that hit you at all?*

ADAMS: Yes. I was fortunate enough not to be in the middle of a very bad one, but they did have, they had a tropical storm and even a tropical storm-level tempest would result in significant death. There were a lot of fishermen who were exposed, not getting weather reports in time, etc. Even inland with the water ways, flooding was very easy and people couldn't swim, so you had a lot of people drowning even inland but especially out in the sea., in the Bay of Bengal.

*Q: While you were there did you feel like you were wading in sort of a pool of humanity or not. I have heard people from in Calcutta talk about where at some point it gets pretty indifferent to people sleeping or dying out on the streets.*

ADAMS: Yeah. You do get, I began to develop a bit of thick hide. It didn't bother me as much as when I was younger and I was in some of these places. Nothing like Bangladesh. You didn't get that overwhelming feeling of being in the midst of a mass of humanity every day, but if you were in certain parts of town, the downtown area you almost get claustrophobic in a sea of humanity. Or if you were on a ferry, you read to this day about overloaded ferries in Bangladesh capsizing, but where our offices were and where the government offices were, and where we lived you did not have that teeming population so you had some relief. You get used to it. I got used to it.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the politics of the UN where you were?*

ADAMS: Not so much in the macro sense, not so much from the standpoint of what you typically read about, issues that are written about in the press normally. That is to say we heard precious little about what was happening with the UN secretariat in New York and other headquarter agencies. It was much more what is going on at FAO Headquarters; Director-General Saouma was viewed as an authoritarian. You do it his way or it was the highway. The relationship with the UNDP was strained because he was trying to be more independent, and the problem there was to some extent it created difficulties and lack of coordination within the UN system. There was tension with the World Food Program because they had their equities to



protect, and there were some similar mandates. The WFP had the resources. It is one of the few UN agencies that had significant resources, not so much money but food, and that is very attractive to host governments. So the World food Program representative was probably the most, from the host government's perspective, most important of all the UN reps in country in a place like Bangladesh. So yes I got something of a flavor of the UN. There was also a competition of sorts, well it wasn't even a competition. It was more something of contempt on the part of USAID officials, contempt for the UN because USAID had much more money, and their staff lived more high on the hog, relatively speaking.

**PHILLIP C. WILCOX, JR.**  
**Economics Officer**  
**Dhaka (1977-1979)**

*Phillip C. Wilcox, Jr. was born in Colorado in 1937. He received his bachelor's degree from Williams College in 1958 and then immediately after received his law degree from Stanford University in 1961. After graduation he went and taught in Sierra Leone from 1961-1963. During his Foreign Service career he had positions in Laos, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Washington D.C., and Jerusalem. Mr. Wilcox was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 1998.*

*Q: Could you describe Dhaka in 1977, both the political and economic and also living conditions.*

WILCOX: Dhaka was coming out of a series of political convulsions following the birth of Bangladesh, it's breakaway from Pakistan, and the Indian invasion. That was a time of terrible chaos, violence and human suffering. In the mid-'70s, there were also natural disasters which killed a lot of people. Thereafter, this began to make progress. The United States and donors from all over the world had focused on Bangladesh as a country with compelling development needs. Development was the main element of U.S. policy. It was a desperately poor country, about the size of Wisconsin with a dense population and a high rate of population growth. The main goals USAID, the World Bank and other donors were family planning, food production, public health, and job creation. I spent more time working with USAID on their programs than on the traditional work of an embassy economic officer.

*Q: Really in a way, this was not a place where there was going to be much investment or purchasing of American goods was it?*

WILCOX: Few American firms were interested in investing because of the poverty and the country's history of socialism and expropriation of private property. I got to know the Bangladeshi business community, which was struggling to overturn the policies of state control established by the former government of Sheik Mujibur Rahman, the first president of Bangladesh. Zia Rahman, his successor, was working, albeit slowly, to change those policies.

*Q: Well, did you find that sort of the genes of entrepreneurship ran rather strongly? This is basically a Bengali community.*

WILCOX: The Bangladeshis are a tough resilient, hard working people. In spite of adversity, which is almost inconceivable to westerners who haven't seen it, the Bangladeshis have actually made some progress. This wasn't readily apparent when I was there, but 15 years later, Bangladesh has made real strides in producing almost enough food to be self sufficient in privatizing a fair sector of their economy, in raising income, and most important of all, in running an effective family planning program to slow down a potentially catastrophic rate of population growth.

*Q: What was our attitude towards family planning, because particularly since the Reagan administration which came in in '81, abortion has been considered, you know, we cannot support abortion. What was our attitude in dealing with family planning at this time?*

WILCOX: Family planning was far less politicized in those days, and it was a central plank of U.S. foreign policy in underdeveloped countries. USAID had very experienced family planning experts, and did a superb job. I had seen it earlier in Indonesia. The Congress was supportive, there was plenty of money, and abortion was not a big issue. We supported voluntary sterilization in Bangladesh at the time, but recognized this should be carried out without coercion, in contrast to India, where coercive practices had set back family planning.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

WILCOX: Ed Masters was there when I arrived, and David Schneider came later. Both were solid professionals. While Ed Masters was still there during the early months of my tour, a Japan Airlines flight was hijacked by a group of Japanese Red Army terrorists and forced down at Dhaka. The airplane was carrying well over 100 civilians including a good many Americans. In the course of negotiating with the terrorists, an insurgent group of Air Force officers mutinied and seized the airport, adding to the crisis. Because there were so many Americans aboard this plane, we were very much involved in the process with the Bengalis and the Bangladeshis to get the hostages released.

*Q: What were you doing? Were you involved in this?*

WILCOX: Yes, around the clock. We worked on the government to persuade the terrorists to release the passengers without capitulating to their demands. They did release some - perhaps all - of our citizens in Dhaka, but the terrorists then forced the pilot to take the plane to Algeria where they abandoned it, released the rest of the hostages in return for a very large sum, I think it was \$10,000,000, and disappeared. As a matter of policy, we opposed such ransom payments.

*Q: How did Masters and Schneider deal with, how did they operate?*

WILCOX: Both very experienced in the developing world. Ed Masters had served as DCM in Indonesia. David Schneider was a premier South Asia expert, having served in India and Pakistan repeatedly. They had a strong sense of the need for economic development as the core

of U.S. policy in Bangladesh, and they used our considerable influence effectively to developing close relations with the Bangladeshis and influence their policies. But it was not a tutelary relationship. The Bangladeshis had an upper tier of elite civil servants. It was an effective relationship.

*Q: What was our reading on the Indian government vis a vis Bangladesh at that time?*

WILCOX: The legacy of the past was still strong. The Bengalis are Muslims and have had an historic rivalry with the Hindus in India. But the Indian invasion in 1978 enabled Bangladesh to break away from Pakistan, so the relationship was ambivalent. The Indians had a large embassy there. Relations were cordial, and improving, but there was a latent fear about mother India because of its enormous size. Both governments were making an effort to deal in a sensible way with water. The water of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers were shared by both India and Bangladesh.

*Q: Did they even have relations with Pakistan at that time?*

WILCOX: Yes. There was both an animosity toward Pakistan and a kind of nostalgia for the old days. Most of the Bangladeshi civil servants had grown up in the civil service of Pakistan, and their classmates, or as they called them, “batch mates,” were working in Islamabad and around the world, so there was a kind of affinity. By that time, the Pakistanis were beginning to recognize that partition was a good thing because Bangladesh, with its enormous weight of population and its economic problems, and its cultural and ethnic differences from the Pakistani communities was a very different and troubled country. Moreover it was hundreds of miles away. I think the break up was an historical inevitability. It is a pity it took place in such a violent way.

*Q: Did you have any floods, typhoons or the like. They seem to be endemic in that area.*

WILCOX: We didn't have any of the catastrophes that strike Bangladesh now and then. The country is extremely vulnerable to this kind of phenomenon because it is basically a river delta at sea level. The Bay of Bengal is subject to typhoons and hurricanes, and when they come, they sweep across the coastal areas and kill or displace masses of people. There was a theory at one time that periodic natural disasters would keep the population down, as nature's way of population control. Modern medicine changed this. While a great many people lost their lives in these disasters, the success of public health programs, including smallpox and cholera inoculations, had long since ended nature's way of maintaining a balance, and the population was soaring.

*Q: How closely did you work with our AID effort there? The assistance effort must have been huge.*

WILCOX: It was. Besides family planning, USAID promoted agriculture and irrigation projects, including a massive program of building flood control levees, using U.S. surplus food as payment. This was called the PL-480 Title II program. CARE, the private voluntary organization, ran the Title II program for USAID. Another program was designed to reduce food

subsidies in order to increase agricultural production and income for farmers. Bangladesh, like many poor countries, had a ration subsidy system. Our programs were designed to wean them away from that so the market could operate. The food grain program USAID ran also emphasized fertilizer, irrigation, and new varieties of hybrid wheat and rice seeds.

*Q: I would think that much of our effort which had been concentrated in South Vietnam not long before this, I mean the final pullout was in '75, the expertise and knowledge would have sort of been switched over to Bangladesh, a hot place in Southeast Asia.*

WILCOX: A lot of well-qualified and dedicated USAID and other development experts were drawn to Bangladesh because it presented a model challenge for economic development. The middle class spoke English, and there was a coherent government structure. It was a great country for, and as we have subsequently learned – something of a success story for - development assistance.

*Q: What about corruption; was this a problem?*

WILCOX: Yes, and it was getting worse. I wrote reports on it. As in many developing countries there were close family and political ties between the business community and the bureaucracy and a good deal of corruption and back scratching.

*Q: Were you able to deal with this?*

WILCOX: It didn't taint our AID program, and the impact on development was not crippling, so it wasn't part of our diplomacy then.

*Q: What about social life in dealing with the Bangladeshis?*

WILCOX: It was spontaneous. The Bangladeshis are open and engaging people, and it was easy to make friends there. The intelligentsia, including academics, businessmen, and senior civil servants were interesting, accomplished people, although a great many were emigrating.

*Q: Was there much spillover into Calcutta, sort of the Bengal area there?*

WILCOX: The Calcutta Bengali are Hindu and culturally different with respect to religion. Many of the Hindu Bengali were forced out in the convulsions of the late '70s and went to East Bengal in India. Some of the Muslim Bengalis had been trained and went to prep school or university in Calcutta and were part of the Bangladeshi Muslim elite. The Hindus who were expelled were poor people known as the Biharis.

*Q: About cultural life, you know I have never served in the area, but I know the Bengali movie industry is sort of world renowned from India and the poetry is supposed to be particularly good. Was there a reflection in Bangladesh of that?*

WILCOX: The people were proud of that tradition, but the real heart and flowering of Bengali culture is in Calcutta and West Bengal where there was more wealth and commerce and a more highly developed urban society.

*Q: Were you looking as we were looking at developing Bangladesh towards tying them in to this commercial center of Calcutta and working on that or was this sort of...*

WILCOX: We encouraged regional cooperation, but at that stage, Bangladesh's main export, foreign and commercial ties were with the Persian Gulf countries. Migrant workers were the major source of foreign exchange.

*Q: You are talking about the Persian Gulf.*

WILCOX: Hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis worked there and sent remittances home. Bangladesh imported food grain from the U.S. and Canada in those days. They exported jute, and were beginning to exploit their considerable natural gas reserves. This activity has grown, but trade and business ties with their immediate neighbors had not developed very much at that time. The Indians and Bangladeshis are talking about using Bangladesh's oil and gas reserves for West Bengal and perhaps building pipelines for that purpose.

*Q: But that hadn't developed.*

WILCOX: No. Gas has been used primarily for domestic energy needs. USAID also started a program of rural electrification, which has been a success.

*Q: You left there in '79. Were you now a certified economic officer?*

WILCOX: I went out there with a view that to be effective in understanding the rest of the world and representing the United States, you had to have a grasp of economics as well as politics. I was confirmed in that view by my experience in Bangladesh. It was also a tremendous education living in that part of the world which is utterly different from the west and where human beings faced with incredible odds somehow cope, survive and sometimes thrive. It shows that even with these burdens of population, there is still a way to generate economic development and a better life for people.

*Q: Well, was the Bengali sort of example being looked at do you think by our government or any other governments saying "Okay, we can do something in something like this?" What are we learning and passing on, or was it country specific?*

WILCOX: In those days U.S. economic development assistance was still thriving. It was very much a part of our foreign policy, and it got a lot of impetus from the Cold War. It was seen as a strategic tool as much as a humanitarian endeavor, so we had high levels of funding. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, as you know, development assistance has declined drastically, and it is struggling to preserve itself as a significant element of U.S. policy.

*Q: Was there much carryover, I'm talking about the late '70s, from the Bengali experience to other?*

WILCOX: Well, like everything else, development policy goes through different cycles. Human rights, women's rights, and promotion of democratic institutions get more attention today in our aid policy than previously. The lessons that we learned in Bangladesh were that sensible and well-funded development assistance programs can help a lot in family planning and food production. There is lots of transferability there. A lot of the people who worked in those programs are now gone. I hope there is a corporate memory in AID that can sustain and apply those experiences elsewhere.

**PHILLIP ELY CHURCH**  
**USAID Officer**  
**Dhaka (1977-1981)**

*Phillip Ely Church grew up in Portland, Oregon. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago, a master's from Stanford University, and a PhD in economics from the University of Oregon. He joined USAID as a program economist in Guatemala in 1970. He has also served in Bangladesh, Pakistan, the International Rice Research Institute and in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Mr. Church was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.*

*Q: Then you left the Central American region, when?*

CHURCH: We transferred directly from Guatemala to Bangladesh around Christmas time 1977. Earlier, I had cast my eyes at a world map trying to decide where I wanted to take my USAID career next. I had no desire yet to go back to what I joked was USAID's only true "hardship post", Washington, DC. I know I could have benefited from a tour in the U.S., getting to know how the Agency functioned, because I went straight overseas to Guatemala when I joined the Agency. Still, I joined the foreign service to work abroad, not in the U.S.

However, the value of a Washington, DC tour with USAID became apparent in Bangladesh where the Agency had a very high profile program. Bangladesh was a country that Henry Kissinger had called an international "basket case." Bangladesh became independent from Pakistan after a bloody war in 1970s only to be devastated by monsoon floods. Its first decade as a country was one more of disaster relief than economic development. Many doubted that Bangladesh was viable as a country.

The whole South Asian continent was undergoing an exploding population. Despite a "green revolution" that promised significant increases in food grain production, mass starvation was still a real threat. The region at that time was still very unstable both economically and politically and USAID was most anxious for some economic development "success stories."

*Q: What was your position in Bangladesh?*

CHURCH: I served first as program economist and then an agricultural economist in Bangladesh.

*Q: What was the situation when you arrived?*

CHURCH: I worked in Bangladesh at perhaps one of the more promising periods in the history of our assistance programs in the country. By 1977 when I arrived in Bangladesh, the country was beginning to recover from a period of floods and droughts that had punctuated its short life as an independent nation since its bloody independence struggle with Pakistan at the beginning of the decade. Large amounts of money - twenty fold what we had for programs in Central America - were budgeted for Bangladesh development programs. In Central America at the time, the population was 15 million. Bangladesh had nearly 90 million people in a much more concentrated geographic setting. Poverty was much more widespread in Bangladesh. For me, the Bangladesh program also required a lot more understanding of how the USAID bureaucracy and donor community conducted and coordinated a large country development assistance effort.

*Q: What were the kinds of programs with which you were concerned in Bangladesh?*

CHURCH: One of the things in which I became involved was building a better knowledge base of what affect our development dollars were having on peoples lives. At the time USAID was working largely at what we called the “outputs” level, focusing on things like how much fertilizer, credit school books or condoms our programs distributed rather than how much more food was produced, how many more kids were educated and how much more income or well being program beneficiaries experienced. USAID’s program in Bangladesh was a start, at least for me, of efforts to monitor more closely these “outcomes” of our programs, that is, of what our programs were accomplishing boosting food output, literacy and rural incomes or lowering infant mortality, disease incidence and population growth.

Bangladesh was more about accomplishment because we were working in an environment where life was a make-or-break situation for many people. A failed crop meant hunger, even loss of life, in a setting like Bangladesh. A simple disease or infection was life threatening to children already weak and malnourished. Bangladesh appeared to be on a collision course between population growth and food availability.

USAID needed better information about what was working in our food production assistance programs. Bangladesh offered an opportunity to do something constructive in getting better numbers to people in USAID/Washington and in the Congress who made decisions. So I spent a good share of my time in the field talking to farmers, learning about their problems, learning why they were using a particular seed or fertilizer or cultivation practice. A central question of concern was: “Why, when new high yielding rice and wheat varieties were introduced, was there such a wide gap between the crop yields that scientists obtained at the experiment station and what farmers experienced in their fields?”

*Q: Why these gaps?*

CHURCH: First, agricultural researchers could control for a number of factors on their experiment stations that farmers could not in their fields — water availability, pests and plant diseases, for example. Small farmers, however, do not have nice well-defined farms. They cultivate a small plot of land in one place, rent out a piece of land in another area, rent in another piece of land from a neighboring farmer as well. A farm may consist of say 3 hectares of land total but be made up of a dozen or as many as 20 or 30 small rice paddies or plots scattered over an area many times that size. Each plot has its unique soil conditions and planting schedule. One field may be dry; one may be wet. Our surveys showed that farmers select plots so as to use their labor (and that of their family members) most efficiently over the entire cultivation year, not always to maximize yields.

We quickly realized that research scientists cannot go into a region with a single crop variety or cultivation practice and expect it to be adopted throughout a farmer's land holding. It may be adopted only in part and only on some farm plots because land varies so much by soil type, water regime and fertility across any single farm operation. Farmers purposely select plots with a variety of features in order to spread risks and stagger planting and cultivation times in such a way as to best use their time and labor. So, new crop varieties did not yield on farmer's fields what they did in experiment station trials.

*Q: Did you come to any general conclusions about farming in Bangladesh?*

CHURCH: I think we came up with conclusions about ourselves and how we should conduct agriculture research in a setting like Bangladesh. The major conclusion, if there is one to be made, is that the client needs to be much more a part of the development equation. I can see that going on much more today in our attempts overseas to partner with our clients.

In Bangladesh in the late 1970s, we were just beginning to look at the farm community and the farmer as a partner in the process, as someone from whom to learn. By comparison, earlier in Central America we essentially carried pre-packed solutions to farmers via mobile school programs, on trucks equipped with special plows and seeders to show farmers how to use this stuff. In Bangladesh, we listened to how farmers did it and then examined ways that we could help them maybe do it better or let them look at options. We conducted a lot of on-farm trials in the context of what came to be called "farming systems research", which essentially studied the whole farm unit. For example, how is rice cultivation linked to the livestock enterprises on the farm and how does each compete for limited family labor? We examined the interactions among the several crop and livestock enterprises that made up the whole farm unit that the farmer managed rather than focus exclusively on a single crop.

*Q: What was our program in agriculture then? What were we trying to do specifically apart from this approach?*

CHURCH: In Bangladesh we were trying to close the domestic food production and consumption gap. The United States was supplying as much as 2-3 million tons of food grains annually to the country and more was coming from other donors, notably Canada and Australia. To put that into perspective, Bangladesh produced at the time I was there about 15 million tons of food grains and the donors provided another 4-5 tons, about 25% of the country's total consumption needs. A



country is considered to be in a food vulnerability situation when it depends on imports for more than 5% of its food needs. Bangladesh was nearly five times that level, so the objective was to increase domestic production of basic food to bring that gap down to under 5% or from 5 million tons to about one million tons of grain imports. At the time the U.S. had food grain surpluses to share, but no one knew what the long run forecast would be for U.S. agriculture. To close that gap in Bangladesh we needed to build capacity to produce more food by the country's own farmers.

*Q: The primary strategy for doing that was what?*

CHURCH: Improved seed and more and better fertilizer use, or so we thought at the time. I think we came away from that experience realizing that improved farming practices were equally critical. Seed and fertilizer were basic components, but not the whole solution.

An immediate problem was to get fertilizer to farmers, which the government was subsidizing to encourage adoption. Well, it was catching on. Chemical fertilizer was used on about 5% of the crop land in the early 1970s. When I got there in 1977 farmers were applying it to about 30% of the crop land. And when I left in 1981 the figure was at about 60%. Well, the government could afford to subsidize fertilizer when it was used on only 5% of the crop land, but as usage grew, subsidies began eating up the entire agriculture budget leaving little money for research and extension services. Without such services crop yields from added fertilizer use began to level off. Our chemical fertilizer use strategy was not sustainable for the long run.

*Q: Were you able to accomplish anything in that respect?*

CHURCH: There were two things that USAID can point to as fairly successful. One was the privatization of the fertilizer sector. We got the government out of the fertilizer business. It was entirely a government operation which is a traditional pattern in that part of the world. The fertilizer corporation, the fertilizer marketing, the distribution of fertilizer was all in government hands. We helped the government dismantle that system and introduce private distribution networks. There was a great deal of resistance at first because everyone was sure the middleman would capture the profit, but we demonstrated that enough middlemen would compete and bring down the margins to where they could provide a better service at a cheaper cost than the government.

Secondly, as I already described, we brought farmers into the partnership or into the process as active informants of what was needed and what worked and why, whereas before we were only listening to the research station scientists.

*Q: Who was working with the communities to introduce these technologies and concepts?*

CHURCH: As far as I could tell, one of the major ways that information was shared was by word of mouth and marketplace, not the extension service. For example, private fertilizer distributors became disseminators of information. I recall now that you mention it, the bags had on them instructions as to how to apply the fertilizer to get the best yield. So we used the market mechanism as a vehicle for getting farm messages as well as chemical fertilizer into farmers' hands.

*Q: Did you find the Ministry of Agriculture receptive to doing things this way or did you essentially bypass them in this approach?*

CHURCH: The Ministry of Agriculture had strengths and weaknesses. I have never seen more dedicated civil servants than those with whom I worked in the Ministry of Agriculture in Bangladesh. But the Ministry had few resources with which to support its research and extension staff. As I indicated, most of the budget was still going to pay fertilizer subsidies. So agricultural researchers had few vehicles to get around the countryside and had to take bicycles and buses to get to farmers' plots. Their daily meal and lodging allowances were so low and so miserable whenever they left the office or research station they could not afford to travel without using their own money. And, of course, salaries themselves were very modest. That's one of the things we also could point to. To turn around this situation was to say, "OK, we'll reduce the fertilizer subsidy burden, but we want to see the budget savings go into salaries, vehicles and travel allowances for your research people so they can begin to work more with farmers."

*Q: Had the agriculture situation changed in that period you were there?*

CHURCH: We definitely saw improvements; I think the statistics tell the story. Fertilizer use continued to grow and crop yields improved even as subsidies were lowered and the cost of fertilizer to farmers rose. Bangladesh has its own natural gas resources which it began to use to produce urea fertilizer in the country. It is less import-dependent today, despite a larger population to feed! The research system has continued to maintain contact with its clients. I really can't speak to whether the agricultural researchers field logistics problems have been solved. I suspect the situation is better today but that Bangladesh still has a ways to go.

*Q: Was the food deficit declining?*

CHURCH: Not only has the food deficit declined, but in some years Bangladesh has come pretty close to food self sufficiency. Now to claim food self sufficiency is a little misleading in a country like Bangladesh where purchasing power is such a big factor. You can have sufficient rice, on a caloric basis, but if many do not have the income to buy it, they still go hungry. Still Bangladesh has come very close to self sufficiency in terms of meeting its needs in the nutritional basis using, say, the UN caloric minimum acceptable standards of about 2,200 calories a day. Much needs to be done to raise incomes, especially among the poorest so they have the resources to buy the food and other necessities they need to improve their well-being.

*Q: How did you find working with the Bangladeshi people?*

CHURCH: I enjoyed it very much. It was a dramatic difference to be in a Muslim culture from a Christian culture in Latin America. The Muslim culture is very hospitable and accommodating. Muslim culture practices tolerance for non-Muslims, even though many people look at the Islamic faith as being very traditional. I found it a very pleasant environment.

*Q: How did you find working with the government bureaucracy?*

CHURCH: I observed very dedicated people enmeshed in a very rigid system. It is a by-the-book type of bureaucracy, very little creativity, very little originality, but a lot of dedication. As I said, it took the USAID program more than a decade to disengage the government from one policy and practice, fertilizer subsidies, for example. We did that not by convincing the government that a private sector distribution system was more efficient, but by demonstrating the damaging impact that their subsidy program was having on the budget. Still, acknowledging that reality was slow and responding to the reality also took time.

Working in Bangladesh as a development economist, I grew to understand better the interdependency of professional disciplines and program management skills needed to get the job done. The Mission Director in Bangladesh at the time we were running this fertilizer program chose not to push the economic logic of lower subsidies which he believed wouldn't resonate among our Bangladeshi counterparts. Rather he made and won the case on financial and budgetary grounds. Development assistance is more than just coming up with a better economic rationale. It also has to connect at a level that produces the political response and commitment that is needed to change attitudes and to make things happen differently.

*Q: Did you have any connection with the Embassy and U.S. political interests in Bangladesh?*

CHURCH: Bangladesh at the time was part of what was called the Group of 77 nonaligned United Nations countries. The U.S. Embassy's agenda was securing Bangladesh votes on United Nations issues of importance to U.S. interests. The Embassy viewed our economic assistance and humanitarian relief work in that context.

*Q: Did you see any of the cold war tensions affecting the development assistance work?*

CHURCH: Thanks to the cold war, development assistance work in Bangladesh and most of South Asia benefited from large infusions of annual funding. After all, the whole of Indochina was caught up in the aftermath of the Viet Nam war and the fear of a widening regional conflict was always there. If there is one problem we had, it was how to use the money wisely. The USAID program in Bangladesh went from an annual \$20 million program to a \$100 million program in development assistance alone, plus another \$75 million in food aid, plus a number of export credits. Combined with funds from other donors, Bangladesh was receiving a half billion dollars at the end of the decade of the 1970s.

*Q: Apart from the fertilizer subsidies that money was going to what?*

CHURCH: Food relief, health, education and family planning programs, with some road infrastructure and school construction work, funded often under food-for-work that built dikes, aquaculture ponds and irrigation canals. The Asian Development Bank was putting money into road infrastructure, electric power, and communications. The World Bank was providing a lot of large infrastructure loans, hydroelectric dams, irrigation systems.

*Q: Did you find that kind of overall assistance program worked well?*

CHURCH: As an economist, we viewed food aid with a little bit of skepticism because we were fearful it would undermine food prices and discourage crop production. Again the dependency question became important. But it also provided, in some cases, some useful spinoffs. There were a number of food assistance programs built around fish farms, for example. Fish farming became a new enterprise, and the nontraditional food crop of Bangladesh became Tilapia, a species of rapid reproducing and fast growing fish that originated in the Nile region of Egypt. It became a very popular source of protein and food.

*Q: Well, any last comments about the Bangladesh experience?*

CHURCH: Guatemala and Latin America served to launch my career. Bangladesh and South Asia helped give it depth. My work in the Asia region provided a different perspective on development than Latin America. I learned that in settings like Bangladesh to spur development you often must change more than economic incentives; you must also change the way people act within the bureaucratic circles.

**RICHARD PODOL**  
**USAID Deputy Director**  
**Dhaka (1978-1982)**

*Richard Podol was born in Chicago in 1928. He attended the University of Iowa, where he received his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. He became involved in the Foreign Service in 1954. Mr. Podol has worked in India, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Zaire, and Uganda. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in September 1996.*

PODOL: In 1978, I went on home leave, and then went to Bangladesh.

*Q: What was your position in Bangladesh?*

PODOL: Deputy Director, in the large Mission context you might say.

*Q: How big was the Mission?*

PODOL: We must have had more than 30 direct hire, at least that, and I don't know how many contractors. But it was a much broader based program: agriculture, rural development, health, family planning, and some infrastructure.

*Q: Why were we interested in providing so much assistance to Bangladesh? "We" being the United States.*

PODOL: Partly for humanitarian reasons. It was kind of a basket case in that part of the world. It was causing a lot of problems. India and Pakistan had fought a war over what is now Bangladesh, East Pakistan, and there were still problems. Bangladesh was creating problems for India. The first thing that hits you about Bangladesh is the enormous overpopulation, which

impacts on anything you want to do. But the solution for excess population was migration into India. This was causing problems along the Indian border. I think part of it was trying to do something in Bangladesh that might alleviate population pressure that was spreading out. It was also creating problems with Burma, but we weren't terribly interested in Burma at the time. And humanitarian reasons. If you believed in basic human needs, now there are 120 million people there and most of them are poor. Then it was 90 million.

*Q: What were we trying to do with our program?*

PODOL: Before saying that, let's set up the context in which we had to work. Overpopulation, for example. The average farm was maybe two or three acres. A big farm there was 10-12 acres. Two or three was more likely. At the time I was there, over 40 percent of the rural population was landless. That rate of landlessness was increasing at about 2 percent a year. So what in the world do you do with masses of landless people in a country where you have extremely small farms to begin with? Second, Bangladesh is geographically a disaster area. The bulk of the populated parts of the country are at sea level. So, when a typhoon occurs in the Bay of Bengal, it wipes out coastal areas. They're inundated. When a severe typhoon occurs, the water backs up the rivers and creates mass destruction. On the other side, the Ganges and other rivers flow out of the mountains into Bangladesh and out to the Bay of Bengal. When you get very heavy snowmelts, then the rivers in the northern side flood. So, disaster is the name of the game. They were constantly worrying about or undergoing a disaster. So, your problems of development in this country are extreme, very difficult.

Therefore, one of the largest programs was in family planning. The government and people in the cities were very receptive to family planning. In the rural areas, you ran into a different kind of situation. When a family was extremely poor, women had to work. And when women worked, the number of births went down significantly. But in the rural areas, if the family incomes went up for some reason, then the man would pull the woman out of the workforce, lock her up, literally, in the house, and she'd start producing children, and the birthrate would go up. So, as your income went up, your birthrate went up at the lower levels. It would only start to go down again in families where women were educated. Then the birthrate would drop. And in university educated women, it would be the lowest of all. So, this was the pattern you had. So, family planning was one of the major programs. The other big piece was agriculture, since the country was agriculturally based. The land was good. Because of flooding, you got a lot of good soil distribution. So, agriculture was a big program. If you talk about basic human needs, the one that made the biggest impact of all, maybe the biggest actual impact of any project I've ever seen, was rural electrification. Before the program went into effect, you could drive through the countryside at night and it would be pitch black. Occasionally, you would see a little spark where there was a little fire going. But, basically, it was pitch black. You couldn't see where you were going or anything. This was the way people lived. I remember the first village that was electrified. You'd go into that village at night and there were the people gathering in the village center, conducting economic activity, buying whatever, talking, socializing. It changed the entire life of people in that village. So, it became the most popular government program in the country, fully supported by the president. If you wanted a program that made an impact on the day to day lives of people, that was it. Each family had a light bulb in the house, hooked up to the system.

*Q: Was the rural electrification program financially viable?*

PODOL: Operationally, yes. You didn't have to pay the cost of building the infrastructure. The co-ops would be financially viable when it came to operations. They couldn't pay the cost of setting up the infrastructure, no. So, that was the other big piece. There were other rural development activities, such as road building, which was essential in that country and extremely difficult because of the nature of the soil and the flooding. Your road had to be 12, 15, 18 feet above the surface, so when the floods came, they didn't go under. But these were not paved. We're not talking about highways. We're talking about gravel roads. So, essentially, that's the outline of the program. And PL 480, Title II.

*Q: You said that the rural electrification was effective. Were the others effective? Did you feel at the time that they were having an effect?*

PODOL: The agricultural research project had produced results that were being used by farmers to increase production. That was working well. Family planning was beginning to take hold in the cities. The vasectomy program, like in India, was the number one program they had there. Some would say because of bribes in the sense that, if you came in, you'd get clothing or something - that they were making poor people who needed money come in and sell their reproductive rights for some money or a piece of clothing or whatever they might be given. But that was beginning to take hold. And you had some very competent Bangladeshis.

*Q: How was the government to work with?*

PODOL: You were better off if you didn't. It was very corrupt. Corruption was the name of the game. Corruption was worse there than in any country in which I worked, with the exception, of course, of Zaire. But even then, corruption could be more disabling in Bangladesh than in Zaire. You could work around it in Zaire. In Bangladesh, you could not get anything through without a payment here or there. You want to get something out of Customs? Well, you could go down to the port, knock on the door, and pound, and sit around and wait a few weeks, or you could pay somebody and get it out. That was disabling in terms of your development program.

*Q: Is that what we had to do in our program?*

PODOL: We didn't. The Embassy did.

*Q: Did you work around the government? What did you do? What was the alternative?*

PODOL: Family planning was carried out with local, private, voluntary organizations. They were like the Indians: they liked to organize; they liked to set up societies, and you could work with those groups. In agriculture research, yes, it was possible to get the research out to the farmer. That would work alright. At a different level, you could get something done.

*Q: And the administration was-?*

PODOL: Because they had the backing of the president, who put a Brigadier General in charge of the rural electrification program; it worked because of that. These guys wanted to make it work and it did. They cut through not all but most of the obstacles, the red tape, to get things done. It didn't make them popular, but it worked.

*Q: I suppose they had a large training program for Bangladeshis?*

PODOL: I'd say, no, it was a small one, compared to what I'd seen before. I can't tell you why. They had a good manpower base for a small program.

*Q: Were we involved in the famous small loan bank?*

PODOL: The Grameen Bank. No, we had our own agriculture lending program, but it reached a different level. The argument was just the opposite, that we were trying to get the government to charge much higher interest rates than they were charging, on the grounds that they could easily be paid and that this would make the lending program viable, instead of having to be heavily subsidized, which the government couldn't afford. The point being that these higher rates would still be much lower than those charged by village leaders.

*Q: This was a little higher for the government bank clientele?*

PODOL: Yes.

*Q: For small farmers and so on?*

PODOL: Yes.

*Q: And was it working?*

PODOL: Yes, it demonstrated that people would pay 26% interest and therefore make your lending program administratively viable. Before that, there was another very famous rural development program in east Pakistan. That they found worked extremely well there because of the dedication of the person who was running it. But you take him out of it and you couldn't replicate it, because you couldn't find somebody like him to run other programs.

*Q: What were the characteristics that made him unique? Do you remember his name?*

PODOL: Dr. Aktar Ahmed Khan. He was a very charismatic figure. So, when he went into the villages to talk to people, they listened and they would do the things that he would recommend. They could see he was sincere. He wasn't just another bureaucrat out there doing something because he had to do it. He really believed in his program. Because of his personality, he was able to get people to go along with his programs, and they worked, with his leadership continually being there to lead.

*Q: But when he left, it-?*

PODOL: It kind of petered out. Not all of it; something remained. They never could replicate it because there wasn't another person like him. He could also get money. Because of his fame and personality, he could raise funds.

*Q: What were the issues that you were personally dealing with as the Deputy Director?*

PODOL: It was almost like Tanzania. Joe Toner let me handle day to day operations.

*Q: He was the Mission Director?*

PODOL: He was the Mission Director. He dealt with the government on broader policy issues with the Ambassador and so on. And he let me handle day to day operations. I did what I did in Tanzania. We had management information meetings and discussions, setting out priorities and program steps, but not in a rigid way that couldn't be changed. So, we revised our efforts.

*Q: You had a large number of projects?*

PODOL: We must have had 12 or more, yes. It was a big Mission. I remember an interesting issue with Washington. We had a PL 480 Title II program, with CARE implementing it. It was a Food for Work program. CARE wanted to do two things: sell the food and use the local currency to implement the program, for example if you had to buy equipment to build a road. To give people food was very inefficient. It was much better to sell the food and pay the people cash, rather than trying to move food around the country. That was alright. But what CARE wanted to do is use some of the proceeds to pay the administrative costs. And Washington said that's a no-no. We fought that one to no avail. The auditors came and we fought that one with them. It made imminent sense that you use some of the money to pay your administrative costs. We couldn't get that approved though.

*Q: They were paid out of special fundings?*

PODOL: CARE had to appropriate their own money for these local administrative costs, the CARE people out there working in the field, directing and things like that.

*Q: These were Food for Work programs?*

PODOL: Yes, all Food for Work.

*Q: What kind of projects?*

PODOL: Road building and flood protection. Again, that's what you did. The only thing you could do with this mass of unemployed rural people was to put them to work on these local projects: roads and earthworks. And that's what the program did.

*Q: So did it work all right?*

PODOL: Yes.



*Q: And I guess it's still going on?*

PODOL: I don't know. What's happened in recent years in Bangladesh, they've gone into light industry. You find a lot of Bangladeshi-made clothing in the United States now. That didn't exist when we were there. The only industry they had was jute, for carpet backing and sacking, rope. Now they've gone into light manufacturing. That will employ a number of people, but not nearly the surplus working population.

*Q: Did you have other issues in relation to Washington on this?*

PODOL: I can't think of any. Again, Joe Toner was extremely well-liked and thought of and he could handle Washington. He had been Director of Personnel and he could handle Washington, so we didn't have any problems with Washington.

*Q: So, there were no major operational problems? By this time, we had shifted largely to contracts or were you still having a lot of direct hire?*

PODOL: Mostly direct hire. The agricultural research program was contracted, but that was pretty much it. For some of the construction work we didn't have direct hire out there building; we had contracts with engineering firms doing some of the construction.

*Q: But you had your own engineers?*

PODOL: Yes, we had direct hire engineers to oversee the activity.

*Q: And your family planning program was-?*

PODOL: Direct. And health was all direct hire. I don't remember having any full-time contract people in country, though we may have brought out one of a number of organizations that put on special training courses, things like that. But it was direct hire operated.

*Q: What was the thrust in your health program? What were you trying to do there?*

PODOL: It was all built around family planning, trying to get acceptance for family planning. What we learned from experience in India earlier is that the reason for the high birth rate was a high child death rate, infant mortality rate. In the Hindu culture - Bangladesh is Muslim - but in the Hindu culture in India, you have to have a son light the funeral pyre when you cremate. So, you have to make sure you have a male child that reaches adulthood. So, you'd have to produce a certain number of children to achieve that goal. The higher the death rate, the more children you have to produce. I think what we learned in India is that, as the death rate went down, infant mortality rates went down; about a generation later, the birthrate started to go down. We didn't think that was a coincidence. So, the associated program in Bangladesh was working on infant mortality: immunizations, safer water, to try and convince people through seeing things in the real world, that their kids were going to live to adulthood so they could cut down on the number of children they needed. That was a social security system also. Children took care of their

parents in their old age, so you needed children again. That was true in the Muslim society, as well as in the Hindu. One of the very largest projects, funded out of AID Washington, was diarrhea research. They had a center for diarrheal research in Bangladesh because it was a major killer. The hospital was dedicated to that, that was again partly American staffed and funded, had a patient rate of something like 100,000 a year, all of diarrheal cases. They were doing intravenous salt injection.

*Q: Oral rehydration?*

PODOL: That's where it started. That came when I was in Bangladesh - oral rehydration as a substitute for intravenous fluids. We were working on that. Under part of family planning, we had one of these condom marketing programs, where you sold condoms on the market at a subsidized rate, rather than distributing them through health clinics. So, you'd find them in all the shops and so on.

*Q: When?*

PODOL: That was really getting organized and underway when I left. They were all viewed under what you'd call today "child survival programs" and leading to, down the line, acceptance of family planning.

*Q: But the primary health care was in setting up clinics?*

PODOL: No, they were there. It was introducing the services: immunization services.

*Q: They already had a public health system?*

PODOL: Yes. The British left behind a good infrastructure all over the Indian subcontinent.

*Q: How did you find working with the Bangladeshis on a more personal level?*

PODOL: I had limited contact with the Bangladeshis, really limited. They did not invite you to their homes. Ministers didn't hold cocktail parties. There was very little of that, so you didn't have the contact like you had with the Indians, for example, or even the Nepalese. You didn't have that contact in Bangladesh.

*Q: Do you have an understanding of why, of what was in their culture?*

PODOL: No, I don't. I really can't say. It might have been my position, too, because I spent most of my time in the AID Mission or with the Ministry of Finance, who had to sign agreements. So, it really was limited to the Ministry of Finance. And the Secretary of Family Planning, because he'd been in the U.S. I was in his house. He may have been the only Bangladeshi that provided any social relations, he and his wife, who had both been in the U.S. We went to their village, spent a night in their village.

*Q: What about the Mission itself? How did you find Mission operation and the staffing and so on?*

PODOL: Staffing was excellent. Toner knew the people from his Washington experience that he wanted and he was able to get quality people for his positions. He was good at that. So, we had a good staff.

*Q: Anything else on your Bangladeshi experience that you want to emphasize?*

PODOL: I'll just reiterate that, in some countries you go into, you can say, "Ah, here's a development strategy that makes sense because we can look at the resources and see where we're going." Bangladesh did not give you that kind of a picture, because of the population and the disaster proneness of the country. We had a disaster preparedness program that languished. We tried to set up a cyclone/flood early warning system, but that never really got implemented. Bangladeshis didn't pay much attention to it.

*Q: It didn't work?*

PODOL: They never activated it, really. They had built a number of concrete buildings along the seashore, where people were supposed to go when typhoons hit. They put their animals in them. So, they really never paid much attention. The unfortunate thing was, a few weeks after I left Bangladesh, the president was assassinated. They've had nothing but political problems ever since, continuing today.

**TERESITA C. SCHAFFER**  
**Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1979-1980)**

*Ambassador Schaffer was born in New York and later educated in France. She received her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr College and joined the Foreign Service. Her Foreign Service career took her to Israel, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in September 1998.*

*Q: Then in 1979, you returned to Washington to become the deputy director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh (PAB), How did that assignment come about?*

SCHAFFER: Initially, I was assigned as the deputy director of the office that handled Indian affairs. Howie has been assigned as PAB director. During the Spring of 1979, there was a shuffle in NEA with the former PAB director moved up and a new person was brought in to replace her. Then the decision was made that Howie should head up the India desk, rather than PAB. Since I couldn't work for Howie, another position had to be found for me. Howie was told that the India assignment was an offer he could not refuse. NEA had also asked the then deputy director of PAB whether he would be willing to move to the comparable position in the India office. That

was all right with him; so he and I swapped jobs and I went to work in PAB. Both Howie and I were the logical candidates for any positions on the India desk or PAB. We were the right grade; we had the right “cone”; we had the desired background.

This is an excellent example of the assignment flexibility that is required to make tandem assignments workable. No one was harmed; it allowed me to continue in my chosen profession. This sort of flexibility has been lost; the assignment process today is much more regimented because it depends so heavily on the “bid” process. To undo an assignment becomes a major transaction today; even if an officer had informally been accepted for an assignment, there is no guarantee that it would necessarily happen. There are all kinds of rules about the extent of advance notification in bidding or unbidding and how the assignment panel must proceed. It is possible that today’s process might have ended up with the same results as the assignment of 1979, but it would have been a much more nerve-wracking process; it could also of course have not ended as happily as it did in 1979. I am certain that for this particular set of 1979 assignments, it would have been much harder today to achieve the desired results.

I had some acquaintance with both Afghanistan and Bangladesh. We had visited the first in 1975 while stationed in Pakistan -- with two small children. We drove through the Khyber Pass in a driving rain. The car stalled, but fortunately decided to try again. We crossed the border with our 1 ½ year old chirping away in Urdu and the six week old having his lunch under my blouse. The Afghan guard was completely befuddled seeing only three people, but had four passports. Our efforts to explain that there really was a fourth passenger only flustered the guard. We drove to Kabul and spent a couple of days there and returned.

I had visited Bangladesh while serving in India. I went to Dhaka as the Science Attaché and Howie was with me. I was given the grand tour of the International Center for Diarrheal Diseases Research for Bangladesh (known as ICDDRDB). This is the only international research effort in Bangladesh; it has done first class research in the field. It had been a cholera lab in an earlier incarnation. We also had the opportunity to go out on a river steamer; so we saw something of the country-side. We met all sorts of government people.

In fact, the PAB deputy director spent almost full time on Pakistan. I was the economic officer for that country, in addition to being an adviser on economic matters to the other desk officers. I carried the major part of the load in liaison with AID for all the PAB countries, but I think it is fair to say that I spent 95% of my time on Pakistan -- in part dictated by the fact that 1979 was a year of crisis there. That was true even in my economic “hat” though we had no current program for Pakistan. We did have some projects that had been previously funded which were continuing. We still had an AID Mission in Pakistan; it takes AID a long time to close missions and program. And as I’ll explain later, we spent innumerable hours worrying about the content of a new assistance package. There was also the question of rescheduling Pakistan’s debt -- an issue in which AID was vitally interested because some of it was debt to AID. As a practical matter, that also meant that we and AID worked very closely on economic assistance -- current and prospective. Since I knew the assistance program and personalities in Pakistan quite well, I could contribute to the dialogue in a meaningful way.

To be entirely accurate, I have to note that the country directorates did not get involved in the assistance project proposals or even in the approval process. State would be involved if there were any major issues as well as approving the overall program framework and the funding level.

I worked for Robert Peck, who was the PAB country director. Jane Coon was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia. The Assistant Secretary was Hal Saunders, who was one of my professional heroes. He is an extraordinary person. He spent most of his time on Middle East issues; most of what was remaining was devoted to Iran and the hostage crisis. He did take enough time to assure himself that South Asia was properly followed. I clearly remember times that really capture the reasons for my admiration for Hal. The first time came when he was preparing to provide Congressional testimony on Pakistan. He had requested that we draft his opening statement; when that was done, he asked the drafter and others to stick around to discuss it with him. I happened to be given the task of drafting the statement. When we met in his office after 6 p.m. one evening, it was obvious that he had not had time to read the draft. When we had assembled, Hal, in his usual quite fashion, asked: "What do we really want to tell Congress?" When I heard that question, it seemed so obvious, but I also knew that very few people ever asked it. We went to work and developed some "sound bites" for him. Then we talked about some of the ancillary messages and the subtleties of the situation. Hal asked some questions, which we tried to answer. When he was satisfied, he thanked us; he asked me whether I needed to rewrite his statement. I told him that I surely did. He gave me back the draft and asked me to return it to him as soon as possible. It was a superb performance; here was an Assistant Secretary handling multiple crises, who was able to close his door and focus on Pakistan by getting down to the basic questions and at the same time, inspire his staff. We knew how busy he was; it was a rare insight into a very busy executive. He was obviously one of the most organized people I have even known.

The other example came right after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. A few newspaper reporters had asked for a briefing on the situation. Hal agreed to see them. They were requested to come to his office well after dark on a non-working day. We in PAB were exhausted after having worked a full day. Hal made his presentation, describing the situation. One of the reporters asked how many Soviet troops there were in Afghanistan. Hal patiently pointed out that we did not have an exact fix on the numbers, which he had admitted earlier. He gave the reporter a range, but pointed out that the exact number was not the key; the fact that a sovereign country had been invaded by another was the important issue. The reporter then in very snide way said: "You mean you asked us to come here at this hour on a holiday and you don't know the exact number of Soviet troops in Afghanistan?" In response, Hal very quietly asked whether the reporter didn't want to rephrase the question. The reporter then realized how preposterous his comment was. He rephrased the question and Hal responded very quietly with the range he had given before and emphasized again the key issue. He said that if the same question was asked again, he would respond to it in exactly the same words. It was the only time that I have heard Hal come close to losing his cool.

Hal's staff revered him. He was a very nice guy, gentle, always under control, who had a superb touch for human relations. As I was leaving the Bureau, he wrote me a personal note of thanks; that was both unusual and unnecessary, but he did take the time to do that.

I found the work very stimulating. I did not mind working in the large Washington bureaucracy. I was very happy to return to the field of economics -- the subject in which I had received advanced training. My tour in the Science Office in Delhi was great, but I really welcomed the opportunity to return to my field of expertise. To the best of my recollection, the PAB directorate had six officers -- four on desks -- and 2-3 secretaries. Mike Hornblow worked on Pakistan political issues; Larry Benedict worked on Bangladesh; Ernestine Heck worked on Afghanistan and then there was one more officer in addition to Bob Peck and myself.

Our major issue with Pakistan concerned their nuclear program. That was followed by the spillover from the USSR invasion of Afghanistan. Those two problem areas had a major effect on our bilateral economic relationship. Just before I started to work in PAB, the U.S. had, for the second time, cut off assistance to Pakistan because of its efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Pakistan has had a long history of economic challenges -- particularly the balance-of-payments problem. We kept pretty close track of that problem.

Over the course of the Fall of 1978, Afghanistan had been through a succession of crises. A Communist government had already taken over; it was not a very cohesive institution because of internal tensions. In December 1979, one Communist leader was assassinated and replaced by another. A few weeks later, on Christmas Day, came the Soviet invasion. For about two weeks prior, we were receiving lost of information about Soviet military build-up along the Afghan border. I think it was clear to all that something was about to happen. We held a series of discussions in rapid succession with the Pakistani Foreign Minister -- one before the invasion and two soon after. As it happened, Bob Peck was away for Christmas, leaving me in charge of PAB. At the highest level of our government, options for our response were being considered. One step that was taken was to dispatch Clark Clifford to New Delhi to brief the Indians on what was going on in Afghanistan and our thoughts about events there. Howie went along and I am sure you will find reference to that trip in his oral history. Clifford and he were the total delegation.

Before the Clifford party had a chance to take-off, Warren Christopher, then Deputy Secretary of State, made plans to go to Pakistan. But that soon became the "Brzezinski" delegation, with Christopher just a member of the delegation, and with enough members to fill a plane. So the Pakistan visit turned out to be highly visible -- lots of limelight and headlines. It was on trip that an initial assistance package was offered General Zia; he rejected it calling it "peanuts" -- a somewhat infelicitous phrase particularly in light of President's Carter affinity for peanuts. Despite this un auspicious beginning, in fact that trip became the starting point for U.S.-Pakistan cooperation on the Afghan issue.

Soon after the Brzezinski trip, we hosted a Pakistan delegation in Washington. That was headed by Agha Shahi, who had been the Foreign Secretary for many years. In light of his experience, he tended to operate as the Foreign Minister. He wanted to talk about US-Pakistan relations, the U.S. commitment to Pakistan and the effect that the Soviet presence in Afghanistan might have on our bilateral relations. We had an elaborate series of meetings -- Secretary Vance spent a lot of time with Shahi and his delegation. I was the note-taker for the U.S. side in all of these meetings. The consultation did not result in any concrete operational results; we just promised to

keep in touch. The most uncomfortable part of the discussion, in light of recent history, was about the U.S.'s commitment to Pakistan. In my view, this issue had been central to a dialogue which seemed to be at cross purposes for almost thirty years. We have had a number of alliance relationships with Pakistan, starting with the regional alliances like CENTO and SEATO. By 1979, neither organization was exactly robust. But in both cases, the U.S. view -- as stated in words in a number of documents -- was that we were interested in Pakistan primarily, if not exclusively, as a front line state in our fight against Soviet Communism. The Pakistani view, which probably reflected a lot of atmospherics at the time, was that the U.S. would be its supporter -- no questions asked. Of course, Pakistan's perceived enemy was India. The fact that there were Soviets in Afghanistan really raised this difference of national objectives. My guess is that the Pakistanis were looking for a much more positive statement about our commitment to it than anyone was willing to give in 1979.

The second set of meetings, a few weeks later, followed roughly the same format as the first one, except that the Pakistani delegation was headed by Ambassador Yakub Khan, who was one of the most remarkable officials in the government. He is still around, even though he is getting on in years. He had been a general, and had then served as ambassador to almost every major country, including the U.S. and the USSR -- which was the position he held when he was assigned to head this delegation. He is one of the most articulate, urbane and sophisticated people I have ever encountered. In 1979, the Ambassador was at the top of his game. Mike Hornblow was asked to meet Yakub Khan at the airport and then to drive him into the Department's parking lot in the basement. That was an effort to avoid as much press attention as possible. Mike had a particularly disreputable looking yellow VW at the time; it served well as a cover for the Pakistani.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, we made frantic efforts to restore aid to Pakistan, which had been suspended in the summer under the non proliferation bans then in place. At one point, I remember my phone ringing at 5:25 p.m. from the Secretariat; I as being asked to submit a memo by the end of the day to the Seventh Floor outlining what an assistance program to Pakistan might consist of, assuming that a \$200 million appropriation was forthcoming. I called the former deputy director of our AID mission in Pakistan -- he was working in Washington in AID. I suggested to him that the whole amount be spent on fertilizer. He suggested that half of the amount be devoted to roads; he told me that those funds too would be readily disbursed; that was good enough for me and I included a road construction program in my memorandum. It took us about fifteen minutes to spend \$200 million -- which was about the length of time it took me to type the memo. Of course, this was not real money; we had both the opposition Congress as well as Pakistani rejection of our offer.

The Pakistani visits were useful in achieving communications between the higher echelons of both countries. There was a frank exchange of views on the strategic situation, but few operational results. As I said, the Pakistanis were more concerned about India; we shared some worries about India in light of some very pro-Soviets statements about Afghanistan emanating from New Delhi. The Soviet statements on Afghanistan did nothing to allay our concerns; they certainly helped the Pakistani position.

We were not able to convince Congress to authorize the resumption of assistance. But we kept on working on different formulations on what an aid program might look like. The only possible way to get some supplement appropriations would have been for the President to make calls himself. The time was not opportune -- this was April, 1980 and because the government was in the middle of one of its budgetary crises he turned down the suggestion. The bureaucratic machinery creaked along as it often does and by the time the recommendation went to the White House, the Soviets had already been in Afghanistan four months. Furthermore, there were other crises to worry about, notably the Iran hostages and the failed rescue mission, the Vance resignation, the advent of a new Secretary -- Ed Muskie. The new Secretary had to face this Afghan can of worms, which would have been tough enough for a veteran, much less a newcomer.

I fully supported our attempts to restart an assistance program for Pakistan. I started with the assumption that our aid cut-off had been spectacularly ineffective in influencing the Pakistani nuclear development program. Furthermore, the internal situation had changed dramatically. For years successions of regimes had been voicing great concern about Communism -- essentially to ingratiate themselves with us -- by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, Pakistan had a very good reason to worry about its security. The Soviet invasion had an unsettling effect on Pakistan's internal political problems.

I must mention another major event that had an effect on US-Pakistan relations. I refer to the attack on our Embassy in Islamabad. That certainly had an effect on our bilateral relations. It was a major catastrophe -- four people were killed and many more seriously wounded -- which had been totally unexpected. Islamabad was built to be riot proof. So no one expected what happened.

When the crowd began to assemble, it seemed to come primarily from the direction of the University, down the road from the embassy. There was some indication of Iranian supply of equipment to the rioters. The Ambassador and the DCM were not in the Chancery when the attack began; both were at lunches. The DCM went to the Foreign Ministry as soon as he was alerted, to demand that security protection be provided, as required by international law and practice. He was told that the whole police department was in Rawalpindi, about ten miles away, providing protection for President Zia's talk about the importance of austerity while he rode around on a bicycle. A few policemen did arrive and may have provided some assistance to people who had been eating in the Embassy Club, but it was a haphazard operation. The fire department and the military didn't show up until night-fall. The crowd finally dispersed, not under pressure from government forces, but because night was falling. By that time, it had set fire to the whole building. So the fact that our Chancery was assaulted and that Pakistani security forces did not come to meet their legal obligations until six or seven hours after the start of the disturbance, came as great shocks to us. It raised questions about the viability and competence of the Pakistani government, not to mention its attitude towards the U.S. I think there may have been some people in our government who suspected Pakistani government participation in the riot -- or perhaps "benign neglect -- ; but that didn't last very long. Our greater concern was not as much about involvement in the riot, but the degree of *Schadenfreude* that had taken place. It was at best evidence of major incompetence and at worst a sinister Pakistani plot.



Pakistani officials called and expressed their apologies. We told them in effect that we would send them the repair bill. The event certainly shook people up both here and in Pakistan; they were astonished. I think the government recognized that there were strains between our two countries; but a riot and mayhem -- unthinkable, particularly in Islamabad.

The winter of 1979-80 was also the winter of the great evacuation. Our Embassy in Teheran, including some staff, was taken over by the Iranian "students" in early November. Much of our staff from there was also in Washington awaiting developments. On November 22, our Chancery in Islamabad was torched. I was actually in the Operations Center when Peter Constable, the NEA senior deputy assistant secretary, spoke to Ambassador Hummel in Islamabad. The Ambassador resisted efforts to evacuate his staff; he thought Washington was over-reacting (and I don't think Mrs. Hummel wanted to leave). Peter told him that the Secretary had issued instructions to evacuate most of the staff and the dependents and that was the way it was going to be. And that is what happened.

In the next two days, something happened in Libya putting our staff there at some risk. There were rumors that a demonstration against us might be mounted in Dhaka on the Friday after Thanksgiving. Ambassador David Schneider requested permission to keep the Embassy closed -- an interesting sign of the times because a few years later an ambassador would have made that decision on his own authority. We have become so much more accustomed to crises that we now give ambassadors much more leeway that we did in the late 1970s. At that time, what was happening in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Libya were still rare occasions when all local US reactions had to be approved with Washington. I remember Hal Saunders turning very pale when he read the Secretary's instructions; he said if anyone wants to close down his or her embassy, they should go ahead. The U.S. could not stand any more assaults beyond the ones already suffered in Teheran and Islamabad.

As a result of all these incidents, sometime during the week after Thanksgiving, NEA was instructed to evacuate dependents from essentially all the post in the area, except India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka -- all the non-Muslim countries. By the time we had evacuated our staffs and dependents, we had about 1000 people evacuated to the U.S. The Family Liaison Office was a very new organization; that meant that most of the work-load of supporting this large group fell to the regional bureau. We tried hard to provide good services to the evacuees and I noted that different evacuees behaved differently. The desk was very much involved with the evacuees from Pakistan and Bangladesh. Most of us had served in the area and had some feel for what it meant to have one's life disrupted -- especially just before Christmas. We sent to the post a weekly newsletter to which any of the evacuees could contribute. We also sent messages from the post to loved ones in Washington.

The Pakistan evacuees organized themselves. They had pretty well agreed on a *modus operandi* by the time they arrived in Washington. They had a couple of people who took upon themselves to know where all of the evacuees would be; they published a newsletter which would circulate to their fellow evacuees. They tried to keep the group in contact with each other as much as possible. Evacuation is always a terrible experience, but I think the Pakistan evacuees did a marvelous job of minimizing the hardships.

On the other hand, the evacuees from the Persian Gulf states got much less support, and were less self-reliant. They came from small posts; there had been no crisis in their country of assignment. That made many of those evacuees wonder why they had been pulled out. Furthermore, the Department gave to the posts' leadership discretion to decide how many dependents must leave. In most cases, for example, the ambassador's wife was not evacuated. So the selection from several of these posts was quite arbitrary and focused on the junior staff members. Many of the evacuated staff did not accept that they had any reason to be evacuated. They tended to assign blame somewhere in Washington. They did not organize; the desks did little to support them. These evacuees became as bitter and disgruntled a group as I have ever seen. It shows what difference embassy leadership and cohesion as well as the Washington support system can make. It was a lesson to me.

The Afghan situation was a major policy focus in Washington. The U.S. decided to boycott the Moscow Olympics and made various efforts to get other countries to follow suit. There was intense interest in how the Afghan mujahideen were faring as they began to organize for resistance. It was clear that a covert program would sooner or later be mounted.

I had no reservations about our efforts to dislodge the Soviets from Afghanistan. I thought it was the right move. It could have been viewed as the "Cold War rearing its ugly head again." It might have heated up the atmosphere unless some precautionary steps were taken. I also thought that the prospect of another Soviet satellite in central Asia potentially quite destabilizing. With 20/20 hindsight, I think an evaluation of our Afghan policy is more complicated than it was in 1979/80. I think that everyone who was involved in development of our Afghan policies has some things to answer for. That country has been dragged through some very miserable times and is still suffering. But at the time, I fully supported our efforts and I am delighted that the Soviets are not in Afghanistan any longer.

I didn't spend much time on Bangladesh. We had a large assistance program there, but it seemed to be meeting its objectives. Every once in a while I assisted the desk officer on some problem or another, but those occasions were few and far between.

**JOHN J. HELBLE**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Dhaka (1979-1982)**

*John J. Helble was born in Appleton, Wisconsin in 1934. He received a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Wisconsin. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. Ambassador Helble's career included positions in Puerto La Cruz, Saigon, Hue, Kuala Lumpur, Dacca and Honolulu. This interview was conducted by Thomas F. Conlon on April 5, 1996.*

*Q: Today is October 11, 1996. John, would you care to begin? I think that when we ended this interview previously, you were just finishing up your assignment to the Inspection Corps, and your assignment to Bangladesh as Deputy Chief of Mission had just come up.*

HELBLE: The assignment to Bangladesh came about, in large measure, at my daughter Ramona's insistence. She said that if I were chosen for this job and if it was a good assignment for me, she was in favor of my accepting it. Even though she would not have a high school to go to in Bangladesh, she would be more than happy to spend her time doing a correspondence school course at the high school level, through the University of Nebraska. Her view was that she could learn things in Bangladesh that many of her contemporaries would never have an opportunity to learn and to experience. There were things in the Indian subcontinent that would be unique and a great opportunity for her to see and observe.

I might say, before I go into the actual assignment, that Ramona did, in fact, fulfill all of the objectives for two years of high school through the correspondence course. She made the honor roll and worked relentlessly--mostly alone, although occasionally with a tutor. She performed in a manner that I've always admired a great deal. We had, as I think I mentioned, a fairly "bad" experience with a correspondence course with our son Stuart at the first grade level when we were in Hue. However, I think that much depends on the individual child at the time that he or she meets these unusual challenges that arise in the Foreign Service. Ramona was very much "up to the challenge" at that point. I think that 9th and 10th grades in high school, which she went through via the correspondence course, are very difficult challenges to handle without classmates, working on your own. She was disciplined enough to achieve her educational objectives without the support systems normally available.

The assignment to the Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh, began on July 3, 1979, when we arrived in the country. This was the day before July 4 and the annual social function given by the Ambassador commemorating that occasion.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador?*

HELBLE: The Ambassador at the time was David T. Schneider. He was, and is, a first rate person, and an outstanding Foreign Service Officer. I had heard, prior to my arrival in Dhaka, that he was highly regarded as perhaps the most outstanding expert on the Indian subcontinent which the Foreign Service had at that time. Based on my two years of service with him in Dhaka, I have no reason to question that view of him. He was a gentleman, very "laid back," quiet, and soft-spoken and he earned everyone's respect. He was very fair to everyone. Working for him, as I did as his Deputy Chief of Mission, I benefited from the loyalty and support which he gave me, as well as the encouragement and confidence he reposed in me throughout the time that I served under him. That was a great blessing.

*Q: John, I've always heard it said that the DCM job is one of the worst in the Foreign Service. As DCM you have two problems, especially when you are Chargé d'Affaires. One problem is to look at a situation and decide what you should do about it. However, you also have to figure out what the Ambassador would have wanted to do if he were there. You don't want to do something that he would be strongly opposed to. Did you ever have a problem with this?*

HELBLE: I never had much of a problem with that because, first of all, I was not Chargé for any long period of time. I was Chargé for a few weeks at a time at the most, I guess. I also knew that

David Schneider was the kind of person who would not "second-guess" me and say, "Well, you should have done this or that." That was not his style. I never worried a great deal about that.

However, I think that you're absolutely right that that is a major problem for a lot of DCM's, particularly when they serve as Chargé d'Affaires. That is generally because of the Ambassador's personality.

At the reception on July 4, 1979, Ambassador Schneider introduced me to 500 or 600 of his "closest friends," of course. This was a great way to start off at the post, but it was a little overwhelming. As I said, Ambassador Schneider was very supportive and helpful. In fact, he always undertook to keep me very much involved in all of the activities in which he participated. He made contacts for me and was very supportive in connection with everything that I did. He told me at the outset that he would really like me to "manage" the Embassy.

About 80 Americans were assigned to our Embassy in Dhaka, about half of whom were employees of the U. S. Agency for International Development. They administered the aid program in Bangladesh, which amounted to more than \$100 million annually at that time. The Ambassador wanted me to look after the internal working of the Embassy, first and foremost.

There were a number of problems, particularly on the very large, administrative side. We had about 700 local employees in addition to the 80 Americans. Of course, virtually all of those local employees were Foreign Service Nationals in administrative support roles. So it was a big Mission. The reason for such a large Administrative Section was fairly obvious. Bangladesh was truly a Third World country, developing very slowly. The country had very little infrastructure with which to support Western life styles and institutions such as an Embassy. We had air conditioning and electrical problems all the time.

*Q: What was the population of Bangladesh?*

HELBLE: When I went there in 1979, Bangladesh had a population of about 88 million. Now, some 15 or 16 years later, the population is more than 120 million. You can tell that the rate of population growth is a major problem in a country like that. I should say that the 88 million people, or now, 120 plus million, are crammed into a territory the size of the State of Wisconsin, which probably has a population of five or six million. So that gives you some perspective.

Of course, Bangladesh had long ago been described by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as "the world's basket case." This description, indeed, was somewhat unfair. I had been told before I went to Bangladesh that I would enjoy the Bengalis as people and that I would enjoy my tour there. That comment was made by people who had served there. People who had not served there were very sympathetic to me or very suspicious that I had really "screwed up" somehow to have been assigned to a place like Dhaka. However, the people who had served in Bangladesh knew what they were talking about. The Bengalis are very nice people. They are much "softer" in manner than the very "hard-edged" Indians that I had known in Kuala Lumpur or in Saigon. The Bengalis were generally well-disposed toward the United States, even though they carried some of the South Asian, subcontinent "baggage" of suspicion about American intentions. For example, it was widely believed in certain quarters in Bangladesh that the United

States really wanted to establish a big, military base there to "counter" India. Some Bangladeshis would have favored that idea.

Of course, the United States had no such interest whatever in Bangladesh. United States' interests in Bangladesh were essentially humanitarian and included traditional, diplomatic contacts.

*Q: Did we have much trade with Bangladesh, to speak of?*

HELBLE: There was very little trade to speak of because the Bangladeshis had very little to sell. Basically, we bought jute from them for use in the manufacture of carpet backing or for related purposes. However, the flow of trade between the United States and Bangladesh was one-way, and it consisted mainly of aid, not trade.

*Q: The West Pakistanis might not agree with this, but I've heard it said that West Pakistan was fortunate, in many ways, to have gotten rid of the incubus of East Pakistan. The population of East Pakistan was growing very rapidly, as you've said, and to an increasing extent, at least, the resources of West Pakistan were being devoted to support East Pakistan. Did you encounter any feeling of this kind?*

HELBLE: Well, I don't think that the Bangladeshis, or the East Pakistanis, if you will, had any animus against West Pakistan of any substance. They, of course, shared West Pakistani "concerns"--and this is a mild word--about India. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh shared that concern and regarded India as their primary security threat. However, I don't think that there was any real animus as a result of the breakup of Pakistan in the early 1970's. There is a considerable amount of animus and fear among the Bangladeshis regarding the Indians, who are a very dominant political, economic, and military force on the subcontinent.

*Q: The Bangladeshis are mainly Bengalis, is that right?*

HELBLE: That is correct, and they are Muslims. There are some Hindus and some Christians in the country, but the dominant element, about 85 percent or more, are Muslims. That is, of course, a common feature that they share with Pakistan and with parts of India adjacent to Bangladesh. For instance, the people in the Province of Bengal and in the city of Calcutta in India are primarily Muslim. These are large Muslim enclaves in India.

I would like to emphasize that, really, the Bengalis were very enjoyable as people. I found them much easier to get to know and to deal with than I had found the Vietnamese. The Malaysians tended to be relaxed and easy to get to know, too. I was very pleasantly surprised at the way the Bengalis behaved. I came to like and really admire many of them. They were a very patient people, considering the circumstances of their material existence. They were not strongly of the fundamentalist Muslim element at that time--and still are not, as far as I know, although there are some strains of Islamic fundamentalism that do appear and did appear, even at the time that I served in Bangladesh in the late 1970's and the early 1980's.

Religion, of course, shapes so much of what goes on in the country. For example, Islamic law affecting land inheritance means that only the male heirs in a family receive any land. If a man

owns one hectare of land, or two and one-half acres, which would not be an uncommon holding, and he has four sons, on his death the land is divided four ways among the four sons.

*Q: Does the man have any option? Does he have to make the division or can it be worked out by agreement?*

HELBLE: Well, this is the Islamic law. It's not civil law, codified in the law of Bangladesh, but this is the Islamic tradition and practice. The result of this process is that the parcels of land many people own are tinier and tinier. Of course, we all recognize that this does not lead to efficient agricultural practices.

*Q: There is a similar problem in Indonesia, which is also a largely Muslim country. The individual holdings of land have been driven down to very small parcels, and by now some two-thirds of the farmers are "farm workers." They own no land at all. Did this happen frequently in Bangladesh?*

HELBLE: Yes, it was very common. Another aspect of Islamic law affected the population, which we have already referred to. It is expected that a young girl will be married by the time she is 13 years old. If she is not married by then, the dowry requirements are likely to escalate rapidly because there is a working assumption amongst would-be suitors or husbands that, after age 13, the girl is probably already "damaged goods."

*Q: You mean, she is not a virgin. Is this a very important point?*

HELBLE: The assumption is often that she is not a virgin, and it is a very important point. So by age 13 the girl is expected to be married. In most cases it will be an "arranged" marriage. On the average, in her lifetime she will give birth 13 times, eight of which will involve "live" births. On the average, there will be five "still births." Of the eight "live" births, four or five will be alive after one year. This tells you something about the conditions in the countryside as well as in the urban slums.

These conditions pose enormous problems and probably contributed to Henry Kissinger's description of Bangladesh as a "basket case." On the other hand the Bangladeshis were trying to do something about this. It wasn't easy because there isn't the necessary infrastructure or education. However, there was an enormous foreign aid effort undertaken both by governments and non-profit, private organizations which were trying to "target" some of these conditions. I think that they were making some progress, but the problems were so overwhelming that it will take much more progress regarding these problems than they have been able to achieve.

I might mention something else. The country, of course, is located on an alluvial plain, basically formed from the mountains of the Himalayas. Rainwater from these mountains, containing a considerable amount of soil, has come down the river systems to the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean. Actually, the country expands to the south every year because of the alluvial deposits along the coast. The soil is very rich, of course, but there is no rock. The land is very flat, and during the Southwest monsoon season (May to October), almost the entire country is literally under water. When the rains fall and floods are created from the discharge of the many rivers,

almost everything is covered, except perhaps for the roadbeds along which the railroad tracks run and some isolated villages which have been deliberately built up and are protected by dikes or berms.

Actually, the floods cut two ways. They can be devastating to crops but are actually essential for the rejuvenation of the soil and for productivity in subsequent years. So it's an interesting phenomenon. There is one area of the country along the Burmese border which is not really mountainous but where there are hills. That is the only relatively "high" area in the country.

Another example of what a country like Bangladesh has to put up with is that, as I said, it has no rock. Rocks are sometimes drawn from stream beds. They are mostly small and well polished, having been washed down from the Himalaya Mountains and deposited in the river beds. People dive into the water for these small rocks and use them for construction purposes. However, you can't get anywhere near enough rock that way. So the primary construction material, in lieu of rock, is brick. The Bangladeshis can make plenty of bricks. However, they break them up and mix them with cement to make concrete--or they use them for road beds. They don't break them up mechanically. They break up the bricks by hand. You will see workers along a road under construction, sitting on a pile of bricks--maybe under a black umbrella to shade them from the sun, if they can afford to buy one. They hold the bricks in their hands and break them up with a hammer.

The average Westerner would look at that and say, "Good Lord, why don't they get a rock crusher?" The answer to that is that one rock crusher would put about 500 people out of work who were breaking up bricks by hand. It is quite a sight when you first see it. You would probably never have seen such laborious effort made to build a road. However, that's the way it's done, under those circumstances in Bangladesh.

Obviously, the country is disaster-prone. It is well known that cyclones are likely to hit the country every couple of years. These storms kill anything from a few thousand to many thousands of people. That is almost a predictable event. Malnutrition and food shortages are endemic. Malnutrition is widespread. I would not say that "starvation," per se, is widespread, but malnutrition is certainly widespread.

*Q: You mentioned the production of burlap from hemp, the fiber that they grow there. Do they mainly produce rice, or what is the principal crop?*

HELBLE: The principal food crop is rice.

*Q: Does Bangladesh produce enough rice to feed itself?*

HELBLE: No, nowhere near enough. There is a deficit in the rice supply, although a lot of the agricultural effort by foreign agencies has certainly improved the situation. However, Bangladesh is clearly a "food deficit" country, and I don't see any way that that will ever change.

As I've said, though, the people are somehow hardy and exhibit remarkable energy under the circumstances. I think that they are a pretty admirable people, but they do have a "very tough row to hoe."

I've talked about the Embassy. Its functions were primarily to carry on humanitarian aid programs and to perform diplomatic, representational activity, like those of virtually every Embassy.

*Q: How big was the Political Section, for example?*

HELBLE: Well, we just had two Political Officers, plus one rotating, junior officer. The same arrangement applied to the Economic Section. There was a very large, Administrative Section. There was one Consular Officer, a "rotating" junior officer. There was a small United States Information Service detachment. There was an Office of the Military Attaché. Furthermore, 40 official Americans were assigned to the AID Mission. The rest of the people assigned to the Embassy were in the Administrative Section, including the General Services Officer, the Budget and Fiscal Officer, and so on.

*Q: You referred to the Military Attaché. Was there much of a Bangladeshi military establishment?*

HELBLE: The Bangladeshi military, in effect, were the political, "power center" of the country. That is not to say that there was much of a military establishment. It was a very impoverished Army and an even worse Air Force and Navy. They all had negligible assets, but the Bangladeshi Army was a cohesive unit most of the time. It was small but effective in determining who the political leaders would be, at the time I was there. This is no longer entirely the case. After the war between India and Pakistan in 1971, which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi military establishment was very much in control of the country. Even though the President of Bangladesh was a civilian, he had been a military officer. When I was there, the President was Zia ul-Haq, a retired general. We'll discuss him at a later stage.

Our first, several months in Bangladesh during the summer of 1979 were devoted to getting to know the situation, settling down in our house, getting "hands on" experience with the levers of control at the Embassy, and so on.

One of the first problems that I had to deal with--and the Ambassador had alerted me to it early on--was a considerable level of unhappiness among the Foreign Service National employees of the Embassy. They had various grievances, if you will--real or perceived. Ambassador Schneider was anxious for me to try to address this situation. I decided to try to identify those Foreign Service National employees who were the "leaders" of this dissatisfaction, if indeed there were any such "leaders."

I brought together about eight or 10 Foreign Service National employees, together with several key, American representatives from the Administrative Section. Over a period of time we developed a dialogue and addressed some of the sources of dissatisfaction, one by one. Some of these issues we could do something about and some of them we could do nothing about--at least



in the foreseeable future. However, we talked about them. I encouraged the Foreign Service National employees to try to develop some form of organization which would encompass the bulk of the 700 or so Foreign Service National employees of the Embassy--so that there would be some channel of communication from the lowest levels up to the Embassy's front office, which I represented. Through these channels the Embassy's front office could communicate downwards to all elements of the Embassy staff.

*Q: You were promoting a trade union.*

HELBLER: That was certainly the view of several of my American colleagues, including the Administrative Counselor, who was very unhappy with this.

*Q: Who was he?*

HELBLER: Grafton Jenkins. Grafton was not what one would regard as a particularly broad-minded individual. By and large, he did not relate well with the Bangladeshis in any situation. To be candid, he was "part of the problem." However, I didn't consider that we were establishing a trade union in this case, although I recognized that some day it might evolve in that direction. As long as Embassy management dealt in a mature and responsive manner with the problems facing us--many of which, I found, were real problems deserving management's attention--I thought that we could manage a relationship with the Embassy local employees which would be mutually productive and satisfactory.

Certainly, in the somewhat more than two years that I served in Dhaka, I felt that relations with the Embassy local employees were managed satisfactorily. I've always thought that it was one of the better things that I did in the Foreign Service. In later years I have talked with some of those Foreign Service National employees who obtained immigrant visas and subsequently retired in the United States, under the arrangements made for Foreign Service National employees. I invited some of them out to my house in Virginia as recently as 1995. They recalled how that particular management approach worked and how grateful the Foreign Service National employees were to have this channel, which permitted things to get done and to address certain issues. Even if they couldn't be resolved, it was explained to them why they couldn't be resolved. I've always felt that that was an accomplishment during my service in Dhaka which was worth mentioning.

*Q: Was inflation a major problem?*

HELBLER: Not really, no. One problem that we had is that we would train air conditioner mechanics. Once we completed their training, they would almost immediately be recruited for service in the Middle East and work in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Kuwait at considerably higher salaries. That problem was not unique to the American Embassy in Bangladesh, although we had one of the better training programs in Dhaka for our employees. The same thing happened with good, household servants. Once household staff became efficient at the Ambassador's or my residence or in the homes of some other American or of a diplomat from another country, they could go off and earn perhaps 10 times as much in the Middle East. That was a different type of problem.

*Q: What was the exchange rate between the U. S. dollar and the Bangladeshi currency?*

HELBLE: Frankly, I can't remember.

*Q: What was the Bangladeshi unit of currency?*

HELBLE: It was the taka.

*Q: So the exchange rate was not a big problem for the Americans serving in Dhaka?*

HELBLE: No. The American problems involved primarily adequate housing and adequate support for that housing. I already mentioned air conditioning, refrigeration, and power. These things were not unique to Dhaka as Foreign Service challenges. Many Foreign Service posts have those kinds of problems.

*Q: How were health conditions?*

HELBLE: Of course, there was really no acceptable local, health support system. We had a State Department doctor and a nurse. This was very important. We had some serious, medical emergencies. People just had to be prepared to be evacuated medically if you suffered from anything serious. Local hospitalization was not a realistic option.

*Q: Where would people be evacuated to? To Clark Field in the Philippines or...?*

HELBLE: Yes, to Clark Field, depending on the circumstances--or to Bangkok. Not India. Probably not Clark Field unless treatment there was required on a temporary basis for someone enroute to the United States. We didn't have a lot of medical evacuations, but we had several, and I think that Bangkok or directly to the United States were the two places for external, medical care.

*Q: How were relations between Bangladesh and Burma? Were they at all close? They are next door neighbors, but the Burmese had this concept of staying away from other foreigners, as much as possible.*

HELBLE: There wasn't a great deal of contact between Burma and Bangladesh. As I mentioned earlier, the only significant hill country in Bangladesh was along the Burmese border. There were some frictions from time to time, primarily because of Bangladeshis who, you might say, "migrated" into Burma. They would go across the border and take up residence in Burma. After all, Bangladesh was a country which was almost literally "bulging at the seams" with people.

*Q: So if they went to Burma, that shows how bad the situation was.*

HELBLE: That's right, but they would tend to go into the western area of Burma, which was not the most populated area of the country. There were border frictions as a result of that sort of thing. Once in a while there would be some heated exchanges between the Bangladeshis and

Burmese. "Dialogue" is not quite the right word. However, this was a very limited relationship, compared with Bangladesh's relationship with India.

About five months after we arrived in Bangladesh, that is, by November, 1979, we had a major crisis develop. It wasn't really a crisis that developed from events inside Bangladesh, but we had the "spinoff" from the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran, followed by the burning of the Embassy in Islamabad Pakistan at the end of November, 1979, if I recall my dates correctly. A decision was made by the Department, within hours after the burning of the Embassy in Islamabad, to evacuate dependents and "non essential" personnel from 10 posts in the Middle East. Bangladesh was not then and is not today part of the Middle East. However, it came under the same bureau in the Department, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, NEA. It was apparently felt in Washington that, since Bangladesh was a Muslim country with a capacity for inflamed attitudes toward Americans under the circumstances that had come up in the area between Pakistan and Iran, it would perhaps be prudent to cut back on the official American presence in Dhaka. This decision also affected other posts in the Middle East, properly speaking.

*Q: Who made the decision as to who was "essential" and who was "non essential"? Did the Embassy make this decision, or the Department?*

HELBLE: I was going to get into that because this was a very difficult subject. Our instructions from the Department were to reduce our official American staff by two-thirds and to evacuate ALL dependents, without exception. Ambassador Schneider told me that I would be responsible for organizing and coordinating this evacuation. He and I then coordinated decisions on who would go. We also had to involve the Mission Director of AID, the Agency for International Development, because a very high percentage of the people who would be leaving would be members of his staff. So, in that respect, it was a "Country Team effort."

We quickly learned that calling people "non essential" and telling them that they should leave the country did not bring out a very positive attitude on the part of the recipients of this message. Most of those affected clearly felt that, if they were "non essential," why were they sent to Bangladesh in the first place? So I suggested that we start using the "expendable" category. The "expendables," such as the Ambassador and the DCM would remain in Bangladesh. The "non expendables" would be evacuated back to the United States. In any event that was more in jest than anything else. [Laughter]

From a high of about 88 official Americans we reduced to 28 Americans. Some people were happy to go, because this was just before Christmas. It was the first week of December, 1979, and some people said, "Great. I'll be home for Christmas and will see my parents," relatives, or whatever, in the U. S. Others said that they were "too important" to leave. They said that they had this or that project going or they wanted to stay out of genuine devotion to the Foreign Service or to their jobs. They didn't want to be left out of the action and so forth. It was a very difficult process, but we were not alone in this respect. Many other Foreign Service posts were going through the same process.

Some of our people couldn't understand why they were being evacuated, because we hadn't had any particular problem in Bangladesh. There were, however, intelligence reports regarding

assassination threats targeted against the Ambassador and me. We couldn't tell for sure whether these were credible reports. Frankly, we didn't worry too much about them, but they existed.

*Q: Were they mainly from CIA sources?*

HELBLE: Yes. We certainly had grave concern about the security of the Embassy itself. The Embassy was in a high-rise, commercial building in the center of downtown Dhaka. If two trishaws bumped together in front of the building, there would be up to 200 people swarming around the scene of the accident in a matter of two minutes or so--all of them very agitated as to who was responsible for the accident, and so on.

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The Embassy building was virtually a "fire trap." It was an older building with a core open to the sky which would have acted like a chimney in case of a fire. The Embassy was located on the top two floors of this six or seven story, commercial building. We really had no way of defending the Embassy, particularly if someone decided to "torch it." We had a Marine Guard detachment of six Marines, but that would have been inadequate in the event of a real attack against the Embassy by an inflamed crowd.

So, after the torching of the American Embassy in Islamabad we spent several days, on orders from the Department, trying to secure everything that we could and cutting a "hatch" in the Communications Room through the ceiling to the roof which people could use to escape. That arrangement had saved some lives at the Embassy in Islamabad. We also updated our Embassy defense plans.

Our Regional Security Officer, who had been on leave in the United States, came back to Dhaka in the midst of this process, when we were trying to get everybody involved to evacuate. We were trying to "button down" the Embassy, reviewing all of the individual security arrangements and so on. To my total dismay the Regional Security Officer didn't turn up for work for two days after he returned from the United States, pleading that he was suffering from "jet lag." We were in the midst of a genuine crisis. He should have been a key figure in making the arrangements. I shall never forgive the gentleman for that and I did not forgive him for the rest of his tour in Dhaka. It was a very poor performance on his part.

We eventually got the families out of Bangladesh. There were one or two "recalcitrants," involving spouses who did not want to leave. However, in the final analysis, they went.

During the next three months we had serious morale problems, of course, with those who were left behind. I presume that morale was not very high among the families that were evacuated. The situation was probably all right through Christmas for most of the families who had gone off to the U. S. However, after Christmas people wanted to know, "When can we come back?" The Department was in charge of that decision. We had no say in that, although by mid-January we were suggesting to the Department that we did not see any further threats to the Embassy in Dhaka. However, the Department had a number of "eggs" to juggle, and we were not alone. At

least, Ambassador Schneider and I appreciated that, although many of the people "down the line" could not understand why the Department was being so "slow" in sending people back to Dhaka.

*Q: Did most of the dependents who left Dhaka return to the U. S., or did they go elsewhere?*

HELBLE: I think that they all went to the U. S., with perhaps one or two exceptions. In any event, we prepared a "news letter" which we telegraphed to the Department. The Department then circulated the "news letter" to the families to keep them up to date on what was going on, with little vignettes on who was doing what, and so on.

The AID Mission was very concerned because they were spending millions of dollars, but they no longer had a "monitoring" capability, which is always a critical function, particularly in a country like Bangladesh. There was a continuing question as to how the aid was being utilized. So there was a lot of genuine concern about that kind of issue.

However, we "muddled through." The Administrative Counselor and I gave a big, New Year's Eve party at my house on December 31, 1979. It was a real "smash." Of all things, we found a band, whose members got drunk before the party really started.

*Q: Did anybody notice?*

HELBLE: Yes. They couldn't play. [Laughter] We had to put on some taped music. We had "gate crushers" and so on, but we got through that.

Throughout this period, from early December, 1979, until well into January, 1980, the Ambassador and I rotated 12-hour shifts in the Embassy. We were concerned that if something happened and the Embassy were attacked when we were both in the office, there would be nobody "outside" to coordinate activities in the wake of a possible "disaster" at the Embassy. Ambassador Schneider is a particularly fair man, as I've said. One of us would take the noon to midnight "shift," and the other would take the midnight to noon "shift." So one of us was always at the Embassy and one of us was always outside the Embassy. We did that for six or eight weeks, I guess, before we felt that we could return to a more "normal" way of operating.

*Q: What was the time differential between Dhaka and Washington?*

HELBLE: I think that Dhaka is 15 hours ahead of Washington.

On the whole, this was a trying time, but not unprecedented in the Foreign Service in recent years. Evacuations of this sort have become all too common from many posts and for many different reasons. This was the only time that I personally went through such an evacuation. I didn't find it a very pleasant experience.

Once the families and the two-thirds of the official American employees of the Embassy who had been evacuated returned to Dhaka--if I recall correctly, in late February or early March, 1980--life returned to a more "normal" schedule. The workload at the Embassy was always considerable, but it was not as crushing a workload as I had experienced during my time in

Vietnam or while serving in the front office of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. There was time for tennis, and I played a great deal of that. There was time for socializing, which was, of course, an important activity in terms of morale in a place like Bangladesh, where there are very few recreational and entertainment outlets. Socializing at home, parties, movies, games, and that sort of thing filled in the gaps. We had a fairly active, representational life, entertaining and being entertained by many Bangladeshis and members of the diplomatic community.

*Q: Were there still many British there in Bangladesh?*

HELBLE: There were not many British. There was a British High Commission, of course, but it was not as active as the British High Commission had been in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There were no large business interests keeping the British there, as was the case in Kuala Lumpur.

*Q: Was there any industry at all in Bangladesh?*

HELBLE: Just light industry--nothing very significant.

*Q: Occasionally, I see a shirt in a local store which was made in Bangladesh. This would have been "off shore" manufacturing, using American raw materials--the so-called "maquiladora" type of activity.*

HELBLE: That's right, but that kind of activity was not going on in Bangladesh during my time there. As of now, garment manufacturing has become a factor in that very low cost labor environment. In that sense Bangladesh has tended to replace Taiwan or Singapore, which used to make such garments. Bangladesh is the kind of labor market that garment manufacturers want to turn to.

To touch on another subject, "Whitey" Watzman had become the editor of the Department of State monthly news magazine. He decided that he wanted to have an article in every issue of the magazine on the "Foreign Service Post of the Month." He selected five posts in the five, geographic bureaus of the Department to start out with. He chose Dhaka as the post in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs area. So he came to Dhaka. Whitey had never traveled outside the United States, much less to the Indian subcontinent. I put him up as my house guest. He did what he came to do: took pictures, did interviews, and so on. However, one morning Ambassador Schneider, my wife Joan, and I took Whitey out to a village market outside of Dhaka.

Certainly for me, but even for David Schneider, who had spent many years in the subcontinent, we encountered a scene which will last for our lifetimes. For Whitey it was a terrible shock. As we walked through this very dirty, crowded, hot, smelly, little village market, looking at the produce and the items available for sale, a boy about five or six years old began to "tag along" with us. This was not uncommon. There were beggars throughout the market, including deformed people, little children, and so on. This child continued to tag along with us. In his arms he carried a baby boy about three months old. Like the boy carrying him, the baby wore no clothes. In any event it took each of us a time to come to the realization that the baby the boy was carrying was dead. Nobody said anything until we got back to our van, got in, and started off for

the return trip to Dhaka. His brother had been sent off by the parents to beg with the dead baby who had most likely died some time in the previous 12 hours. This was a begging ploy to get something out of the dead child. That's the kind of reality that you don't see in the United States-- I don't care where you are.

For poor Whitey Watzman it was an "eye opener," but I must confess that it was for the rest of us, too. Ambassador Schneider had seen things that were comparable, I guess, but even he was pretty shaken by it.

*Q: You don't get used to that.*

HELBLE: You don't get used to that.

We were able to travel outside of Dhaka to some extent--to Chittagong, to the hills in eastern Bangladesh along the Burmese border which I've referred to, and to a tea plantation up in the north. There was a very nice visit called the "Rocket Trip," involving driving down alongside a river to pick up an overnight car ferry at the city of Khulna and return to Dhaka by water. That was very interesting. However, travel inside Bangladesh is difficult, the roads are poor, and, by and large, the hotel accommodations are miserable, at best. Reliable food outlets for Western stomachs are hard to come by. There really aren't a lot of "sights" to be seen in that country. There isn't a lot of historical and cultural architecture, striking scenery, and that sort of thing. So we didn't do a lot of traveling outside of Dhaka.

It might amuse some people if I said that we would take a "long weekend" for rest and recreation to the big city of Calcutta, in India. Some people might say, "Good God! You were taking 'R & R' in Calcutta?" Well, compared to Dhaka, it had a lot to offer.

*Q: How far was Calcutta from Dhaka?*

HELBLE: I think that it was a half hour or 40 minute flight--something like that.

*Q: Could you drive to Calcutta?*

HELBLE: You could drive, although I never did it. There were problems involved in crossing rivers on ferries. I guess that some people drove, although I can't recall any specific case.

*Q: Aren't the many mouths of the Ganges River collectively called the "Sundarbans," with islands along there? Isn't part of that area in Bangladesh?*

HELBLE: I can't tell you how the mouths of the Ganges are divided. I know the area that you're talking about but I just don't recall the geographic division of that region.

Anyway, after about 16 months in Dhaka with only, I think, one trip to Calcutta for a weekend I decided that I should get away for a while. My wife Joan was working at a library. Our son Stuart had joined us in the spring of 1980 and had gotten a job at the International School, teaching physical education. I decided that I needed to get out of Bangladesh, and neither Joan

nor Stuart could travel because of their job commitments. However, my daughter Mona, who was always a couple of months ahead in her studies, said that she could go with me.

So she and I went off for 22 days on one of those rare events for a father and daughter. We traveled to Kashmir, where we spent about 12 days. We stayed in a houseboat at Srinagar, on the lake, and visited glaciers, carpet manufacturers and weavers. We had a wonderful time. Then we went to New Delhi and saw something of that great city. We also visited the Taj Mahal. I had seen that previously, but Mona had not. Then we stopped off in Calcutta for a day or two with friends. So we had a wonderful, 22 day vacation. It was a great break for Mona and the only break I had during the time I was in Dhaka. However, first and foremost, it was a great opportunity for father and daughter to get to know each other better and share some common experiences. From a family point of view, that was one of the highlights of that tour, as far as I was concerned.

My wife Joan found plenty to do. She served as President of the American Club for a while, at my request. The American Club had some Embassy support. We had had some problems with it. I wanted somebody to "straighten it out." So Joan took on the job for a year and dealt with some of the problems. She resumed jogging, which she'd been doing, off and on, over the years. She ran in 10 kilometer races, as did our daughter, Ramona.

*Q: Who ran faster?*

HELBLE: I'm not sure who ran faster, but Joan had more endurance. She had been "in training" much longer. Once he joined us, our son, Stuart, played a lot of tennis with me. So we had things to do and stayed busy.

*Q: You mentioned the American Club. I take it that there was a non-official American community of some size.*

HELBLE: Not very much.

*Q: At one time, just after Bangladesh became independent, I understand that there were a lot of private American aid agencies represented in Bangladesh.*

HELBLE: Yes, that is true. There were certainly such organizations as the Ford Foundation and other, non-governmental organizations that were associated with humanitarian and developmental aid activities in Bangladesh. A fair proportion of the membership of the American Club consisted of these non-official Americans.

As the summer of 1981 approached, it was time for me to be transferred to another post. I had promised my daughter Ramona that, when we left Dhaka, I would find a post where there would be, as she put it, a "reasonable facsimile of a high school." She had asked for this at my next posting. We were considering various options in that respect. I was asked by the Department if I would like to be assigned as Chargé d'Affaires in Kabul, Afghanistan.

*Q: How did this request come--from Personnel in the Department, a friend, or...?*



HELBLE: This request came from Personnel, in a telegram from the Department. I said, "No," not because Adolph "Spike" Dubs, the Ambassador, had been assassinated there a couple of years previously or because of the situation there. Rather, Kabul was not a place where I could take our daughter Ramona for her high school education.

*Q: The Soviets were fairly well dug in at the time.*

HELBLE: The Soviets occupied Afghanistan at that point, for all intents and purposes. So I said, "No" to this assignment because it didn't offer an opportunity for my daughter to complete her high school education.

I was also asked if I would be interested in being Ambassador to Papua-New Guinea. I checked and found that, again, the high school situation was not appropriate. So I said, "No, thank you" to that offer.

So for the time being I was left without an ongoing assignment. Meanwhile, Ambassador Schneider was getting ready to leave Bangladesh. He had made all of his farewell calls on the members of the cabinet and the President and was preparing to leave Bangladesh on a Monday morning in early July, 1981, as I recall. On the preceding Saturday morning at about 9:30 AM I received a phone call from a Bangladeshi contact who told me that President Zia ul-Haq had just been assassinated in Chittagong, apparently by military elements.

So I called the Ambassador, the chief of the CIA station, and the chief of the Political Section and told them of this report. We all went down to the Embassy. We were able to get confirmation within an hour or so that, in fact, President Zia had been assassinated. The murder had apparently occurred in a military compound in Chittagong, where he was spending the night. The regional commander in Chittagong, who was a rather prominent general, was believed to have been associated with the assassination plot. Ultimately, it turned out that he was so involved in the plot.

In Bangladesh a constitutional successor to President Zia was available. There was a Vice President. It happened that, at that time, he was very ill and was in the hospital in the military compound in Dhaka. He was a man without any particular political standing, which was why he was allowed to be Vice President. Given the realities in a country like Bangladesh, it immediately became very uncertain as to what was going to happen.

I suggested privately to Ambassador Schneider that it might be prudent for him to suggest to the Department that he not leave on the following Monday but rather stay another week or two and see how things went. I took this view because, in the Indian subcontinent, there is endemic suspicion of U. S. activities. The U. S. "hand" is always seen as somehow involved in any serious problems in the area. President Zia had been shot and killed on Saturday, and Ambassador Schneider was scheduled to leave on the following Monday. In my view there would be many people in Bangladesh who would say, "Ah ha! He's done it and now he's skipping out of the country." This was patently ludicrous unless you're a native of the subcontinent.

*Q: Especially suspecting Dave Schneider of involvement in an assassination.*

HELBLE: Right. In any event Ambassador Schneider said that was the conclusion that some people would draw. Such people consider it ridiculous to suggest that Ambassador Schneider was involved. His household effects had already been shipped. However, people born in the subcontinent would say, "Ah, that proves it! He knew that this was going to happen, so he sent his household effects out of the country ahead of him."

Anyhow, Ambassador Schneider recommended to the Department that he stay on in Dhaka for a week or two. The Department agreed, and he did stay on for a week or two.

Meantime, Vice President Sattar demonstrated a remarkably swift recovery from his illness. Ambassador Schneider and I decided that this showed the effects of "the elixir of power." Suddenly, Sattar was the President of Bangladesh. It had widely been believed that Sattar had been on his death bed in the military hospital in Dhaka. In any case Sattar struggled out of bed on Saturday afternoon, the day of the assassination. On Monday morning Ambassador Schneider and I went to call on President Sattar at the Presidential Palace. He had taken the oath of office as President and was sitting there, as "chipper" as could be. We were quite stunned. In any event Sattar remained in office as President for a substantial period of time after that, contrary to all predictions, because he had no power base of his own. However, he managed to stay in office for quite some time until he was replaced in later elections. This was a sad note to sound at the end of a tour. While no man in perfect, President Zia ul-Haq performed better than probably anybody else could have done, under the circumstances. President Zia's death was really a tragic loss for the country. However, Bangladesh has survived, as such countries tend to do.

Ambassador Schneider left Bangladesh two weeks later. I was Chargé d'Affaires for a few weeks, and then Jane Coon arrived as Ambassador. I overlapped with her for about two months. On September 30, 1981, I left Dhaka without any ongoing assignment. However, I was not at all concerned about that.

I would just like to make a few, general comments about what that tour of duty as DCM in Dhaka meant to me in several ways--or what I learned from it. Obviously, you don't recite everything that you have learned from an assignment. However, one of the things that struck me is that Bangladesh is a poor country materially, but is not necessarily "poor" in other respects. There is more of a sense of nationhood and of pride in that country than, I think, I would expect to see in many other, developing countries. You won't find poverty in many countries which is greater than it is in Bangladesh, although perhaps Somalia would be an example of greater poverty. Later, I had an opportunity to go to Somalia. This was long before Somalia became a "front page story" in the United States.

*Q: Was this when you were a Foreign Service Inspector?*

HELBLE: No, this was a couple of years later when I was Political Adviser to CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific]. I think that Somalia was materially poorer than Bangladesh. It

was clearly poorer than Bangladesh in the sense I just mentioned--that is, the sense of nationhood. I think that Bangladesh is essentially a country that is culturally "confident." It is basically dominated by a moderate, Islamic culture. Hopefully, Bangladesh can remain a moderate, Islamic culture. That provides a certain element of confidence in terms of cultural identification and certainty.

Personally, I had benefitted from my experience in the Inspection Corps, during which I learned a lot about management styles. That helped me a great deal as a DCM. Each situation is, of course, unique. However, the principle of top management in an Embassy caring about what is happening to the lower levels of the diplomatic mission is certainly a principle which carries over, regardless of where you are. Ambassador David Schneider was "first rate" in that respect. He certainly encouraged me to be concerned as well about the situation of people "down the line." In a country like Bangladesh, if you don't have Mission support, if you don't have the support of the other people in the Mission, as well as physical support, you're really going to have morale, productivity, and effectiveness problems.

It all started with Ambassador Schneider. He was the kind of leader who provided guidance in that way. I think that that's about all that I want to say on Bangladesh. Let's take a break now and then I'll go on to my assignment as Political Adviser to CINCPAC.

**MELVIN R. CHATMAN**  
**Bangladesh Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1980-1982)**

**Training Section, USAID**  
**Dhaka (1982-1987)**

*Mr. Chatman was born in Oklahoma and raised in California and Michigan. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he pursued theater interests before serving in the US Army in Korea and Vietnam. In 1970 he joined AID and spent the rest of his career with that agency. His overseas postings include Vietnam, Malaysia, Bangladesh and San Salvador. He also had assignments with AID in Washington and New York City dealing with refugee, rice imports and training issues. Mr. Chatman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.*

*Q: And you did what in '80?*

CHATMAN: I came back in 1980 and I went to work on the USAID Bangladesh desk for the next year, year and a half.

*Q: What were we doing in Bangladesh at the time?*

CHATMAN: Trying to keep people from starving to death, that was one of the big...

*Q: It's a pretty lush area isn't it?*

CHATMAN: Well it wasn't lush; they were still importing rice when I first went to Bangladesh. I think before I left there in '87 they were actually exporting rice. It was still importing rice country when I arrived there and of course, the government had a lot of problems because they had expanding population problems, they had problems with the weather, they were still in some form or fashion recovering from the 1970 whatever it was war with Pakistan. There was a whole multiplicity of problems and things that USAID was faced with.

*Q: You were doing this from 1980 to about '82, was that it?*

CHATMAN: '82 something like that, '81.

*Q: What piece of the action, what were you dealing with?*

CHATMAN: On the desk you deal with everything, as you know. So at that time whatever came from the mission we were the coordination point for USAID Washington so I was assistant desk officer, I did all the soup to nuts type of things.

*Q: What were the main programs? I mean you certainly were trying to keep them from starving, what were we doing?*

CHATMAN: Rice import was a big program, if I remember correctly and there were a lot of government building programs that we were trying to help the ministries to become more efficient. I don't remember just every detail.

*Q: Did you get involved with the embassy of Bangladesh at all?*

CHATMAN: I did because I was subsequently assigned to Bangladesh as a result of that prior assignment as a desk officer. So I went to Bangladesh and stayed for about six years.

*Q: Just before we get to there how did you find working in AID and in the Department of State? How did you find that?*

CHATMAN: I am a very strong as a field person. I was not as comfortable as a person working at a desk, which was of course a very big part of one's career but I had been so field oriented for so long I found that that was one of the big adjustments that I had to make.

*Q: How did you find...did you get any feel for the coordination between AID and the State Department?*

CHATMAN: It was very good, what little contact I had with the State desk, the State desk and the Bangladesh desk naturally talked a lot. I don't remember any problems of any kind.

*Q: Well then you went out in '82 about?*

CHATMAN: I think it was late '81 or early '82.

*Q: You were there until what?*

CHATMAN: '87.

*Q: '87. Can you tell me when you got out there how did you find, let's say, what was the state of Bangladesh? The government, the economy, the people, how did you find it?*

CHATMAN: Very, very not at rest. You know everything, there were so many problems and the government was so strained for resources; resources included money but also for people that were also really dedicated to doing something about it. The change was like building highways in Washington. By the time you build something to correct what you are planning for today you are ten years behind. It was the same way there. I think they were establishing programs like that that were good for the moment but never addressed the longer-term growth problem.

*Q: What was your particular job?*

CHATMAN: I worked in the training section at AID. The training section and I also was a project manager for several projects. My big project was a satellite remote sensing project where it was run in order to try to predict the catastrophic floods and rain problems that Bangladesh is faced with all the time.

*Q: Was that all tied to the monsoons?*

CHATMAN: Well of course it's tied to the monsoons because that is when most of the damage comes but what I'm saying is it was really tied to just bad weather. If it was a non-monsoon type of problem I guess theoretically you could have flooding also but the idea was to have a warning system that would allow people to evacuate in time to get out of the low-lying areas so that they wouldn't be killed. There were times when 50 thousand people in one year were killed simply because they did not leave or did not know about leaving an area in time of a flooding problem.

*Q: You look at that and basically Bangladesh is one big delta isn't it?*

CHATMAN: Yes it is. It is below, most of it is at sea level or below sea level I guess.

*Q: Well then, I am a villager sitting in the middle of that. Where can you go, you can get a warning...?*

CHATMAN: That was the problem because the people who died in those other floods were people who were living in obviously dangerous lower areas but had no place else to live. So they chose those areas because that's where they could get land. For a couple of years they were okay but every couple years then you have this massive flood because the flooding doesn't really occur in Bangladesh. It occurs as a result of the draining of the water down through the Himalayas, which ends up like a bowl in Bangladesh.

*Q: Yeah, well what could you do about that? I mean the population is getting bigger and the floods are there, they are going to be there.*

CHATMAN: Bangladesh has done miracles about birth control. It's not home yet but I think they've gotten down to something like half of what they were before and average child per family, some really unbelievable number. It was mostly thanks to a lot of work put in by AID and other goers.

*Q: Well this is during the Reagan administration, isn't it?*

CHATMAN: To tell you the truth I can't remember. I assume because Reagan was in office for eight years, it probably was.

*Q: It would be you know the Republican administration has always been very uncomfortable with birth control.*

CHATMAN: Yeah, you are right. I don't remember them making any threats about just cutting off funding to birth control programs like Bush has but it was a major program. I don't remember that kind of sensitivity because that was one of our most successful and most heavily managed programs in our mission.

*Q: As a training officer how did you find the Bangladeshi students that you had?*

CHATMAN: Like any other students there were some very, very good ones, there were some mediocre ones, there were some very bad ones. The problem always in training courses and things like that is if you have people that are struggling so much with just existing it's really hard to train them because their mind is occupied with a lot of other things. I thought that that was one of the problems, we just, it was generic to the system because that's the way life has been for years and years and it wasn't going to change during my tenure.

*Q: Over the six years you were there how did the warning system work? Were you doing that almost the whole time?*

CHATMAN: At least four years of it. It worked excellent, it worked excellent, and many times as a matter of fact it worked so good what it did was it actually caused some controversy because the warning system was not under the same ministry as the weather management. So whatever the system was that predicted the weather, it wasn't under the same ministry and the weather predicting formal system did not have anywhere the new resources because AID came into Bangladesh and completely updated this one office so it had top technology ability to predict the weather conditions especially flooding conditions. It did it you know there were about I can't remember the number of sensors that were placed throughout the country but they were placed out and their readings were read by a satellite and there were obviously models that once certain data came up in a certain connection during a certain time that something was going to happen. They could predict when that was going to happen by the data. The other system could not do that and, of course, that created a lot of problems.

*Q: Was there any way of integrating the two? Were you working on that?*

CHATMAN: I don't remember us in my office working on that. It was sort of a, not by us, but the Bangladeshi...

*Q: Its true the Bangladeshi's...*

CHATMAN: The Bangladesh government had its own politics and they were very happy, the larger part of the government was very happy with this, it was called SPARSO (Space Research and Remote Sensing Organization), the ability of this organization because we brought in millions of dollars worth of equipment, we trained all the technicians in the states and set up a really, really state of the art system for them to manage. It ran very well.

*Q: While you were there were you able to see the results of the warnings of floods and that?*

CHATMAN: Several times they were given complete credit for warning for giving advanced well to one or two days ahead of the formal system of upcoming floods which obviously saved a lot of, I'm not sure how many lives, but it obviously saved a lot of damage and injury.

*Q: How did the people get out? Where did they go?*

CHATMAN: There is an emergency relief type of program. I'm not really sure how well it worked but that was a separate office that did that. The best thing to do was go to the obvious higher land. There are certain areas where every time you get a trickle you have that kind of problem. What I think most of them did was to just get out of the lowest level areas.

*Q: Was there much work going on to regulate the floods, dams, levees, that sort of thing?*

CHATMAN: There was as far as I knew there was nothing done to try to regulate because the problem was impossible, that part of the problem. I don't remember any effort to try and do that because as I mentioned it was an Indian problem, Bangladesh was the victim but the real source of doing anything about it was up in the Himalayan's. What are you going to do dam off those mountain streams and such? It would rain for five or six days without stopping sometimes. It would do that. You can imagine how much water that can feed and at some places it was at sea level.

*Q: How did you find the Bangladesh government?*

CHATMAN: Probably one of the most corrupt that I have ever had to work with but corruption was somewhat of a justification, there is never a justification really, yes there is. Corruption was an understandable corruption because the salaries of the people who were playing all these key roles that were basic for us to make any improvements in the government were not being paid enough to even live on. So what happens, the normal thing that happens when that goes on people will do a good job but they have to get paid for it. If they don't get it out of their salary they'll get it some other way. That happened all the time and it still happens.

*Q: Did that interfere with your work and all?*

CHATMAN: I am sure it interfered with our work but it became such a part of the work that everybody sort of understood it and worked around it. We did not have an anti-corruption effort although we knew corruption was a major problem.

*Q: Yeah.*

CHATMAN: I guess the government running is better than one not running at all.

*Q: Oh yeah.*

CHATMAN: Even if it is corrupt and has got a lot of other things going on.

*Q: What about you've got these rather fancy sensors and all and these are way up country I would think there would be a problem of having them stolen and all of that?*

CHATMAN: Well that was a major problem and I can remember instances when what had happen was they had them first of all enclosed in barbed wire but that is never a problem for somebody who doesn't have anything else to do but try to steal something. There was a lot of work done with the local leaders to explain to them that there was no value on these things on the market but there was an extreme reduction in the ability of the government to stabilize if someone moved these things. I think while there was some pilferage I don't think that that was a major problem. One of the problems was that things would just stop working. We would have to send someone, a technician, up there to see what had happened. There were nine of them throughout the country.

*Q: Did you live in Dhaka?*

CHATMAN: I lived in Dhaka.

*Q: How was it there? How was life there?*

CHATMAN: I now am married and have been married for the last 22 years to a lady from Dhaka. I had no problems at all. A lot of Americans were threatened by...

*Q: Who's threatening?*

CHATMAN: It's I think when you're in a country where you can see poverty but then see a lot of improvements past the poverty that that becomes fairly easy to deal with. But when you are in a country where you see poverty and go behind poverty and there's just more poverty then it becomes a little threatening. So people became very isolated, many of my friends had no Bangladeshi friends at all and claimed that that was impossible to have friends with Bangladeshi's. My boss when I first arrived there my orientation gave me this big spiel about how it was impossible really to have Bangladesh friends. I immediately found that I had no



problem at all in finding friends in Bangladesh. They weren't the rickshaw drivers or the rice paddy workers and stuff like that, they were the middle and upper class Bangladeshi's but I had no problem in finding a large group of friends.

*Q: How did you meet your wife?*

CHATMAN: Through a friend that was married to a Bangladeshi also.

*Q: How did you find, did this give you an entrée into Bangladesh society, I mean, into the family?*

CHATMAN: I don't think much more than where I had been before because I learned how to speak Bangla. I was very willing to go out in the communities and stay, I was willing to go to houses, I was willing to deal with some of the uncomfortable situations that you deal with when you have dinner at eleven o'clock at night and you are accustomed to having it at seven. There are a lot of things.

*Q: Did you get any feel for...it was a Muslim society wasn't it? What type of Muslim society was it?*

CHATMAN: If you rated three levels Saudi Arabia would be the most strict, then Bangladesh would fall next and then the bottom level would be someplace like Malaysia and Indonesia where the system is there but it's not nearly as strict. Bangladesh was sort of the middle of it, it was restrictive but they were strict but nothing like Saudi Arabia or those countries. That's the best way I can explain it.

*Q: Did the religion affect you at all?*

CHATMAN: Obviously it affected us I mean it controlled the time that we went to work, the days that we worked, it controlled how people thought about things that we were interested in doing for them, it controlled everything. It was a major factor in any kind of decision we needed to take.

*Q: How did you find relations between the embassy and AID?*

CHATMAN: I found it was very good and a big part of that was we lived, we had a common club and there was a lot of, and the marine house was also very popular so there was a lot of fraternizing outside the duty hours.

*Q: Did you get over to India? Did you get a feel about Bangladesh relations and all?*

CHATMAN: Yeah and it was, of course, a strain like they are and have been for years. I don't think that they were impossibly strained but the Indians still are a little think that the Bangladeshi's are their backyard or what do you call it their country cousins or something like that.

*Q: I'm just trying to think in the '80s were there any political events that impacted on you?*

CHATMAN: Yeah there were hartels, which are riots, where political parties just stopped government. They have them on a regular schedule and they can be very dangerous because these people, crowds of people like that get a little flaky, get a little over...

*Q: It is sort of like going amok.*

CHATMAN: Right, go amok. Fortunately when I was always afraid of this and it never ever happened even in Vietnam when we were evacuated from Vietnam, they never attacked Americans, they never attacked foreigners. I was always worried that something would happen in Bangladesh because first of all there were so many people that there is no force in Bangladesh that could have made any control if the crowd went amok. It just would not happen. The crowd would have had to decide not to deal with foreigners and that was the only thing that saved us because the moment they wanted to deal with foreigners that was the end of it. We would have no control over that. That was the same thing in El Salvador that was the same thing in Vietnam, the same thing in Bangladesh as I've just said.

*Q: Well you were there in six years and you said the first four years you were working on this flood control system. What did you do the next two years?*

CHATMAN: I may have, no it was four years. I worked in training. I remember it is very easy to have more than one project so I can't remember the timing of the projects but I was a training officer and I also worked on this project. I think I was the training officer first and then went to the project when one of the guys who was on the project rotated somewhere else.

*Q: Then you left there when? In 1980?*

CHATMAN: '87.

*Q: Where did you go?*

CHATMAN: I went to El Salvador.

**JANE ABELL COON**  
**Ambassador**  
**Bangladesh (1981-1984)**

*Ambassador Jane Abell Coon was born and raised in Dover, New Hampshire. She received a bachelor's degree from Wooster college in 1947. Her Foreign Service career included positions in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Ambassador Coon was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin on November 4, 1986.*

*Q: I should say. Well, necessary, necessary.*

COON: Necessary for all of us. So now I was officially on board in Bangladesh. My DCM had carried over from the previous ambassador and was a very competent officer. This was early August. He was going to leave in late September, when my new DCM came on board, whom I had selected for the job.

My first initial steps were to learn what the totality of the mission was about, how they saw their role, and where they were going in their various sections. I'm sure there are a variety of ways to do this. The way that I chose was initially to ask each agency and section chief to give me two papers; one on their objectives and what they hoped to accomplish within the next nine months up until April, and the other was, what were their longer term objectives, and where would they like to be--or where would their agency or the element of the mission--what would they like to accomplish in the next five years. The latter was obviously more difficult for everybody because, as you well know, in the Foreign Service we're on two- or three-year tours of duty, and very seldom stretch our minds beyond that particular period of time.

I suspect there was a fair amount of struggle over this exercise, but I found it very useful in ascertaining how clearly elements of the staff were thinking in terms of their objectives and their goals and how would they go about getting where they wanted to get. It was also very useful in seeing how various elements of the mission interacted with each other. For example, if the number one goal of the USIS director was to either rent, lease, or build a new cultural center--which in fact was the case and was wholly justified--and this didn't appear on the admin officer's list at all, I knew that there was an issue of coordination here. So that it helped not only in finding out how various elements were looking ahead, but how they articulated with each other.

Then of course I did the usual walk-through of all elements of the mission, from the USIS library to the AID mission to the attaché office, the GSO section, which is normal. And not immediately, but within two or three weeks, I started a series of intensive briefings with AID, which was the major element of the mission in Bangladesh and was our major program in Bangladesh. With each of the four divisions in AID, I would have a briefing with the AID director and the American AID staff in the morning, I would lunch with the AID staff of a particular division and their American contractors. In the evening the director would put on a function for me, for the division, the contractors, and their key Bangladeshi contacts from all of the ministries. So that I felt that by the end of a day--fairly exhausting day--I would have a fairly good handle on each element of the AID program and would at least have been exposed to the major players.

There are really two halves to an ambassador's life at this point. One is the internal, getting on top of your mission and what they're doing, and establishing yourself as the leader of the mission. And the second half of your life, which has to go on, obviously, parallel, and is equally if not more important, is your development of external contacts with the government of Bangladesh and with your colleagues in the diplomatic corps. There is, of course, a fairly well-ordered pattern to that, that you are expected to call on your colleagues in the diplomatic corps and on selected ministers and senior government officials in the Bangladesh government. That went, I think, quite smoothly. It takes longer than you think it's going to take, inevitably.

At some point in late August there was some sort of civil disturbance downtown, so I couldn't go into the embassy in the city. We had a regular pattern that we worked out for riots and civil disturbances. I think I managed to make five calls that particular day on my colleagues who lived out in the suburban area where I lived. We fortunately had enough advance notice so my secretary had made arrangements for my calls. I got very tired of tea that day.

The issue inevitably arises, how did my mission, the Bangladesh government, and my colleagues in the diplomatic corps respond to the new American ambassador in the form of a woman? I think without question there was an enormous amount of just plain curiosity all around. I suspect that within my own mission, particularly among some of the older men, probably in the AID mission, there was a very *considerable* skepticism about the wisdom of the United States government. Among my colleagues in the diplomatic corps, I heard afterward that in fact there was very considerable skepticism among several of the Western European ambassadors. Not, interestingly enough, the Asians. Again, questioning the wisdom of the United States government in sending a woman to a Muslim country. I think I can safely say that within a very few months, most of the people who were skeptical at the beginning were coming around to me to consult on various aspects of the political situation.

With the Bangladesh government, so far as I was able to ascertain, and obviously I can't be 100 percent certain of this, I did not sense any problems at all. The foreign minister was extremely gracious; the president, of course; the finance minister; other key members of the government, I think, accepted me as the American ambassador, and it did not appear to be an issue.

I've often said that in South Asia, at any rate--I don't know about other parts of the world--I think in many ways a Western woman is sort of a third sex. They don't expect you to conform to their social mores. You aren't a part of that culture. You're obviously still a woman but you're something outside of their cultural context. So I think it was perhaps not surprising that I got probably more raised eyebrows from my Western European colleagues than I did from Asians.

*Q: Did it bother you? Did you have a feeling that, "I'm on trial now, and all eyes are on me, and I'd better not make a misstep," or did you just sort of figure, "Well, I know what I'm doing."*

COON: I think it was more of the latter. By the time I got to Dhaka I knew South Asia pretty well. I had visited Bangladesh on several occasions, the first one as far back as 1957, while some of my contacts in the Bangladesh government were still in graduate school, so I think I was reasonably confident in my knowledge of the local situation. Although obviously the role is different than when you're either a junior officer or when you're a visiting fireman from Washington. But I don't think I felt that I was on trial, particularly.

I felt then and throughout my tour that, by virtue of being a woman *and* the American ambassador, I was far from being invisible. I was obviously a conspicuous figure in the community. When there would be a function of some sort, like at this ceramic factory, being covered by Bangladeshi television, almost inevitably the TV clip that evening would zero in at some point on me in the diplomatic corps, or the Saudi ambassador, or both. The Saudi ambassador because he wore Arab clothes, and Saudi Arabia was also a significant aid donor to Bangladesh, and me because I obviously was different from the other ambassadors and

represented the United States. There was no point in my tour in Bangladesh when I did not feel that I was a public figure, and I think perhaps the biggest difference between any other job in the embassy and being the ambassador is that as ambassador you are a public figure all the time.

*Q: You can't let down at all, I suppose. You're always on parade.*

COON: You're always visible to either your own community or the Bangladeshi community. Now this doesn't mean you go around acting like a stuffed shirt, but you're conscious of the fact that when you're doing your laps in the swimming pool, there are two or three of the wives nudging each other and saying, "There's the ambassador." Not to speak of diplomatic receptions or anything like that, where one expects it.

*Q: And you're more on display than if you were the ambassador's wife?*

COON: I think so. Because in some ways I was, you know, the two of them wrapped up together to the distaff side of the community. To pursue that subject just briefly, there was an enormous amount of curiosity on the distaff side, which I was not really conscious of. When my new DCM came, his wife, who is a marvelous person and had very good antenna with respect to the community, suggested that I speak to the American Woman's Club. We talked about what I would speak about, and I was going to talk about US policy toward Bangladesh, and finally she said, "You know, what they really want to know about is *you*."

And so I got up and gave an autobiographical account, slightly embarrassed by this, but it obviously was something they were just inordinately curious about: how I got there.

*Q: Did you ever feel, when you were doing your daily rounds out there, that you were not only doing them for yourself, but you were doing them for other women? That's a comment many of the ambassadors have said to me. They felt a burden, that they had to be just as good as they could be because they were striking a blow for women. Did you ever feel that?*

COON: You know, in the beginning, in the first year, at least, while I was there, I was asked by several women's organizations to speak. I think maybe I spoke to one, but I consciously made a decision that it was important to be seen as the American ambassador and not the woman ambassador. So that I did not, the first year and a half, take much of a role with women's organizations, for example.

And I didn't make this decision lightly. I got together the professional women of the embassy--there were several professional women in AID, USIS, and the embassy, some of which had been there longer and had very good contacts in the community, both men and women--and we talked about it. They concurred that it was important that I be seen as the American ambassador and not a woman ambassador. We actually had a discussion on this point.

Now I think where it hit me--I think I realized, not immediately, but fairly early on, the symbolic import for women of my being there. It was something that continued throughout my tour there, and I found in many ways quite touching. One of the first receptions given for me was a reception by the DCM for embassy staff, including the Foreign Service Nationals and their

wives. Many of the wives followed their husbands and were very shy. In retrospect, I suspect that many of them would not have come if they hadn't been curious about this new phenomenon. And repeatedly, throughout the evening, as I stood in the reception line, I would shake hands with Mr. So-and-so, the agricultural assistant in AID, and his wife then would take my hand and almost whisper in my ear, "We're so glad you're here."

This became almost a pattern at the early receptions, that many Bangladeshi women--it wasn't just one an evening--would repeat this: "We're so glad you're here." "It's wonderful to have you here." "I'm glad the Americans sent you." That kind of thing.

*Q: Which you know they would never have said to a man.*

COON: No, that was strictly the women to me. And I realized that I had a symbolic value, and this continued for the three years.

*Q: So it had a big impact.*

COON: So I think without question, it had a significant symbolic impact on half the population, if you will. My last year there, when I was well established, I did consciously accept more invitations from women's groups. Not a lot, but more.

*Q: No, I see your point. I should think it would be very important to make it seem that this was such a--not an ordinary event but, "I am not to be treated any differently than a man." And make it seem as though, "of course, this is the way we do things."*

COON: It's in the normal course of events. That's right.

*Q: Would make probably a bigger impact, I should think. Provided you carry through and do the job well, which we know in your case, you did.*

COON: Right up to the final receptions I would get these very quiet comments, and in some very far corners of the country where I traveled. Because I had appeared so much on television at all these functions the government televises, apparently my general recognition was very, very high.

*Q: All over the country?*

COON: Pretty widely.

*Q: They have access to TVs? Well, obviously they must, but is it in the corner stores or--*

COON: When I say recognition, I don't mean down to the poorest, landless laborer; I don't mean that. I do remember just before I left Bangladesh, I was on a tour with the president, a helicopter tour of flooded areas in north Bengal. I was sitting under a tree, looking fairly disreputable, it being August and a very hot day, and I was in *salwarkemeez*, because climbing on and off helicopters was not something you did lightly in a skirt. And I noticed two Bengali men, young teachers. I was sitting near a school, and two young teachers were standing there whispering to

each other, and one of them finally came up and said, "Aren't you the American ambassador?" Because they'd apparently seen me on television. And this was a fairly distant corner.

*Q: Getting the message out, so to speak. How large was your staff?*

COON: We had about eighty-five what we called direct-hire Americans on the payroll. About thirty-five in AID mission, and the rest in the embassy, USIS, the attaché office, agricultural attaché.

*Q: Did you have a defense attaché?*

COON: Defense attaché.

*Q: How many Marines?*

COON: I guess five, with a Gunny.

*Q: You said that you inherited a DCM who then subsequently left. And you had selected a new one. Could you tell me a little bit about him? How you selected him? What criteria you used?*

COON: Being a political cone officer--an officer with a lot of political background and a South Asian background--I felt it was less important for the DCM to have a South Asian background, but I would like to have somebody who had a strong economic background, and if possible, someone who had been an economic officer in some part of the developing world, who had worked with an AID mission.

Before I went out, I interviewed a number of candidates, some of whom were interested in the job, and some of whom were appalled at the prospect of going to Bangladesh. I finally found someone who was in the senior seminar, named Carl Schmidt, who had a good reputation as an economic officer. He was an Eastern European specialist and had served quite widely in Eastern Europe and in EB, the economic bureau, and had been office director for Eastern European Affairs. I think the last thing Carl had ever considered was going to Bangladesh, but we hit it off quite nicely in the interview.

He was very uncertain about the reaction of his wife, so I invited them to come over and have drinks with me. We had a very good evening, and his wife, who, I think, at first was somewhat aghast at the prospect, warmed to the idea, and they agreed to come out.

I think it was probably the best decision I ever made, after the decision to marry my husband, anyway. [Laughter] And not a wholly dissimilar relationship, because the relationship between the ambassador and the DCM is a very close relationship. It worked out from my point of view, and I hope from Carl's, extraordinarily well. He brought skills that I think complemented my skills. He was a good manager. He was keenly interested in junior officers, which I feel is a very important thing. We had several junior officers and a good rotation program.

He had the economic background, although as I look back on it, that was probably less important than his managerial skills. A DCM should not be the economic counselor; the DCM should be the embassy manager. I think I visualized that one a little bit wrong. I think Carl handled the situation extremely well, where he was not the economic counselor, which is precisely what he should *not* have been.

On the other hand, he had insights into, particularly, EB and to economic issues that were useful. So it was, from my point of view, a very happy relationship, and I think it must have been happy enough for him so that he extended a third year.

*Q: Also, it seems to me you were lucky in that his wife turned out to be--*

COON: His wife turned out to be just marvelous.

*Q: Because there is a very definite role, as you yourself know, having done it more than once: the DCM's wife.*

COON: She was a very self-sufficient and independent person who had a large number of interests of her own, both music and writing. She was very interested in Bangladeshi society, made a lot of Bangladeshi friends. But she was not about to become president of the woman's club or go on the school board. Nor was she going to be my staff aide or something like that. We had a respectful relationship. I think I understood her position because I had a not dissimilar position vis-à-vis Ambassador Laise in Kathmandu. On the other hand, Rika had very good antenna in the community and could alert me to things, to potential problems, and usually had very good advice. So that was a very, very, happy relationship for me.

*Q: Did you see her on a specific time schedule?*

COON: No, I did not. No, she was not a member of my staff, and I respected her for it. But when something came up, why . . . And we saw each other. We lived not very far apart, and if there was something I needed to talk to Carl about, I'd drop by, and chat with her, too. They would, of course, come by the residence.

*Q: It's really a key relationship, isn't it?*

COON: Absolute key relationship, to have that. Carl also was a person who had a lot of quiet confidence in his own abilities, his own judgment. I respected his judgment, and he could come in and close the door and say, "I think you ought to do that. I think that particular idea of yours"--he put it much more tactfully than this, but anyway--"is really off the wall."

And if there's anything an ambassador needs, it's a candid DCM that will also keep them from misjudgments and missteps, because very few people in a mission overseas will tell the emperor that he has no clothes. You badly need it.

*Q: Also, if there is bickering or hard feelings between the two top people, morale goes right to pot.*



COON: That's an impossible situation. That's terrible. People then drive a wedge between the ambassador and the DCM. Now I obviously commuted to Kathmandu every couple of months to see my husband, and it was a wonderful feeling to get on that plane. Carl would almost always drive out to the airport, because we'd have last minute things to talk about, and I would get on that plane and not have a worry in the world about my mission. That's the best thing that can happen to an ambassador: to know that you've left it in perfectly good hands, and there isn't anything to worry about. And you can focus on having a nice time in Nepal.

*Q: How often did you have your staff and country team meetings?*

COON: We had country team meetings every week. That was another thing that I quite consciously did. When I first arrived at post, the intent of the old DCM was to just continue with the meeting pattern which had existed. I had enormous regard for my predecessor, but I wasn't him. My style is different. I made clear that I would not establish a new meeting pattern until my new DCM arrived. When he arrived, then we would discuss and establish what would be the meeting pattern which suited our style and method of operation.

*Q: You had obviously worked out all of these things before you got there, hadn't you?*

COON: Well, you think about it. You think about how you're going to--or at least you should--approach the new job, because you don't have a whole lot of time. You've got to get on top of things fast.

*Q: Did the ambassador course help you much?*

COON: I think it had some useful ideas. And then I deliberately talked to several people in Washington that had been ambassadors about how they approached their initial period at post.

*Q: With these meetings, did you always sit in the same place?*

COON: I think in the country team meeting, yes. I had a chair that was positioned next to a telephone, so I did tend to sit in the same place. I think I'd do that differently now, at a different stage of my life. Ultimately-- I don't remember exactly when I established this pattern, but my meeting pattern fell into what I called a political cell meeting, in which I had my political officers, obviously the DCM, economic officer, defense attaché, and usually the USIS, on Monday mornings. We would get together and talk a little bit about the agenda for the week, what areas we felt we needed more information, what might happen, what people were working on in terms of reporting. It was useful to have the economic officer in on that, even though it was a political cell meeting, because he could contribute, and it was a fairly conscious effort to try to build bridges among the various elements of the mission that were doing the reporting.

*Q: Were there problems within different sections when you got there?*

COON: There had been a lot of turnover that summer. We had a new admin officer, new political counselor, a new DCM, a new ambassador, a new defense attaché, a new second

political officer. Over half the embassy had turned over that summer. I'd been in enough missions where there had been poor communication among various sections, so that was one of my goals. I think that one worked fairly well. I don't think I ever worked out nearly as successfully a relationship between the political and the economic section. I don't think there was competition, but there wasn't enough communication, as I see retrospectively.

And the other little meeting I had was a meeting on Friday afternoons with the economists from AID and my own embassy economic section. This was not a decision or policy meeting so the AID director was not there. It was a combination of purposes. One was to educate me on the major economic and AID issues, the substance of issues. The second purpose of this, and it was quite an up-front purpose, was to make sure that the AID economists and the embassy economists were talking to each other, and were, again, not in a competitive relationship, because I had seen too many embassies where the AID economists and the embassy economists were absolutely at daggers points.

That one worked out on both fronts; the education of the ambassador. It also, It, frankly, gave me an entree at a lower level into AID, which kept me better informed than I might always have been through the hierarchy, since AID directors tend to tell ambassadors what they want to tell ambassadors. So that was also useful in that respect. I don't think we ever had a competitive relationship between the embassy and AID on the economic front.

*Q: That's very good, and rare. It seems to be a continuing problem.*

COON: It's a continuing problem, and the problem is exacerbated by the fact that AID had two first-class economists, and we had an economic officer who was a reasonably good officer, but he was much stronger on the commercial side, and we had a junior officer in the section, so the weight was on AID's side. I needed to be sure that the two were talking to each other.

*Q: You've mentioned the four areas in which AID operated. Would you tell me about those?*

COON: There had been an AID program for Pakistan before Bangladesh broke away. At the time of the war in '71, the branch AID office in East Pakistan was evacuated. After the war was over, and it took us some months to recognize Bangladesh, AID sent out--and to this day I'd love to know the history of that--a handful of rather young officers in their late '20s and early '30s. AID was largely a relief operation at that point. In '72 and '73--literally, Bangladesh's food reserves were on the high seas, in American bottoms bringing out PL 480 wheat.

By '73 or '4, at least '74, the young AID officers were attempting to move from what was much too much a relief operation to begin to plot a strategy for food production and distribution. They must have been a fairly creative little cadre. Their strategy was put into place with AID and the World Bank, and really went into gear when Zia came into office. My dates may be a little off here--from '75 on. It was a program which focused heavily on increased agricultural production by high-yield variety seeds, irrigation during the dry season, fertilizer, and farm gate prices which would provide an incentive. The World Bank invested very, very heavily in storage facilities in the country, because the notion was that you would set a floor price, and if the market price for rice dropped below that floor, the government would go into the market and buy

and store the grain. Then during the lean season, when the price rose too high--and there was a trigger price--the government would put grain on the market to moderate the price swings. The thinking in the mid-'70s was extremely sound, in that Bangladesh never went the way of the African countries where agricultural prices were almost deliberately suppressed to keep the urban dwellers happy, and agricultural production went down.

So by the time I got there, agricultural production was increasing. There was an increased use of high-yield varieties, use of tube wells and fertilizer. The storage facilities had gone up.

So to get back to your original question, our thrust was in agriculture. We supported agricultural research, which really meant adaptation of rice and wheat that were developed in the Philippines and Mexico to Bangladeshi conditions. We were heavily into fertilizer, both fertilizer imports and distribution, and the building of fertilizer warehouses very widely throughout the country. We were using our role in fertilizer distribution and imports to privatize distribution, which had been a government monopoly. That was one of our more successful programs, privatizing fertilizer distribution. So that was a major thrust in agriculture.

We also had a significant population program, and that was the second major thrust of our AID program.

We supported a number of voluntary sterilization private groups in Bangladesh, which did a very good job.

*Q: Sterilization of men?*

COON: Yes, but mostly women. We heavily subsidized commercial marketing of contraceptives, and we carefully monitored the family planning program, and not only our role, but the whole family planning program. We wanted to assure that there was no element of coercion, and that quality control was maintained, particularly on sterilizations, so that you didn't have a large number of deaths and infection and that sort of thing.

*Q: Did you use the same sort of incentives that were used in India to induce people to go in for sterilization?*

COON: No, we did not use incentives because that is not part of our policy, to provide incentives for sterilization. We did provide transportation money--or the government provided and we reimbursed them to some extent--transportation money if they had to come from the village to the center. We reimbursed the government for a new sari for the women or a new lungi for the man, on grounds--and I think very sound grounds--that you reduce the possibility of infection if you go home in a clean garment.

*Q: Were there also tubal ligatures?*

COON: Yes, they were both done, male and female, but female sterilization was going up much faster than male.

*Q: Is that so? The women preferred that, or do you think their husbands preferred that?*

COON: I think there probably was a reluctance among men, but there was a tremendous demand among women--the issue in Bangladesh when I was there was not motivation; it was meeting the demand.

*Q: They could see nothing ahead but one baby after another after another, and you can't feed the ones you've got.*

COON: The average Bangladeshi woman was having something like fourteen pregnancies at this point. I can't cite the figure, but both female and infant mortality were just appalling. We also, later on, got into some work in women's and children's health.

We also had an active rural electrification program, which supported in many ways the agricultural program, because it made available electricity for tube wells and also provided power for small village industry; rice mills, and that sort of thing. That was an extremely popular program, being managed by an American contractor, the National Rural Electrification Cooperatives of America--NRECA.

*Q: The health care for the women and the babies, wellness clinics and that sort of thing, did that fall under the population--*

COON: It was health and population division, and then of course, we had a major food import program known as PL 480. We were importing three or four hundred thousand tons a year, mostly wheat.

*Q: The soil, as I understand it, is quite rich in Bangladesh.*

COON: Oh, it's an extremely fertile country. You can get three crops a year if you have water. Not three rice crops.

*Q: The problem is the monsoons, and the lack of rain, and too much rain?*

COON: The problem is population pressure. It's a hundred million people in an area the size of Wisconsin. Just enormous population pressure. Later in my tour of duty, we moved into programs in rural credit and banking reform. Credit was the other constraint on agriculture. We were trying to help the Bangladeshis, through the banking system, to establish rural credit arrangements that would reach even very small farmers. So they could get credit to buy seed and fertilizer and a tube well.

*Q: The idea being to help them become more self-sufficient, of course. But before you can do that you've got to get them fed, I suppose. The country has been at war so much it seems to me there can't have been very much productivity.*

COON: Well, the curve was a very encouraging one. Agricultural production was increasing at about 3 percent a year, from around 1976 to when I left in '84. Which is no small

accomplishment. Wheat production had gone from about a hundred thousand tons in 1970--wheat is a winter crop and relatively newly introduced into Bangladesh--went from about a hundred thousand tons in 1970 to about 1.2 million the year I left. They were making significant progress, and they are very close to self-sufficiency in rice, if they haven't achieved it yet. I'm not sure.

Now, there are good years and bad years. When I say 3 percent a year, some years it was a little more, some years it was less. And wheat, I understand, now is up to 1.4, 1.6 million tons, something like that.

*Q: There is quite a problem there with people fleeing either to Pakistan or to India, isn't there, and causing difficulties between the three governments?*

COON: There was a relatively small group of people, called Biharis, Muslims who migrated from the Hindi-speaking areas or the Urdu-speaking areas of India to Bangladesh in 1947 and thereafter. They had tended to prosper rather more under the Pakistani regime and had tended to side with the Pakistanis at the time of the '71 war, so they were not very popular. There were a few hundred thousand. Some left right after the war, and there was increasing pressure while I was there to have family reunification. They were agitating to go to Pakistan. The Pakistanis weren't so keen on having them. Bangladeshis found it quite acceptable for them to leave, put no barriers in their way. It was one of those tragic aftermaths of the flow of people in the subcontinent, '47 and '71.

Then there has been some migration, since the late 19th century, of Bengalis from both West Bengal and what is now Bangladesh into the much less heavily populated areas of northeast India, particular Assam and Tripura. That had probably continued at least up to '71. The point of view of the Bangladesh government--who had reached an agreement with Mrs. Gandhi that any that arrived before '71, legally or illegally, would not be forced back--the Bangladesh government's position was that Bangladeshis had not gone to Assam since 1971. The Indian government's position was somewhat at variance with this.

When there were very severe riots in Assam in 1982, which were ethnic riots in part, between native Assamese and Bengalis, regardless of their origin, there was a certain amount of pressure on the Indian government from the local government, the politics of Assam interacted with the politics of India, to attempt to restrict what the Indians felt to be a continuing influx of Bangladeshis. I suspect that the Indian government, or the Assamese particularly, probably overstated the influx, and the Bangladeshis perhaps overlooked the possibility that some had crossed the border. I don't think it was a major hemorrhage. Now if there were ever a breakdown in Bangladesh, or a severe famine, that would be something else again.

*Q: Is that one of things that led to India's deciding to put up a fence?*

COON: That's right, that was the issue of the fence. The Indians, really in response to political pressures from Assam, announced that they were going to put up a fence around Bangladesh. The Bangladeshis took this--I didn't fully understand the Bangladeshi reaction. Educated Bangladeshis found this really wholly unacceptable, very humiliating. They protested

vigorously. I don't think it was that any of the educated Bangladeshis planned to emigrate to Assam, but they just found it a very humiliating thing.

I confess that it seemed to me the likelihood of an effective fence actually being put around Bangladesh was--

*Q: Of barbed wire, wasn't it?*

COON: It would have raised the price of wire clippers in most Bangladeshi bazaars, but it wouldn't do much else. Because there's a great deal of smuggling that goes along across that border.

*Q: How would they police it?*

COON: That's another good question. Anyway, by the time I left, the fence issue had largely died down. The Indians had put up a couple of posts. I think Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had more success in reaching an accommodation with the Assamese on the political issues that were agitating the Assamese. As far as I know, that issue has died down.

*Q: A terrific expense for absolutely no results.*

COON: Oh, colossal. It would have been a colossal expense.

*Q: I know the Russians were there, but they don't get along too well with the Bangladeshi, do they?*

COON: No. There's a large Russian embassy in Dhaka. The Russians had been very supportive of Bangladeshi independence and of the Indian role in Bangladesh, but by the mid-'70s, when the Bangladeshis began to distance themselves a little bit from the Indians, the Bangladeshis also distanced themselves a little from the Russians, and cultivated much closer relations with the Chinese as an offset. This is a fairly normal pattern in the subcontinent, that the smaller countries around India tend to cultivate relations with large countries other than the Soviets.

*Q: Why? They're afraid of the Soviets?*

COON: No, they're afraid of India, and India and the Soviet Union are very close. So there was a very large Russian Embassy there that was in many ways a carry-over from the earlier days of Bangladesh. There was a large Indian High Commission there too, and a Pakistani Embassy. The Bangladeshis and the Pakistanis had reestablished relations and have very good relations now. The Chinese presence--and the Chinese had provided both economic and substantial military aid to the Bangladeshis. The usual west European contingent, including the British, of course, because it was a commonwealth country. The Australians and Canadians were quite important because they were also food donors, and they, for the most part, had very able high commissioners there.

*Q: So you had a large diplomatic community?*

COON: It wasn't large. I think it ran about thirty-five or forty, something like that.

*Q: And you had cordial relations with all of them, including the Russians?*

COON: Yes. I wouldn't say the Russian ambassador and I were particularly intimate. The Russian ambassador was--when I first got there the Romanian was dean of the corps, but he stayed only about a year, and then the Russian ambassador became dean of the corps. He left almost exactly the same time I did after about eight years in Bangladesh, each one of which I think he loathed progressively more. It was quite apparent that he desperately wanted a transfer and was not getting it, and he finally was retired out of Bangladesh. I somewhat sympathize with Gorbachev's effort on the vodka front. As I look back on my Russian colleague, it was a clear case of alcoholism.

*Q: Really? I found a very interesting news report on two diplomats, two Russian diplomats being detained while attempting to burn five hundred and eighty-eight rolls of movie films. What was all that about?*

COON: What's the date on that?

*Q: April 6, 1982.*

COON: That was not long after the *coup*. The military government took over, and to this day, I'm not quite sure what they were up to, but it may have been fairly harmless. They were getting rid of a whole lot of--you know, they import in an awful lot of movies for the Russian community themselves. But it was the most ham-handed sort of thing. The Bangladeshis stumbled across them and attributed the most dire motives to them, it being within about two weeks of the *coup*. You know, sometimes we think the Russians are twelve feet tall, and they aren't. They can be just as ham-handed as can be. What kind of film these people were burning, I don't know, and why they chose to go out in the countryside and do it, and then get picked up by the police . . .

*Q: Oh, they went out in the countryside to do this?*

COON: They went outside of Dhaka, yes. It was very peculiar. They were invited to leave. The Russians, of course, had a network into the left wing. There were a variety of small left-wing parties in Bangladesh, of generally not a great deal of strength or significance. It was very clear that the Russians were subsidizing them. Again, they didn't even cover their tracks terribly well. And then in December of '83, there was some student unrest, led by some of the left-wing students, and the government just plain got fed-up and asked fifteen Soviets to leave. For a very small--what the Bangladeshis perceive to be a small and weak country, that was quite a courageous act on their part.

*Q: I should say. Did they go?*

COON: Yes. They were quietly replaced over the next several months. Of course, in a situation like that, where there's a conspiratorial explanation for every act, why, we were either blamed or credited with putting the Bangladeshis up to it. In fact we had nothing to do with it. [Laughter] I can't say we were sad to see it happen.

*Q: You don't realize how much power you're credited with until you hear all this gossip about what the US has done.*

COON: Oh, yes. We're credited with a great deal more than we do.

*Q: What did you perceive as the most important part of your mission? The AID function?*

COON: Yes, I think the major relationship really was the AID relationship. The totality of our aid ran to perhaps a hundred and eighty million dollars a year, about half of it development assistance and about half food aid. Some years it ran over two hundred million. We used the food aid for developmental purposes. Our objectives included an interest in stability in Bangladesh. It was certainly not in our interest to have a breakdown, for either political or economic reasons. We had an interest in minimizing friction and encouraging good relations among countries of the subcontinent, which in Dhaka's perspective really meant the relationship between Bangladesh and India. We did not have a stake in bad relations between Bangladesh and India, and did not in any way attempt to capitalize on them, which would have been very easy to do, because the Bangladeshis were not reluctant to attempt to seek our support in their disputes with India. And so a fair amount of my mission was staying out of the middle.

*Q: Did you see the president very often? That would be Hossain Mohammad Ershad most of the time you were there?*

COON: I saw him fairly frequently. To get back to this earlier--I won't leave this question of Ershad, but I'll come to it a little bit later. The first sort of diplomatic challenge I had--even before I arrived, an issue had arisen that was causing very, very bad tempers on both sides of the border, India and Bangladesh. This was the issue of sovereignty over an island which was emerging in the Bay of Bengal at just about the junction of the India and Bangladesh borders in southwestern Bangladesh, known as Talliputti Island by the Bangladeshis, and South Moor Island by the Indians.

Bangladesh is one of the few countries that is growing both geographically as well as in population, as all that good topsoil washes down from Nepal. Islands do emerge, and islands disappear. This island had emerged over the previous few years. It was a foot and a half above high tide, or something like that. It wasn't a biggie, nobody lived on it yet, although Bengalis do move on to these islands very, very quickly as they emerge, well before they should.

*Q: Don't they get drowned?*

COON: This is what happens. You read about storms in the Bay of Bengal and ten thousand people drowning--it's because they move onto this very low ground on these emerging islands too soon. The island became a *cause celebre* with the Bangladeshis. The Indians sent a ship and



a landing party and planted their flag firmly on Talliputti, and the Bangladeshis were in a high dudgeon about this when I arrived. It began to heat up after I arrived, and I had to find ways to convey our view that this kind of friction--and it really looked as if there might even be a confrontation--was clearly a loser for the Bangladeshi. So I had to find ways to convey my views to various elements of the government, that we hoped that they would find ways to tamp this down and reach an amicable solution, or at least agree on a process that might lead to a solution. That's when you realize that a government is a very complicated thing. Particularly in Bangladesh, you don't just go in and talk to the foreign minister, because the foreign minister may have little influence with the military, for example, and you don't know what the military is doing. The president was a very elderly man at the time. The government was just recovering from the disarray which was quite natural after the assassination of President Zia, who had been a very strong leader. So I had to find ways, and that is when it comes home to you very, very quickly that you've got to establish your network of contacts throughout the government. And my network--this was within the first couple of weeks--was not well-established at the time. So it was perhaps more of a lesson to me than anything else. That was the first challenge.

The second challenge, virtually simultaneously, was the arrival of Ambassador Kirkpatrick from the United Nations. This was about ten days after I'd presented my credentials. Jeane Kirkpatrick came out with a small party. She was making a swing through South Asia, to stop at the various South Asian capitals, countries with which she is going to be dealing in the U.N. This was the first cabinet-level visitor Bangladesh had since, I think, Henry Kissinger in about 1974, and they were really excited and turned out for it.

And we had to very quickly arrange her program, including the logistics. She was traveling, of course, with security. She stayed at the residence--and I had just barely moved in myself--with her husband and her security people.

I remember one lovely moment when the two of us were walking through the long vaulted corridor of the presidential palace to call on the president, and she turned to me and she said, "I'll bet this is the first time two women ambassadors have ever called on the president of Bangladesh." [Laughter]

And I said, "I'll bet it is."

That visit went very well.

The constitution required an election, so we very quickly had to focus on the election campaign. The earliest fencing in September being about whether or not the opposition parties would participate in the election, and the president and the government wanted the opposition parties because it was as much an exercise in legitimacy as it was anything else. So there was a great deal of fencing and activity by the various political parties. By late October or November, there were already rumors of disenchantment in the military with the way the civilian government was conducting its business.

I found ways of conveying our preference for the electoral and representative process, and the election went off, really, without a hitch. It went off reasonably well and Sattar was reelected in what I think was a reasonably fair election.

*Q: Did we have any observers there?*

COON: Just the embassy. Just ourselves.

*Q: Nobody at the polls the way they were in Manila?*

COON: No, no. It was a rather curious election because the major opposition candidate, a man named Kamal Hussein was running on an Awami League ticket, and the Awami League put up posters everywhere with the founder of the Awami League and father of the country, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, on the posters in a large picture, and Kamal Hussein hardly featured. Sheik Mujibur, of course, had been assassinated in '74. The government party likewise put up posters with large pictures of former President Zia, who had been killed the previous May, and a small photo of their candidate, Acting President Sattar, down in the corner. So you began to wonder if it was a contest between two deceased leaders.

After the polls closed, I asked my cook who he'd voted for, and he looked at me in total surprise and said, "President Zia, of course." [Laughter]

*Q: Was he aware that Zia was dead?*

COON: Yes, he was aware, but he was voting for what Zia stood for, as far as he was concerned, I think.

An election in Bangladesh, as anywhere in the subcontinent, is a colorful event. A large proportion of the population is illiterate so that the use of symbols becomes very important. Each party has a symbol, and popularizing a symbol becomes one of the major activities in an election. As I recall the Awami League's symbol was a country boat, and they would build these huge replicas of boats that would stretch all the way across streets, and another party--I think it was the government party--was a sheaf of rice, and there would be these enormous replicas of sheaves of rice.

During this period, what you have to do as an ambassador is stay out of the limelight so that you are not identified with a political party in an election. Not always easy.

*Q: No, I'm sure they're doing everything they can to pull you in on one side or the other.*

COON: That's right. Just before the election, the president invited me down to open the third generator of what had been an American AID project, a hydroelectric project. It took some deft footwork to stay out of the political rally.

*Q: You did go for the opening?*

COON: Yes, and it was appropriate to go to the opening, because it had been an American AID project. The third generator actually was not an American project, but it was very much identified with us, and the dam and the early hydroelectric work had been an American project.

So that takes us through the election. After the election, there were high expectations that once the president was elected, was confirmed in office, he would reshuffle his cabinet. Particularly the donor countries were really sort of lying in wait to try and get some decisions made by the government on various economic policies. Unfortunately, the president did not choose to reshuffle his cabinet very substantially, and we went into the winter with a situation where the harvest was not terribly good, and the price of rice from January on began to rise steadily. The price of rice is politics in Bangladesh; that is the heart of it all. Decisions did not come readily.

There was clearly increasing frustration, both in the government, and particularly in the military, and it certainly was widely believed that it was a matter of time before the military moved. Bangladesh has something of a tradition of military intervention, and Pakistan before it. Pardon?

*Q: I just wanted to ask you if corruption was an issue.*

COON: Corruption was a very major issue.

*Q: With reason, do you think?*

COON: I have found, Ann, probably the most difficult thing in the developing world is to have a yardstick to measure corruption. Whether objective corruption is the issue, or people's perception of corruption is the more important issue. So that I find it very difficult to answer that question. Certainly the perception was that corruption was a serious problem that was increasing.

*Q: Things don't get done and somebody says, "So-and-so's hand's in the cookie jar or it would get done," even though there may be a million reasons why--*

COON: Yes. There's always a certain level of corruption almost built into the system. When this rises to a point where it becomes an issue, or when it is perceived to have risen to a point where it becomes an issue, is a very, very hard thing to measure, I think. I learned a lesson very early on as a junior officer in Karachi, where the conventional wisdom, which I never doubted from my circle of friends, was that the president of Pakistan--in fact the man who led the first *coup* before the Ayub coup, a man named Iskander Mirza--had Swiss bank accounts of enormous dimensions. I certainly never doubted this. It was so widely perceived, discussed, described, and was very much the conventional wisdom among my middle-class Pakistani friends.

Ultimately, Mirza was overthrown and went into exile in London. He was entitled to a pension as, I think, a major general and a civil servant, on a British scale. (When independence came, they allowed the civil servants to keep their British pensions.) I knew just enough about him to know that he lived extremely modestly in London for many years, probably ten years before he died, and there was absolutely no evidence that he had much of anything beyond his pension.

That was something that I have long remembered in my Foreign Service experience, that conventional wisdom is not always correct, and one has to--you know, one needs to be a skeptic. It works the other way, too. When somebody appears to be as honest as the day is long, and then you find out that he's just sent six children to Ivy League colleges in the United States, you have reason to wonder.

So in any event, there was a strong sense that a *coup* was coming. The issue was not so much if it were coming as when it was coming. We certainly didn't encourage the coup, and indeed made clear again our preference for representative forms of government.

But on the twenty-third of March '82, I and three or four other ambassadors were tipped off late one evening that there would be a *coup* that night. And the military took over. The Chief of Staff became Chief Martial Law Administrator in an absolutely bloodless coup.

*Q: Did they move into the presidential palace and the radio stations and so forth?*

COON: Yes, they took over the radio station and the palace. It was quick, smooth, and didn't really cause much of a ripple, except they put into effect, of course, martial law regulations, and a number of ministers were arrested for corruption. The president himself was retired respectfully, and a martial law regime came in.

*Q: Is he the one to whom you had presented your credentials?*

COON: That's right.

*Q: Were you under curfew under the martial law?*

COON: Yes, there was a curfew. I don't remember how long it lasted.

*Q: Was it a very binding curfew?*

COON: We fairly quickly got passes for embassy vehicles. Again, Carl Schmidt and I had talked and-- as I said, we did not approve the notion of a *coup* in any way, shape, or form, but we were aware that there was strong likelihood of one. Although it came a little earlier than I thought it would. But we figured we better be prepared, so we sat in the office one day and made a *coup* checklist, about what you do. Who you call into the embassy, what messages do you send to the Department, the consular message that "All Americans are okay," the press guidance--what we called our *coup* checklist, which Carl put on a three-by-five card and carried around in his pocket. So the night of the coup I could call him up, and he came over with his checklist, and we went through the drill and it went like clockwork.

I thought the interesting thing at a time like this, a mini-crisis--would be the *coup* itself-- the events surrounding it, and how one handles the American community and all of that sort of thing. But what I discovered was that the really interesting thing about a *coup* is how you manage in the post-coup period, picking up the threads of your relationship with the government, and managing

your own mission. And that I found really quite interesting: the post-coup management, if you will, of the relationship and of your own mission. And of Washington.

*Q: You have to sort of recast your mind, I suppose, with the new team.*

COON: The beauty of being the ambassador to Bangladesh and not the ambassador to a country where Washington is on your back all the time, is that you really have rather broad policy instructions on your role, and you know perfectly well that probably no one much higher than a desk officer is reading most of your reporting. You make a lot of your own decisions, and if you want instructions from the Department, you write your instructions, send them into the Department and ask them to send them back. It isn't like being in a place, I suspect, like Cairo or Tel Aviv, when the Department must send the most *detailed* instructions. Bangladesh may not loom large in American foreign policy, but it's a lot fun being in a place like that.

*Q: It must be. You can use your own judgment.*

COON: You don't have them breathing down your neck all the time, and we had no decent telephonic communication with Washington so they couldn't phone me very much and the time difference was such that--

*Q: That's what I was going to ask you: whether you felt you had enough guidance from the Department. Obviously you felt you did; all you wanted. [Laughter]*

COON: I think when we concluded our last conversation I was talking about the--in some ways more interesting--problem of post-*coup* management. How do you pick up the threads of your relationship with the host government, particularly when the position of your own government has not been sympathetic to the *coup*. And how do you manage your own country team, members of which may have rather varying reactions to events, and rather varying recommendations as to the course that should be followed. And again, the beauty of being an ambassador to a country like Bangladesh, is that you get only rather broad instructions from the Department, and to a large extent you write your own script, getting a Department approval as necessary.

Within a couple of days of the *coup*, I was invited by the now Chief Martial Law Administrator, General Ershad, to call on him, which was appropriate. I don't remember quite how many days, but it was perhaps three or four days afterward. And I went to the cantonment, there being no question of recognition of the new government. He pretty much outlined the reasons for his action, and the broad intentions of his government, particularly in the field of development, including, very high on his priority list, accelerated efforts in the field of family planning. Most of the goals which he outlined were consistent with our own policies toward Bangladesh. I reaffirmed our position on the desirability, over time, to build democratic institutions, or representative institutions, which he affirmed was also his intent.

Following this call, and over the next few weeks, was the issue of how, again, we picked up the threads, in relatively minor ways. When do we sign the first new AID agreement? Several fairly small agreements were pending. What posture do we take as members of the embassy vis-à-vis

our conversations in Bangladesh, vis-à-vis the public? How do we answer questions from both foreign press and the local press?

And I found, interestingly enough, that my country team had rather varied views on what our relationship should be with the new military government. Some who had served in Latin America, were quite negative about military governments in general. Others saw this as an opportunity in terms of particular economic objectives in Bangladesh, the developmental side of things, since the previous government had not been a government which was decisive in terms of some of the hard economic choices Bangladesh needed to make.

Eventually, within a week or ten days of the *coup*, I realized that I had to get my country team together and sort out our goals and objectives vis-à-vis Bangladesh. We did this collectively. I sent the results into Washington and had it affirmed by Washington. And it was a lesson to me in the management of a country team, because what we came up with was probably less important than the process we went through in arriving at a consensus on our views. And from then on that became the document to which we could refer, and the consensus which emerged was the important thing in terms of how we approached things.

This was the end of March, I think and we signed off on our first AID agreement in early May--a relatively minor AID agreement. And we began to pick up the threads of a more normal relationship with the government.

The government in the meantime--General Ershad had appointed a cabinet fairly quickly, largely composed of technocrats in key economic positions, and a number of generals in other positions. He moved very rapidly to try to clean up corruption, and I think had some success, particularly in the early months or year and a half of the regime. And he named a rather brilliant finance minister who moved rapidly to construct a budget and an economic program, which was a very constructive departure in our view and in the view of the World Bank and the IMF.

At the same time the president and his cabinet moved vigorously to set in place a new industrial policy, which allowed for the denationalization of a significant amount of the industry which had been nationalized right after independence. And despite some cynicism on the part of many people that a policy was one thing and implementation was another, by the following December they had denationalized about a third of the jute industry and a large number of other smaller industries.

The first year or eighteen months of the new martial law administration were a period of substantial economic reform and movement in areas that were consistent with our own AID program and the policies of the Fund and the Bank. So it was a very exciting time. They brought the price of rice under control, which had been, certainly, one of the several factors that had helped provoke the *coup*. The following year they had a good harvest. They moved ahead with the decontrol of fertilizer and moving fertilizer distribution into the private sector, which was one of our important projects. It was really a very productive period, I think, and a period which all of us in the embassy found quite gratifying, particularly in the economic area.

After the first several months or a year, the president, not unlike his predecessor by two, Zia, began to slowly dismantle the martial law apparatus and moved tentatively toward elections, starting with local elections, which I think occurred about a year and a half after the *coup*. There were several efforts at a presidential election and parliamentary elections which were delayed because of uncertainties, with respect particularly to the participation of the opposition. These elections did not really come to pass until after I departed, but much of the groundwork was laid, and we certainly encouraged the civilianization and movement toward a return to some form of representative institutions.

Throughout, particularly the last year I was there, there was--as normally happens in Bangladesh as the rigor of a martial law government begins to dissipate--more and more room for opposition activity and a certain amount of conflict between opposition groups and the government. So there were occasional disorders and what are known as *hartals* there--general strikes--and demonstrations.

*Q: Were these particularly violent, these demonstrations?*

COON: Generally not. On one or two occasions, there was some violence, and I think two or three students were killed in one demonstration.

*Q: Is it mainly students that provoke these, as it is in so many places?*

COON: Students certainly played a role, and there were probably some small radical opposition groups which helped to provoke the students. So it was a combination. [Interruption]

Okay now, where were we?

*Q: You were talking about the aftermath of the coup, and you were just talking about the student riots and the fact that radical elements would stir up the students, to some extent.*

COON: I really don't have a whole lot more to say about--

*Q: Well, I would gather from what you've told me that the new government certainly seemed to be well in agreement with what the United States policy was, anyway.*

COON: Certainly in the economic sphere, yes.

*Q: And family planning, that sort of thing. So, did you have a close relationship yourself with--*

COON: President Ershad? Yes, I think I had a good relationship with President Ershad. I certainly had access to him whenever I wanted access to him. Access was not a problem. In fact I did not exercise my access more than I absolutely needed to, because I felt it was not either in the interests of the United States nor necessarily Bangladesh to have an over-identification.

*Q: With the United States.*

COON: The United States with Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a very friendly country. It's a country to which we give a great deal of aid. It is not an ally in the formal sense. It is a nonaligned country and a member of the Islamic conference.

*Q: Is there a very large Russian presence there?*

COON: There's a substantial Russian embassy, in fact. It was probably the largest embassy in town, but relations after '75 with the Soviets had cooled a great deal. Certainly, Bangladeshi relations with us were far more cordial than with the Russians. Indeed, in the--I guess it must have been in December of '83--the Bangladeshis expelled fifteen Soviet employees from the embassy

Certainly, the high point came in 1983. General Ershad came to power in March of '82. In the summer of 1983, President Reagan invited President Ershad for what is called an official working visit, as distinguished from a state visit. An official working visit implies a working session with the president, a lunch at the White House, and a brief meeting with the press, along with the president. We spent a great deal of the summer of 1983 preparing for the visit, preparing both the Bangladeshis for what they would find in Washington, and of course sending material to Washington that would be of use to them during this visit.

The foreign minister went in June. We prepared for his visit. I did not return for his visit, but of course I would return for President Ershad's visit. I went on leave in August of '83, home leave, and used that occasion for consultations in Washington and a visit to CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, US Pacific Fleet] in Honolulu to help prepare for the Ershad visit.

I flew back in late September to Bangladesh to be on the ground there, and returned in mid-October so I would be back two or three working days before the president arrived.

*Q: So you don't travel with him actually.*

COON: You don't travel with him, no. It was more important for me to get here and be sure that everything was in hand and be available here. Normally, that's the pattern.

*Q: Do you bring any staff with you?*

COON: No, I did not bring any staff with me. We had of course worked very hard for this event, to be sure that it went smoothly.

Ershad--it was going to be his first visit to the United States. And he was a man that, before he became Chief Martial Law Administrator, had really not been out of the Subcontinent. He had served as, I think, a military attaché in India, and of course he had gone through military academy in Pakistan. After he became president, I think he did go to a commonwealth conference and had made two or three foreign trips, but this was the first one to the United States, and he was, I think, both looking forward to it enormously and was a trifle nervous.



I checked into the department and moved into the Madison Hotel, where he was going to be staying, and I had a suite. He was coming into New York Sunday evening. Actually, I guess I checked in on Sunday with my bags, and then I flew up to New York on Sunday.

Just before I left for New York, I was informed that the Marine barracks had been blown up in Beirut. I recognized that this was an event of major proportions and a most serious situation for us. So I flew up to New York, very candidly, not having a very clear idea of what the impact would be on President Ershad's scheduled time with the president on Tuesday, two days later.

He came into New York, and I met him. They had been informed, I think, on the plane of the event. We spent the night in New York, and the program went as scheduled in terms of his flying down to Washington Monday morning by American military aircraft, and then we were helicoptered into town where he was greeted by the deputy secretary--the secretary was out of town--and the chief of protocol, and we went up by motorcade to the Madison. The rest of the day was largely a rest day.

But the next morning in the Madison, I turned on my television set early, because this was *the* day that we would have with the president, to hear the announcement of the American military action in Grenada, and saw the president's statement on the subject. I called the State Department to ascertain whether or not there were going to be any changes in our program.

There was no immediate answer to this question. I was supposed to be at the White House at ten-thirty to participate in the briefing of the president along with Assistant Secretary Murphy and a couple of other people. Eventually I was told to go ahead; they had no other instructions.

We indeed went to the White House, and the president came out of a cabinet meeting on Grenada, came in, and the program went ahead as scheduled. We had the briefing; he met with Ershad for about forty-five minutes, as scheduled; we had the luncheon, followed by a brief photo op with the press.

And I confess I was somewhat relieved. [Laughter]

*Q: I don't wonder. You must have been on pins and needles. This was planned, I'm sure, months ahead.*

COON: Months in advance. The only significant change in the program was that night. The Bangladeshi gave a dinner at which the vice president was going to be the chief guest, but the vice president, as you recall, was sent to Beirut, so on about two hours' notice, the chief justice was rung in to take his place, and the dinner generally went well.

*Q: Chief justices don't mind being called in on two hours' notice?*

COON: Well, he was very kind, I think, to substitute for the vice president. He is after all, the third-ranking person in the government in terms of protocol.

*Q: Well, now, who would be the one who would actually call him? Is this all done through the desk officer?*

COON: No, I think I worked through the chief of protocol.

*Q: I see. Who was at that time Selwa Roosevelt.*

COON: Yes, yes. She was very helpful, and I must say very effective. So the program went generally well. After the three days in Washington, we flew to Houston. From Houston we went to Los Angeles. The only time in my life I've been to Disneyland. It's great fun to go with a VIP because you get all sorts of special treatment. You don't have to stand in lines. And then I left him there, and he flew on to Honolulu for a rest stop. I returned to Washington where I was going to change my spots entirely, and turn into a spouse. Because His Majesty the King of Nepal was coming for a state visit, and my husband, of course, would be the ambassadorial figure. That took place right after Thanksgiving, so I did not return to post during the interval. I had some work to do in Washington.

*Q: If you hadn't been here, would you, do you think, have come on to be a spouse?*

COON: I think I probably would have, because Her Majesty was coming, too. I think the department would indeed have paid my way back. This was a great affair, because it was a state visit and involved a state dinner. I once again met the president in my new clothes.

*Q: He must have wondered if he was seeing double.*

COON: I think there was a moment or two when he wondered. I accompanied the Queen for morning coffee with Mrs. Reagan, rather than being in the Oval Office with the president.

*Q: Do you feel a little schizophrenic when you have to switch roles this way?*

COON: [Laughter] It was rather fun, actually. And the two in such rapid succession.

*Q: Now a state visit, what does that comprise?*

COON: A state visit is a more formal affair. Usually the chief of state comes with a larger entourage. They again were put up in the Madison. Blair House was having repairs done. It involves a meeting with the president, and also a state dinner.

*Q: Does your husband have input as to who is invited to that state dinner?*

COON: We usually suggest some names, but the guest list is made up by the White House.

*Q: If we could go back just a little bit, who met President Ershad besides yourself in New York? Was it the Deputy Chief of Protocol?*

COON: You know, I can't remember. There was someone from protocol and someone from the mayor's office in New York.

*Q: I see. Where does that military aircraft leave? What airport?*

COON: I think they came in to JFK. We had to shift to La Guardia, spend the night there, and the military aircraft went from there.

*Q: I see. So they leave from the commercial places.*

COON: It's the VIP configuration aircraft.

*Q: Tell us about that. What does a VIP aircraft have that other aircraft don't have? Are there armchairs?*

COON: More comfortable seats. Yes.

*Q: I dare say the food isn't quite so plastic as on most airlines.*

COON: Well, it's Air Force food. [Laughter]

*Q: Is that better or worse than commercial?*

COON: I guess it's better. At this distance I'm slightly muddled on the aircraft I was on for the Ershad visit and for His Majesty's visit. On Their Majesties' visit, after the Washington portion of the visit, they went on to--and I accompanied--to Dallas for the--no, first we went to Florida and went to Disney World.

*Q: Is this forced onto these people, or do they want to see it?*

COON: Oh, no. This is their choice. Very much their choice. So that time we went to Disney World and Epcot Center, which I hadn't seen either. I remember that most vividly because I had gotten a new pair of shoes and had a fearful corn on my toe. But in any event, then we went from there to Dallas, where we had seats on the fifty-yard line for the Dallas Cowboys- Washington Redskins football game.

*Q: Now why would Their Majesties be interested in that?*

COON: I'm not quite sure. It was a big event including dinner that night put on by one of the Murchison family, which was, I must say, a rather spectacular affair.

From Dallas we flew to Boston. His Majesty had been a student at Harvard for a year, and the president of Harvard put on a dinner for him in Cambridge at the President's House, which is a representational house.

My great delight in that was that I have seldom experienced greater cultural differentiation than a black-tie dinner in Dallas one night with the Murchison family and all of the glitter of Dallas--the table settings and the crystal--to the President's House in Harvard, also black tie, with all of the best of the Cambridge community out in the long dresses which I strongly suspect dated back to about the mid-'50s.

*Q: They de-mothball them.*

COON: And the service provided by students, and the food being best described as "rather plain New England." But the Harvard community exuding the self-confidence that only the Harvard community can exude. The contrast was absolutely marvelous. I know, because of a conversation afterward, that His Majesty was also amused by the contrast.

*Q: I suppose that the conversation at Harvard was quite of a different caliber, wasn't it?*

COON: The conversation was quite different, too. Only in these United States can you get a contrast that quite measures up to that. The President's House, as I say, is a representational house. It's an old paneled house, and perhaps was rather pleasant when lived in by the president, but now is rather dark and almost spartan in its table arrangements and that sort of thing.  
[Laughter]

*Q: How large are these parties?*

COON: Oh, heavens, I don't know. The Murchison party must have been--they probably were similar in size, maybe seventy or eighty people, something like that, but I'm just guessing at that. Maybe a hundred.

*Q: You didn't have a Texas barbecue, though?*

COON: No, it wasn't a Texas barbecue. Oh, it was very formal, *very* formal.

*Q: Everything brand new?*

COON: Everything at least a fairly recent vintage. And a beautiful harpist in the corner playing a harp; the jewelry and the designer gowns--there was no smell of mothballs at any rate.

*Q: Although the jewels may well have just come out of the bank.*

COON: The jewels may have just come out of the bank, and they came from a very large vault.

*Q: And in New England, I can just imagine: each lady had a Tiffany gold band and a solitaire, probably; not too large.*

COON: Not too large, and a very tasteful necklace of pearls--small pearls. [Laughter]

Well, I left them in Boston because I had to get back to my post.

*Q: Your husband stayed with them, did he?*

COON: Carl continued on. I think they then went on to Atlanta, the West Coast, and Honolulu, and then he came on back. The Nepalese went on to Tokyo for a visit to Japan, and Carl came on back through Dhaka to his post, but by that time I'd been back in Dhaka for several days.

*Q: Are you flown always on the same Air Force plane, or a similar one, on all of these trips around? It's all laid on by the US Government, is it?*

COON: This is all established by protocol as to exactly what is provided. As I recall, on His Majesty's visit we had an Air Force plane available, I think, throughout the visit. With President Ershad we had an Air Force plane to Houston and then I think we had to take a commercial plane to Los Angeles, if I remember correctly.

*Q: But the government picks up the tab?*

COON: For a certain number of days, and beyond a certain number of days, it doesn't. I mean, this is all very carefully defined.

*Q: In other words, they can't just come over here and spend six months cruising around.*

COON: No, no. And it's a shorter number of days for an official working visit, and a longer number of days for a state visit, but in any event it's all very carefully defined. One has to be very careful that your host government understands exactly what--

*Q: And that is your job to tell them before you go.*

COON: That's right. That they understand just exactly what we provide, how long we provide, the size of the entourage that we will look after.

*Q: How many, for example, were in the two different entourages?*

COON: Oh, I think there were a dozen or fifteen perhaps in President Ershad's entourage; well, maybe ten or a dozen, and His Majesty's was a little larger. The Bangladeshi ambassador here traveled with his president, and the Nepalese ambassador here traveled with Their Majesties. Of course they have a major role in arrangements for the visit, too. Royal visits are particularly a test of one's skills, because royal protocol anywhere is perhaps more rigorous.

*Q: But Americans are not supposed to curtsy and that sort of thing, are they, or bow?*

COON: No, we don't curtsy, but royalty has generally more of a hierarchy in terms of a, b, c's, and who can be in touch with them, and that sort of thing.

*Q: I see. Well, could you go into a little more detail on the state dinner? One reads about them in the paper, but most people don't have a chance to go. Again, are the jewels and the gowns . . .*

COON: Yes. One of the things I did in September, when I was back on leave, was head for a personal shopper in Garfinckel's. Tell her exactly what my problems were in terms of the social events I was going to have to attend, and the travel I was going to have to do, and the climatic changes between Washington and Dallas, for example. Or Los Angeles. And work out with her a small but interchangeable wardrobe. One of the things one has to take into account is one's expenditures on these.

*Q: Yes, because this is all on you, isn't it?*

COON: Oh, absolutely. And not insignificant. But I must say, she did very well by me. In fact, this is my travel dress in airplanes in warmer climates. It's crushable. [Laughter]

*Q: Well, you have to think of those things. You haven't much time . . .*

COON: Oh, yes. You have to think of those things. You have very little time, and you have to be extremely punctual, and you've got to be able to change very quickly. And the real trick in all of this is making the motorcade and being sure you're in the right seat in the right car in the motorcade, because motorcades--once the principals are in the motorcade--take off. So that one of the things you do is strike up rather good relations with the Secret Service detail, and be sure that you know who they are and they know who you are, and they get you in the right car. And you're down in time. During the Ershad visit, we left one cabinet minister in the hotel who didn't get down on time. A rather irate cabinet minister. [Laughter]

*Q: That'll teach him, indeed! I suppose the ambassador sits in the car with whoever the principal visitor is?*

COON: No. Usually on the formal part of the visit, the chief of protocol sits with the head of state.

*Q: What about the Queen? Where does she sit?*

COON: I think it's the chief of protocol and Their Majesties in the lead car. With President Ershad, it was slightly complicated because an official working visit--well, that's not true. I was going to say on an official working visit the spouse is not as much of a figure, in the sense that there's no state dinner, but President Ershad did bring his wife, and their baby, who was under a year old. And an ayah to look after the baby. That presented special requirements in terms of--I didn't have to make the arrangements, but somebody had to make the arrangement to be sure there was a crib in the room, and that sort of thing. They were extremely devoted to him--it was their first and their only child--a child born rather late in life. So there was a certain amount of bouncing baby up and down on the airplane. [Laughter]

*Q: Did you have to take care of him?*

COON: Oh, I kind of oohed and aahed.

*Q: The luncheon, what sort of thing does one wear to a luncheon? A suit?*

COON: I wore a good suit.

*Q: But of course a formal dress for the dinner?*

COON: Formal dress, yes. Fortunately, I had something left over from Morocco that I managed to get away with, so I didn't have to buy a long dress.

*Q: Now, reversing the coin, was your husband here for the Ershad visit?*

COON: No, because spouses don't figure as much in that. Begum Ershad did have coffee with Mrs. Reagan, but--now wait a minute; she had coffee or tea at the White House. I wasn't there because I was with President Ershad, so I can't remember exactly.

*Q: And somebody, I suppose, then takes her to a museum or whatever she wants to do?.*

COON: Yes, oh, yes. There have to be two separate programs, one for the principal and one for the spouse. For example, with Her Majesty the Queen of Nepal, I accompanied her to Gallaudet College and Children's Hospital.

*Q: What was her interest in the deaf?*

COON: Well, she was interested in children's things, and so we went to Children's Hospital and Gallaudet. Begum Ershad did quite a lot of shopping, and fortunately there is a particularly wonderful man at protocol who specializes in looking after spouses.

*Q: Oh, really? Who's that?*

COON: Patrick--it's an Irish name. It's not Kelly. I can't think at the moment, but he's extremely good at it, and so he accompanied Begum Ershad in shopping. They can do sightseeing, whatever the spouse is interested in, but the program is generally pretty well set.

*Q: So that you do have to arrange for all of these things as well . . .*

COON: People back here are doing it. The desk officer and protocol are hard at it.

*Q: That's very interesting that it should come, coincidentally that way, so that you literally did have to shed one skin and put on another one and see it from the flip side.*

COON: Yes, that's right. See it from the flip side.

*Q: So you really got the entire treatment of visits, didn't you? In other words, the same would hold true if Mrs. Thatcher brought her husband?*

COON: Yes, so it would be a separate program for him, as he desired. And of course, you take into account the desires of the spouse.

*Q: This brings up a very unimportant but curious thing: would Mrs. Reagan then give him a tea or a coffee?*

COON: I haven't any idea.

*Q: Following these things through you come up with all sorts of strange questions.*

*Back at your post, did you have any CODELS [congressional delegations] or any important people coming?*

COON: I think I mentioned earlier on that Ambassador Kirkpatrick came just a very few days after I arrived at post. We had relatively few visitors in Bangladesh. In fact, I positively encouraged people to come out. Peter McPherson came out, the director of AID. I had two congressmen come out: Bowen from Mississippi, the second year I was there, and Congressman Pritchard from Washington, the third year I was there. Both, to a certain extent, at my own instigation, because I felt it was useful to have members of Congress know what we were doing in Bangladesh, because it was a very substantial AID program.

*Q: What were their committees back here?*

COON: Both of them were from the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Asia. Bowen was quite interesting because he was from Mississippi and came from an area where rice was a major product. Essentially a delta country, so that he found many parallels in Bangladesh. Congressman Pritchard was particularly interested in the population program. Both of them have since retired from Congress, but had a very thoughtful and constructive approach to AID and the population programs, so I welcomed both of them, and the Bangladesh government bent over backwards to welcome them.

*Q: At whose instigation did Ershad go to the United States? Was this something that you arranged?*

COON: I was made aware, through a variety of channels, that President Ershad would certainly welcome an appropriate invitation. Of course, I reported this to my government, and after very careful consideration, we recommended that it would be in the best interests of the United States and our relationship with Bangladesh to have such a visit at the official working level. The Bangladeshis were active at this end. These visits have to be scheduled way in advance because obviously the president's time is very valuable. I think we got word late in June that the White House would be agreeable to arranging such a visit at a mutually convenient time, and eventually mid-October was settled on.

*Q: I see. So that's quite a way ahead.*

COON: Oh, sometimes these things are scheduled a year, a year and a half ahead.



*Q: I guess they are with Great Britain because their schedules are also so busy. Who pays? Do they come over on--is there a Bangladesh airline? And do they take it, if so?*

COON: My recollection is--and my recollection isn't perfect, you know--there was a lot happening in that period--they took the Bangladesh airline to London, and commercial air to New York. The King of Nepal actually took his own--Royal Nepal Airline plane--all the way to the United States.

*Q: It makes good PR for their airlines.*

COON: The Bangladesh Airline, Biman, does not normally fly to New York. It flies only to London.

*Q: At this time was your post classified as a "four" or a "three?" I understood from somebody, I can't remember who, that the post classification was raised while you were there.*

COON: It was raised to a "three," exactly when I don't remember, but it was raised to a "three".

*Q: What is the basis for raising or lowering a post's--well, they don't do it anymore.*

COON: I don't know exactly what the criteria were, but I think it has to do with the number of personnel--in other words, the size of the mission, the size of the AID program, complexity of the relationship. I'm not exactly sure what the criteria were.

*Q: That means more money, doesn't it, for the ambassador? Used to?*

COON: It used to, yes. It was ridiculous to have Bangladesh the equivalent of a very small African post, because we had a very substantial AID program, and Bangladesh is a country of a hundred million people which was taking a much more active role--in the U.N., for example. Bangladesh had a seat on the Security Council. The year I went there they very nearly became president of the General Assembly. They tied. It was the first time in history that there was a tie vote for the presidency of the General Assembly, and they had to draw lots, and the Bangladeshis lost. But this year a Bangladeshi is president of the General Assembly.

*Q: Which is an indication of the country's importance, I suppose, in the nonaligned world?*

COON: It's an indication, to some extent, of its importance, and to some extent the skill of its diplomacy. Bangladesh has a very professional foreign service. Most of the senior foreign service officers were at one time members of the Pakistan Foreign Service, you know, before 1971. The Pakistan Foreign Service was a very select and highly trained group, and a very competent group. The members of the Pakistan Foreign Service, almost without exception, who were Bengalis, came over to Bangladesh at the time of the independence struggle. And particularly at the senior levels, it's a very competent and professional foreign service.

*Q: You had mentioned that the relationship vis-à-vis the United States at the time you were there was much warmer, closer if you will, than it was with the Russians. Was this reflected in the local press? Did you get a lot of coverage on things that you did, and ribbons you cut, and that sort of thing?*

COON: Yes, we got really quite a lot of press coverage.

*Q: And how much influence does that government have over the press?*

COON: A varying amount at varying times. In the early days of a fairly rigorous martial law, there was very substantial control over the press. And as martial law relaxed, opposition parties began to emerge again. I think, up until the time I left, there was a reluctance to directly criticize the martial law administration, but there was certainly a fair amount of press criticism of policies and programs and that sort of thing.

In South Asia--Bangladesh and Pakistan--there have been recurring periods of martial law, and it's not--I know this sounds peculiar--it's relatively benign martial law. It's not a Chile--you don't have large numbers of disappearance cases. At various points there may be a number of people jailed, but then they're released rather quickly. For the most part it's not a harshly brutal kind of martial law.

*Q: How much did this curfew and martial law impinge on the freedom of you and your staff?*

COON: The curfew didn't last very long.

*Q: It didn't. Did you have to have permission to leave the city?*

COON: The embassy people, as opposed to AID, were supposed to notify the foreign ministry. I, of course, notified the government because it had to notify the local authorities for security reasons. People in AID did not, when they were visiting projects and that sort of thing. And it was a fairly relaxed system, in the sense that I'm not sure every time I flew off to open a rural electrification project that we went through a formal process.

*Q: So you were permitted to go pretty much as you wanted.*

COON: Yes, I could travel quite widely.

*Q: There was no place that was forbidden?*

COON: No. During part of my tour there, there was some difficulties in what is known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but it was not an area that was heavily populated nor was I likely to visit.

*Q: Did you have US reporters come through?*

COON: Yes. We had no American press stationed in Bangladesh, but the press corps in Delhi covered Bangladesh, and sometimes people from Bangkok came over. At the time of the coup

they all descended, and from time to time they would come. At the time of the election before the coup, there were several American correspondents that came through. For the correspondents posted in Delhi, all of South Asia was their beat, but there was an awful lot more going on in Pakistan and India and they spent far more time there. But about once or twice a year, the better ones would come over to do stories in depth on various issues.

*Q: Would you give a luncheon for them, or whatever?*

COON: I would almost always see them.

*Q: How did they write up what was going on? Were they sympathetic?*

COON: Generally speaking, I think the reporting was quite good.

*Q: You would brief them?*

COON: Certainly I would background them. There were two or three very good pieces on the population program.

*Q: What about consular problems? Did you have a lot of trouble with consular problems?*

COON: Again, part of the time I had one and a half consular officers. We had a high incidence of fraud in terms of visas, large numbers of people that wanted to come to the States.

*Q: False papers?*

COON: Oh, a whole variety of things. So that it was a fairly rigorous first post for a consular officer. I guess the whole time I was there we had a first-tour consular officer. We had relatively few problems on what we call citizen services. There was the occasional problem with an American citizen. There was one American woman who drifted between Nepal, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand who presented problems to all of the consular officers in the area.

*Q: It wasn't on the beat for the kids with their smoking pot?*

COON: We had very little--you mean youngsters coming out to Asia?

*Q: Yes.*

COON: We had very few of those. There was very little tourism in Bangladesh.

*Q: They went to India for the gurus, I suppose.*

COON: They went to India for spiritual reasons--and Nepal. My husband had far more interesting consular cases than I had. His consular officer occupied most of his or her time on citizen services with bizarre types in many cases. Now we had the occasional difficult case; an occasional death case, for example: somebody killed in an auto accident. It gets very complicated

in a country that has no formal undertaking arrangements, and the only way to embalm is to persuade the local medical college to do it, and then go out and buy the embalming fluids.

So for a consular officer it was an interesting assignment. You know, we ignore what I call the "caste" of undertakers in this country, but you try living in a country without them, and it's another kettle of fish.

*Q: And a body cannot be transported unless it is embalmed. I know it's a long and difficult and often unsavory experience. Did you have to come in much on these fraud cases?*

COON: No, I left that to the consular officer.

*Q: They were able to handle that. What about the inspectors? Did they come through?*

COON: I was blessed by the fact that the inspectors came through about two months after I arrived. I found the inspection process a very constructive one. In some ways the new team wasn't responsible for things that were out of whack, and in fact, we had a very good inspection report. You can benefit from a good inspection by their identifying areas that you ought to look at, and their making suggestions. One of the inspectors, for example, worked very closely and constructively with a consular officer on the physical rearrangement and expansion of the consular section, which we subsequently implemented. So I found it generally a very good experience.

We also had a wage-and-classification survey of all of the Foreign Service national positions, which can be an unmitigated disaster in morale terms. But I had been tipped off--again, there's a benefit to being married to an officer in the vicinity. I had been tipped off by my husband about the problems Kathmandu had experienced, and thanks to that, we were very well prepared and came out of that, on balance, better off than we went into it. A wage-and-classification survey looks at every Foreign Service national position, assessing whether it should be left as it is, downgraded, or upgraded. You have to very carefully review all the position descriptions. Perfectly wretched job. And so your preparations are very important. We were--thanks partly to my spouse and partly to a very good DCM and administrative counselor--we were very well prepared, and I think came out of that better than most of the other posts in the area.

*Q: I suppose this is a different set of people than the inspectors?*

COON: Yes. Oh, it can be a disaster if they recommend downgrading half the positions at post. You can imagine the impact on morale that has.

*Q: Do they ever fire people? Say, "You don't need that position, get rid of the person."*

COON: I'm not sure they can do that. No, they can't actually fire somebody, but it can have a very severe impact on a post.

*Q: It's not part of the scope of this study, but the business of foreign service nationals is a very tricky one, because these people are your local expertise, carry over from one to another, and*

*yet they don't have an awful lot of job security, do they? In many cases? I'm thinking of the fact that so many posts are now being closed.*

COON: At the moment, yes.

*Q: And those people are just gone. Then when you need them again . . .*

COON: And many of them have been with us through thick and thin. There were many Foreign Service nationals that stuck with us during the Bangladesh war under, in some cases, conditions and situations of very considerable danger. Our position, as you recall--the tilt toward Pakistan, did not make us wildly popular in Bangladesh at the time. We have some long-term and very loyal Foreign Service nationals.

*Q: We've been blessed with that throughout the world, it seems to me.*

*Did you have to do a lot of official entertaining?*

COON: I did quite a lot of official entertaining, probably not as much as I should have. That varied a great deal, from the very large national day reception, which I chose to give in February because of the climatic conditions--Fourth of July was early monsoon and would not have been suitable outside--to the occasional large reception, to smaller dinners, and stag dinners. I found that, particularly when I had visitors from Washington, I would very often give a stag dinner. Despite the fact that I was usually the only female, I hostessed stag dinners. People got very used to it. I don't think it bothered people.

*Q: Did you call on your DCM to be your host?*

COON: My DCM would act as my host frequently. I found in Bangladesh I would use the long dining table strictly for diplomatic corps dinners, when the protocol was obvious and you knew people were coming and you could seat them. When I had dinners that involved primarily host country nationals, it was difficult to be sure that everyone who accepted would in fact attend. I would usually use three round tables that would seat up to eight--it was more comfortable with seven--I would host one, my DCM would host another, and another American officer would host the third. Or my husband, if he happened to be down. I found that round tables blurred issues of protocol. [Laughter] And they also lend themselves to being able to remove place settings and shift people around quickly, when you get up to the point where you've got to go in the dining room, and three guests haven't shown up, or they didn't bring their wives, or whatever it might be.

*Q: So you could over-schedule things, like the airlines do, and then if they didn't come, you had more room at the tables.*

COON: That would probably have been a disaster, because if I'd overbooked, they all would have come and brought their cousin-brothers!

*Q: It's very nerve-wracking, though, isn't it?*

COON: I worked out an arrangement very handily. It worked particularly well the last year with the resident manager that I have previously described. She would stay until the time that we sat down. Five or ten minutes beforehand when we had a fix on who had come and who hadn't, I'd go out and have that little board, you know, where you have the place settings. And I would very quickly, using the board, make the changes that had to be made, and then she could very quickly make the changes physically on the table. With almost no fuss and feathers you could adapt to the situation. I could usually do that in less than five minutes. Reshuffle my cards, and then she would track it on the table.

*Q: Did you have any particular problems--we've gone through consular and so forth--with the AID people, or USIS people?*

COON: Particularly for the first two years, I had an excellent PAO. We had an active program, I thought a very good USIS program. Well-integrated into the rest of the mission and the goals of the mission. For example, we were very heavy on bringing out American lecturers on economic subjects that were supportive of what we were trying to do in the aid field. AID was in another building, and I think generally my relationships for AID were good. It's a bureaucracy that is difficult to move with any alacrity.

*Q: We had discussed before how you headed off problems, intra-mission rivalries.*

COON: Yes. I mean one was not always successful, by a long shot.

*Q: But pretty much, you didn't have any really bad problems with morale? It could be very bad at a post like Bangladesh.*

COON: I don't think we had serious morale problems, although there was a certain skittishness on security from time to time. Dhaka was a medium-threat post, and I tried to keep lines of communication open to the community. I'm not sure I was always successful--I think we did reasonably well.

*Q: All right. You sort of kept an eye on the school, that type of thing?*

COON: I think ambassadors ought to stay out of school business. My DCM kept a weather-eye on it, and particularly the last year, there were some monumental problems in the school that ended with both the principal and the deputy looking for new jobs. You know what a small community focuses on; the school and the recreation center.

*Q: And the commissary.*

COON: And the commissary! The school problem, the last year, was one that I think had the potential of being worse than it was, and it was quite bad enough.

*Q: Were you obliged to step in on that?*

COON: The DCM kept me informed, and I think I discussed the issue with a couple of people privately. I did not attempt to move in and make decisions, because I believe that a school is a community responsibility and that, in my experience anyway, an ambassador that tries to run the school is in deep trouble, and it is not the proper role for an ambassador. You have to keep an eye on it. I think ultimately my DCM--again, he wasn't on the school board, but by some very skillful guidance--managed to keep the thing from splitting the community wide open.

And the recreation association. We had only two tennis courts, and that was the big issue, scheduling for tennis courts. That was run by the recreation association. I probably--indirectly--influenced the course of events a couple of times toward more inclusiveness, rather than exclusiveness.

*Q: It is interesting how, at a post, if word gets around, the ambassador doesn't like this, or the ambassador thinks that, it carries tremendous weight.*

COON: You know, it does, and it's very hard to remember that as ambassador, all the time.  
[Laughter]

*Q: I suppose it is. Did you have a swimming pool connected with the residence?*

COON: No, not connected with the residence. I used the recreation association's.

*Q: So that was one headache you didn't have.*

COON: Thank heavens, no. No, I did not have either a tennis court or a swimming pool. I had a garden full of frogs. I used the swimming pool of the recreation association. I would go over and paddle around there to get my exercise.

*Q: Did you have a commissary? That's another thing that can be a can of worms.*

COON: Yes. We had a commissary. I think there had been difficulty just before I arrived. There was a switch in managers. That sorted itself out reasonably well. You also have the Marine Guard. I would of course participate in the Marine Ball, and from time to time, attend a Marine function of one sort or another. I think we only had one problem. I had to exercise my responsibility and ask that one Marine be relieved for a local incident.

*Q: They're such young boys, they tend to get a little unruly sometimes, and get drunk. Did you have that kind of a problem?*

COON: Well, we had the TGIF. It was TGIT there, because Friday was a holiday, so it was Thursday. I made it clear to both the DCM and the admin officer and the security officer that we had to keep an eye on TGIT, because it can get out of hand. I think it was generally fairly well within bounds.

*Q: What about on-the-job training for young officers? You have said that it was a first-time post for your consular person.*

COON: We had several junior officers at post. We had one in the political section, the consular section, the economic section. AID had a junior officer, and USIS had a junior officer. We had a fourth one that alternated between a consular and occasionally a slot as being a staff aide to me. We had a rotational program that I think was a very good rotational program, overseen by the DCM. The DCM took a lot of interest in the junior officers. Oh, we had a junior officer in the GSO section too. So we had, I think, a reasonably good rotational program. At least once a year I would have the junior officers to lunch or tea, and I should have done it more often.

*Q: You did at least do that, which brought them into the residence.*

COON: Yes, and I would try to include them from time to time in embassy functions, representational events.

*Q: Was your home used for the Marine Ball?*

COON: No, the Marine Ball was held in a local hotel.

*Q: What input did you have in this junior officer rotational program? Did you have any input in setting it up? Or was this a continuation?*

COON: It was a continuation. We had these positions at the post, and my DCM each year would spend an agonizing amount of time working out the appropriate rotation, and then would put it up to me.

*Q: Six months each, or one year?*

COON: A year. You know, from consular, say, to GSO, and from political to econ, econ to political.

*Q: Is this why you say you had one and a half consular officers?*

COON: Yes.

*Q: Now, what do you feel were your major successes?*

COON: Ouch. Sometimes I compare a chief of mission to an orchestra leader. It's your job to see that the orchestra plays from the same score, although each section of the orchestra--the brass, the violins, percussion, flutes, and whatnot--are making their own contribution. I think it is the responsibility of the conductor--or the ambassador--to see that the sections play from the same score, which is, I suppose, in another way, saying that the mission is operating from a common sense of purpose or looking toward a common set of goals.

There were certainly many times when the violins and the wind instruments may have been a few beats apart. There may have been some dissonances in my orchestra. There was an occasional cello in the back row that needed a little more practice on his instrument, but I think



for the most part we knew what we were about, and did a reasonably good job. And for this I don't take the credit. I mean, the orchestra is what does it, for the most part.

We sustained what had been a good relationship with Bangladesh, and perhaps improved it slightly. We made some genuine progress in development, particularly with the new government that came into being. We only played perhaps a relatively small role in that, but the statistics on food production, relative price stability, and economic growth in Bangladesh, I think, would substantiate that there was progress during that period. It was a period where it was a lot of fun to be there. I've often wondered what it would be like to have been ambassador in an African country that was going backwards in terms of their whole development program, and was monumentally resistant to really much of any reform.

You also have to remember that an ambassador is there at a particular period, and there's much that happened beforehand and there's much that's going to happen afterward. You can make a contribution in that piece of time but you're always building on what somebody else did.

I think I built a good relationship with the chief of state, with President Ershad, a relationship of considerable confidence. His trip to the United States was certainly a success, in terms of moving that process ahead. And we played a modest but constructive role in terms of encouraging a movement back toward more representative forms of government and the rule of law, which I consider extremely important. I think that's a plus. So it's hard to put one's finger on a single accomplishment for which one can take credit.

*Q: What about population containment?*

COON: We had a very substantial increase in distribution of certain contraceptive devices, condoms and pills, being marketed commercially through an arrangement which we heavily subsidized. That was quite a successful program. In fact, by the time I left Bangladesh, we were, through subsidized commercial marketing, selling more contraceptives than the government was giving away.

*Q: Is that so? You mean the US subsidized the commercial market?*

COON: It was called a "social marketing" program. This had been done in a number of countries, and it was really very successful in Bangladesh. We set up, in effect, a company, with an American advisor and a Bangladeshi general manager. We provided them the contraceptives virtually free, and they set up a marketing network of wholesalers who would market to retailers, very much like a pharmaceutical marketing arrangement. And the wholesalers would get a little bit of profit, and the retailers of course could get a little bit of profit, and the contraceptives were sold at a subsidized rate. The commercial marketing company also did a lot of quite sophisticated advertising. And that was very successful. We also worked with the Bangladeshi government on the voluntary sterilization program, to ensure its voluntary nature and the quality of the program. I think we contributed there.

Reliable statistics are pretty hard to come by, but we think that the rate of population increase was coming down slightly from close to three percent or over to roughly 2.5 percent.

*Q: The birth rate was down?*

COON: The rate of population increase was down. From close to three percent to perhaps 2.5 or 2.6 percent. We also had encouraging statistics on the contraceptive prevalency rate, the rate at which fertile couples were using contraceptives.

*Q: We were talking about the contraceptive prevalency rate.*

COON: Oh, and that the demand for family planning was greater than the supply, at this stage, so that there was a market there that still had not been filled.

Another area which was a very important part of the mission was in the field of agriculture, where AID supported the work of the agricultural experiment station (which I visited several times). The station was adapting rice varieties from the Rice Research Institute in the Philippines to Bangladeshi conditions, and also working on some other varieties. We provided a great deal of the phosphate fertilizer used in Bangladesh under our AID program, and in the process, helped the government to effect reforms in the distribution system of fertilizer.

*Q: It's not enough to get the stuff there; you have to get it to--?*

COON: You have to get it to the farmers, and you have to get it to the farmers when they need it.

*Q: How was the transportation system when you were there?*

COON: It's a very difficult country in terms of modern transportation, because it is essentially a delta that is intersected by literally hundreds of rivers. The traditional form of transportation is river boat, which is still a major form of transportation. Building roads in a delta which is constantly flooded is difficult, and railways--there was rather limited rail transportation. The major national highway between the port of Chittagong and the capital of Dhaka, for example, uses two ferries across rivers, and to get from the eastern half of the country to the western half of the country was a long ferry ride across the Brahmaputra.

*Q: In times of flood, could you get from one side to the other, or would you be absolutely stuck?*

COON: In some respects, the flooded periods were, I think, for many Bangladeshis, periods when transportation was easier, because they just took to their boats, and even in flooded periods, for the most part, we could get around using ferries

*Q: Do they have a history of riverboat people, people who live on boats?*

COON: Oh yes, yes. There's a wonderful tradition of riverboats and a tremendous variety of river craft that are locally made.

I traveled fairly widely in Bangladesh, from the tea estates of northeastern Bangladesh to the mangrove swamps of the southwestern part of the country; and from the Burmese border in the

southeast to the northern tip of the country. On a clear day you can see Nepal across that little strip of India known as the Shiliguri Gap.

*Q: And you took different modes of transportation?*

COON: I took jeeps. My official car, more often than not, was a jeep. I took a two-day trip by river launch, loaned to me by one of the local officials. I took the ferry from Dhaka to Khulna, which is an overnight trip by river steamer, old-fashioned paddlewheel riverboats. I don't think I traveled by train in Bangladesh.

*Q: The trains would be very, very overcrowded, wouldn't they?*

COON: Oh yes, I traveled a short distance by train, an hour or two out of Dhaka. So I used road, rail, rivers and air. Occasionally I'd be taken on helicopter flights as well as traveling on regular planes.

*Q: Would they be American helicopters?*

COON: My recollection is that they used one American--the president used an American helicopter, but I think there was also a Soviet helicopter that had been provided to the Bangladeshis several years earlier.

*Q: I see. When you went around, did you give a lot of speeches?*

COON: Yes. You tend to give speeches on these trips in most places. The Rotary Club is absolutely ubiquitous in South Asia.

*Q: [Laughter] So you were sort of passed from one to another?*

COON: Or universities.

*Q: What about education for women? Is it anything on the order that it is in India?*

COON: I can't give you percentages. Certainly in Dhaka, an increasing number of Bangladeshi girls were finishing school and going on to university, but it was certainly a far, far smaller percent than for males. My recollection is that the literacy figure for Bangladesh was around twenty-six percent, so my guess is that--and this is a guess--probably literacy among women is ten percent or less.

*Q: They would have to also have enough money to be able to spend the time going to school.*

COON: Yes. And there is the issue, of course, of very early marriage.

*Q: Done by families with dowries and the usual customs?*

COON: Oh, yes.

*Q: Did you travel abroad much? Well, of course, you did. You went to visit your husband.*

COON: I did. I traveled to Nepal, averaging about every other month. We also met on a couple of occasions in India, or traveled to India together, for a chiefs of mission meeting or other conferences in India, and we made a three-week trip to China together at our own expense. In Beijing we were used by the embassy to visit some of the Chinese officials concerned with South Asia, and some of the academic institutions in Beijing, quasi-governmental institutions.

*Q: That must have been fun. Everyone says that China is a fascinating experience. Did you have the experience that you didn't know where you were going until you got there?*

COON: The German ambassador in Dhaka, who was my colleague, had been in China a year before, and he had some thoughts. Then we stayed with the Hummels, our ambassador to China, in Beijing, so we had a pretty good idea of where we wanted to go, and then we had to work out what we could do.

*Q: You weren't on a tour, then?*

COON: We were on a tour of two, where we had a guide each place that we went. We were met by a guide.

*Q: So you had more scope.*

COON: So we had flexibility.

*Q: Well, may I ask you what were your relationships with the women officers--or were there any women officers?*

COON: Oh, yes, there were several in both the embassy and the AID mission. I'm not sure whether I mentioned this before, but a few weeks after I got there, I met with several of the professional women in the various parts of the embassy, to consult with them on how I related to women's organizations in Bangladesh. Or how I should relate to women's organizations in Bangladesh, because I was being deluged with invitations to speak to women's groups. And I think they concurred with my judgment that, at least the first year or so, I should not speak to many women's groups, feeling that I needed to establish my credentials as the American ambassador in Dhaka, not a woman ambassador.

But when I left, the women members of the staff in the embassy--professional and support staff--all had a luncheon for me. Two or three of them said that they felt it had made a substantial difference to them to have a woman ambassador. I think one of them implied that it was good for her boss. [Laughter] Who apparently was not among the most enlightened of men. And he had to report to me. So I found among the women in the embassy, generally a very positive reaction.

*Q: Did you find that this carried over at all to the Bangladeshi women?*

COON: Oh, yes. Very much so. Very positive reaction.

*Q: One of your fellow ambassadors learned, subsequent to her tour in Africa, that because she was there, two women were appointed to very high positions. Because she had been there, it was thought that, "If America does this, it's got to be the thing to do." These women met her subsequently, and they said, "Had it not been for you, we would not have been given these slots." Did anything like that happen to you?*

COON: I'm not conscious of anything specific like that, but again, as I said earlier, I was constantly told by Bangladeshi women that they were terribly glad I was there. I think it did make a significant impact on that portion of society.

*Q: What about your secretaries, your personal secretaries? They were women?*

COON: Oh, yes. I had two of the best. I had one, Julie Holmes, for the first two years, and then Barbara Matchey the last year. Both of them were highly professional and enormously competent.

*Q: What was your relationship with these particular women? What I'm getting at is this: in some cases, if the women were not married at post, which in effect you weren't, because your husband was off running another embassy, about the only person they could turn to, to sort of chat with after hours whatever, were their secretaries. Because they didn't want to create any ill-feeling by playing favorites among the wives of officers. You see what I mean? But their own secretaries they could, and so some of them came to have very good friendships with their secretaries. Or was your relationship totally different, because you were flying out to visit your husband from time to time?*

COON: No, I think I had, I think I had a good relationship particularly with the second secretary, and we joked a lot together. She was very good about dropping things off for me at the house if I had to be home early. Actually she lived very close by and so was always more than willing to drop by and take dictation, or if I had a memorandum of conversation I wanted to do. So that we had a good, warm relationship. It was not, I think, a relationship that you described, in that sense.

*Q: I think part of that's a matter of personalities, don't you? Temperaments. And by no means all of the women have done this.*

COON: I have a horrid feeling I'm going to begin repeating myself, but did I earlier tell that wonderful story about my first secretary who looked at me as I was leaving for the foreign ministry, and my slip was showing? She said, rather speculatively, "You know, Madame Ambassador, it's easier to tell a lady ambassador, "Your slip is showing," than to tell a male ambassador his fly is open." [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter] That's quite true, isn't it?*

*What about the wives? Did you see much of the wives? Or just socially?*

COON: Just pretty much socially. I had a wonderful DCM's wife, Rika Schmidt, who is a very self-sufficient, independent person, of tremendously wide interests, and a very warm personality. I think we worked out a good relationship where I did not, I think, use her as a substitute wife, the way some single ambassadors of either sex tend to use the DCM's wife. But she was there, you know, in a pinch, when I did need advice. So that was a good relationship.

*Q: Was she willing to do the usual women's clubs things?*

COON: She wasn't into that very much, but at one point when there was a problem in the women's club, she brought it to my attention and agreed to go on the board, ex-officio, to keep an eye on it. But normally she was not my sort-of substitute on that sort of thing, and there was no reason to expect her to be. In fact, I rather respected her independence.

*Q: What did happen then? The women who wanted to belong, kept it up?*

COON: Yes. The first meeting of the women's club each year, as I recall, was at the residence, and shortly after I got there, I spoke to the women's club, because I discovered there was just enormous curiosity about me. On another occasion, I had the spouses over to the residence after there would be a security incident. There was a level of tension in the community, and so I had the spouses over to the house to be sure that we had open communication to them.

*Q: You have said that the Fourth of July celebration was in February because the summer was the monsoon. What sort of entertaining was that?*

COON: That's right. It was usually, you know, a great big affair. I suppose we sent out five or six hundred invitations and probably had four hundred people, something like that.

*Q: This was to Bangladeshi . . .*

COON: Bangladeshi officials, political figures, senior members of the diplomatic corps, some third country nationals, international organizations, heads of international organizations.

*Q: And all Americans?*

COON: No, not all Americans. I only had American staff as co-hosts and hostesses, so that it was selected American staff. There was a big gathering at the club, the American club, for--

*Q: Americans who wanted to do the usual. What was this, a book-signing thing?*

COON: No, it was in the garden of the residence. We had hors d'oeuvres, reception, cocktails.

*Q: What time of day did you have it?*

COON: In the evening. It took about a week to prepare for the thing, and the GSO put up what we call shamiyanas there. They're kind of tents. And long tables, and red-white-and-blue bunting all over the place. Hired a cast of thousands in terms of servants, it seemed to me. We did most

of the hors d'oeuvres at the residence over a period of days. I guess the club did some, too. USIS would put a little bit of an exhibit in one corner of the garden, in the faint hope that it would attract people away from the entrance, and we'd have a receiving line where I would stand with my DCM, DCM's wife, military attaché, and attaché's wife.

*Q: Did you ever find that at the end of those, your hand was swollen?*

COON: It was pretty sore, yes.

*Q: You can really be wounded, injured, you can go numb.*

COON: Gosh, I was glad when those things were over. After the first year, actually, I put it up to my country team, and I said, "Okay, now we've done one, but I think this uses up an awfully large percentage of our representation funds for the year." A number of embassies were moving from the big national day receptions to what they called vins d'honneur, sort of between twelve and one, just the heads of diplomatic missions and the chief of protocol. We could move to this and abandon the big receptions. So I put it to my country team and said, "You know, if this serves your purposes, fine. I think the cost-benefit ratio for me as opposed to the drain on our representational funds, is not something that serves my interests sufficiently."

I gave them a week to think about it, and they came back, after consulting with their staffs, and at the next country team meeting, to a person they voted in favor of continuing national day. It meant the admin officer could have the head of the airport and the head of customs, and the consular officer could have the chief of police, and AID mission could have all sorts of people from obscure ministries that otherwise never—

*Q: And apparently, to those people it is much better to be invited to the residence of the ambassador than to the home of the people you know.*

COON: That's right. So it had an important payoff for the staff. So we bravely went through with it each of the three years I was there.

*Q: But they are lethal, aren't they?*

COON: I was hoping against hope they'd all say, "Well, we agree with you. It really isn't worth it. We'd rather have the money divided up for representational functions throughout the year."

National days were always a time of crisis, too, it seemed, or there was always a crisis attached to a national day. My mother-in-law was out, incidentally, all three winters--and helped me with national day. I think it was the first year, we had decided to have samosas, which are sort of a triangular Indian pasty, and there was one very old man from old Dhaka who had been a cook when Bangladesh was still part of Pakistan, and was supposed to be the best samosa cook in Dhaka.

We hired him to come in for about three days and sit in a corner of the kitchen and make samosas, about fifteen hundred or two thousand samosas. The night of the party he asked my

cook if he could spend the night rather than make the long trip home. We gave permission, and the old man stayed, slept on the floor in my cook's quarters. At five o'clock or six o'clock the next morning when the cook got up, he reached over to shake the old man, and he was stiff. He'd died in his sleep.

Of course, that scared the wits out of the servants. Fortunately, the security officer made the proper arrangements, or the police could have made their lives quite unpleasant. Of course it got in the newspapers that the American ambassador's cook died under mysterious circumstances the night of their national day. Not that it was a substitute servant. [Laughter] That raised eyebrows for a while.

*Q: Yes, I think it might. These invitations that you sent said, "in honor of the national day"?*

COON: I can't remember exactly what it was.

*Q: How would you get around that, if the national day's in July, but you're sending them out in February?*

COON: "The Ambassador of the United States of America requests your presence at a reception in honor of"--I don't know whether we said, "national day." I honestly can't remember. We may have said, "President's Day." We timed it so it was between Lincoln and Washington's birthday. It couldn't be as late as the twenty-first, because that was a major Bangladeshi national day.

That was one of the crises of the second year. The twenty-first of February was a national holiday which memorialized the Language Martyrs, three Bangladeshi students who had been killed in 1954 in language riots. It was the very beginning of the movement for Bangladesh against Pakistan. There was usually student unrest before the twenty-first of February, so one year there were some riots in early February. I think I'd scheduled national day for about the fourteenth that year.

The government clamped down and imposed a curfew. This was about two days before our national day reception. The next day there was again a curfew, partially lifted during the daytime, and the day of our national day reception, we literally didn't know until about two in the afternoon, whether or not the government was going to lift the curfew that night.

Well, it became a major political issue since the government wanted to establish the fact that the city was functioning normally. By lifting the curfew so the American Embassy could have their national day reception, they could demonstrate this. Which they did about two in the afternoon.

*Q: Oh, my word. The GSO must have been pulling his hair out.*

COON: The GSO was absolutely going out of his mind. I mean we had to get entirely ready, and then not know whether it would come off. And you know, there were those thousands of samosas.

*Q: Did you have any music there? Any loudspeaker system set up?*



COON: No, I don't remember that we did. It was not the practice there to have the national anthems.

*Q: Did the head of state come?*

COON: No. The head of state did not come; he traditionally dispatched a member of the cabinet. One year we actually had five cabinet ministers, which was a notch on our nightstick that year. The other ambassadors and high commissioners always counted them--the success of your national day depended on the number of ministers you had, and we got up to five one year. [Laughter]

*Q: So you were really doing very well. Did they ever have to come around and check out your garden for guns, and that sort of thing?*

COON: Yes. I had the president for, either tea or dinner once, and I think they came by and checked, very inconspicuously. Of course, there was a heavy police guard, at the time of national day, a very heavy police guard. After all of the guests had left, we would always invite the police, the VIP detachment, in to have a ginger ale or a coke or a beer.

*Q: What did you do for the family holidays of Christmas and Thanksgiving? How did you and your husband work that out?*

COON: I think two out of the three years, I spent Christmas in Kathmandu, and the third year, my husband came down, and we spent Christmas in Dhaka.

*Q: He had a daughter with him, didn't he, at this time?*

COON: I think she was out every Christmas. I can't remember for sure. She took a term off almost every year he was there, so that between the term off and the summertime, she was there at least half the time.

My mother-in-law came out each Christmas. She would spend Christmas in Kathmandu, and then come down to Dhaka and spend most of the rest of January and February with me, and then go back to Kathmandu for a final week. To the absolute delight of the Bangladeshis, she preferred Dhaka to Kathmandu.

*Q: Had her husband done any of his anthropological work in that part of the world?*

COON: No, he'd never been in Dhaka. He'd been briefly in India and very briefly in Nepal, and she'd been there, too, but not in Bangladesh.

*Q: So she had a great interest in all of these cultures?*

COON: She had a great interest in seeing as much as she could. The diplomatic corps just loved her, and she loved the social side of things. So she was a great asset.

*Q: If you had company, I suppose you weren't terribly lonely then?*

COON: Well, I had company for a couple of months in the wintertime, which was rather nice, and then Carl and I got away each summer for three or four weeks of leave at home. But there were fairly long stretches when I was there by myself. I had far less company than Carl did, let's put it that way.

*Q: Because of where you were.*

COON: Right.

*Q: Yes, I know; people go to Kathmandu more easily than they go to Dhaka. Oh, that reminds me, the last time you said that while you were there, the post was raised from a "four" to a "three," which was only logical because it's such a big country. Had that anything to do with you, yourself?*

COON: No, I don't think so. And the whole business has been abolished since then.

*Q: Yes, I realize that. Your husband's was a Class Four post, I believe?*

COON: I think it was raised to a "three," too.

*Q: I was just wondering. People always want to know how it is if one gets more than the other; how do they work it out? I always assume that they're adults, and they probably work it out very well, but one has to ask these questions.*

*Did you ever have any problems with being lonely, and not having anybody that you could talk over your problems with? Because it does put you up there on a plateau, and there is an invisible wall between the chief of a mission and everybody else.*

COON: Yes, yes. I think I was awfully glad to see Carl when we got together, almost once a month, because it did give me a chance to talk and let my hair down. It is a somewhat lonely job. There's no two ways about it. I had an awfully good relationship with my DCM, and that makes an enormous amount of difference.

*Q: Were you able to see him and his wife socially, much?*

COON: I saw them socially, well, not every week, but fairly frequently, yes. And he certainly acted as my host on a lot of the entertaining that I did, whether it was stag or whatever.

*Q: Was this because of custom in the country, or was this your idea? To have him as your host.*

COON: I think it was my idea, because I found that, as I said earlier, using round tables was much handier. I would often have three round tables, and he would be host at one, and maybe the

PAO or the military attach or Carl, if he was down, at another, and then I would be hostess at one.

*Q: That's a very good idea. Are they beginning to equip embassies with round tables?*

COON: I don't know. It was very simple, because these were three great round circle pieces of wood that they just carted in on removable legs, and once they were covered with a tablecloth they looked all right. They weren't there permanently. We kept them in storage.

*Q: How often did you entertain your own staff?*

COON: Most of my entertaining involved Bangladeshis and other members of the diplomatic corps, and I entertained my own staff, insofar as they helped me out on these occasions. I tried--and again my secretaries were fairly helpful--to include different junior officers at different times. I don't know how successful I was at that.

*Q: In other words, you had a sort of rota system, and you kind of went around the embassy?*

COON: I tried to. I tried to have my secretary remind me of people that I had left out. You'd try to have people who had common interests with the guests.

*Q: Did it happen that any of your people ever came to you and said, "I wish you would have a dinner for x-y-z, because we're trying to get to him, and this would be a good way to do it?"*

COON: Well, very often these dinners were either related to a visiting fireman, or they were purposeful in some other sense, so I would ask for suggestions, particularly from my political counselor and the DCM, on a guest list. Indeed, I welcomed suggestions. Otherwise you tend to sort of bog down with the same people.

*Q: What possibilities did you have for a private life?*

COON: I don't think an ambassador has a private life. You're kind of a public figure the whole time, in many ways, as long as you're in the country. Now as soon as I got out of the country, and got to Kathmandu, Carl might have been on stage, but I used to fight tooth-and-nail to have as few social events as possible, and just to hole up together or go off on picnics or walks or whatnot. Because that was as close as I could come to being a non-public figure.

*Q: And the opposite when he came to visit you. I suppose he relished it, too.*

COON: And the opposite when he came to visit me.

*Q: Now, this is getting down to it: do you think that he felt as exposed as you felt? Because you were an oddity. People have seen men ambassadors forever.*

COON: That's a hard one to answer, because the circumstances were a little different. Obviously, our personalities are different. I think to some extent, you're right, that being a woman

ambassador, I was surely not invisible, but being the American ambassador in Kathmandu, male or female, you're not exactly invisible either. He was, to a large extent, a public figure, and his social life was much heavier than mine.

*Q: Was it? Partially that may have been because he'd been DCM there before, and he already knew everybody?*

COON: Well, yes, and it's just a place where there was an awful lot more social activity, because there were people coming through Nepal all the time, you know, visiting firemen of one sort or another. So I think he certainly was a public figure. Carl always has had a capacity of retreat into his music. He had a room set aside in Kathmandu, which was a private sitting room, right off the bedroom. In fact, it had been the bedroom of the residence, and he moved into the dressing room. We, in effect, slept in a large dressing room. He used what had been the bedroom as a sitting room, which was his music room. And he can retreat into a private world of music.

*Q: You said he composes also.*

COON: Well, he does now, since he's retired. Listening to music is a very important part of .

*Q: Have you anything that you can use in that way?*

COON: I played golf some in Dhaka. I played very badly but it meant getting outdoors, at any rate. The golf course was in the military cantonment so it meant it was reasonably private. Walking was difficult in Bangladesh because there were always people. It also meant I didn't have to have a bodyguard when I played golf.

*Q: The rest of the time you did have one?*

COON: The rest of the time, when I was out of the house, I was supposed to have a bodyguard with me, yes. Provided by the Bangladeshis, a plainclothes police. So everywhere I went I had this--

*Q: Did they provide them for all chiefs of mission?*

COON: No.

*Q: Why particularly the American one?*

COON: There had been some threats, and there were when I was there.

*Q: From an element of the people?*

COON: No. Well, of course, the Libyans and the North Koreans and the Iranians and the Afghans were all in Dhaka.

*Q: Why would the Afghans be against us?*

COON: Well, it was the communist government. That, I don't think was a particular problem, but the Libyans and the North Koreans and the Iranians were always a trifle unpredictable. And the PLO. There had been an incident with the Egyptian ambassador. I guess it must have been after Camp David--He had a run-in with PLO students. There were some Palestinian students, too. It was not that I was particularly concerned, but the host government preferred to have a bodyguard.

*Q: I see. The US did not assign anyone to you over there?*

COON: No, we did not have an American. We had an American security officer, but he did not accompany me everywhere I went.

*Q: Did you have an armored car?*

COON: Partially armored car.

*Q: Were you supposed to travel a different way to work each day?*

COON: We were supposed to travel a different route to work, but there was one choke point that you couldn't avoid. [Laughter] You had to go past that one point, and there were really only two routes, so we alternated between the two routes.

*Q: Did it bother you, these threats?*

COON: No. It just goes with the job.

*Q: You're very phlegmatic about it, Jane.*

COON: Well, it just does. [Laughter]

*Q: Was Carl threatened at all?*

COON: No, no.

*Q: You didn't want to say, "How about swapping here?"*  
*[Hearty laughter]*

COON: No. You never know how seriously to take these; you know, there are a lot of crackpots out there, and you're not quite sure how seriously to take a crackpot, but then the Islamic Jihad sent me a letter at one point, and I was not prepared to dismiss that as a crackpot. So they beefed up security after that.

*Q: I'm surprised, because usually women are not bothered [in a Muslim country].*

COON: No.

*Q: But you were the authority figure, so even though you were a woman, they thought they had to, I suppose?*

COON: Well, I was never, in fact, bothered.

Outside of Dhaka, the Bangladeshis always insisted on providing a jeep-load of police to either precede or follow on--generally follow on, because of the dust--the ambassadorial vehicle, which would go hurtling down these brick roads at about eighteen miles an hour.

*Q: When you had to travel around in jeeps, did you have to fly a flag on the jeep?*

COON: [Laughter] Yes, we'd fly a flag. There's a thing mounted on the front--it was a kind of comfortable jeep, but it was a jeep, and there would be a flag mounted on that, and a jeep-full of Bangladeshi policemen with their pre-World War II rifles behind. Then every time I'd pull up at a guest house, there would be a guard of honor from the police, and I would have to review the guard of honor, which meant standing on a concrete block while they went through an exercise of banging their guns and putting them over their shoulders, whatever it is. Presenting arms, I guess it's called. At the crucial moment, I would say, "Dismiss," and they would all sort of march off.

One feels like a perfect fool under these circumstances, but it is tolerable unless you have on-lookers--which happened on one occasion when two or three of my children were visiting, and two of my daughters stood directly behind the policemen and made faces at me while I was reviewing the guard. [Laughter]

*Q: Children can be incredible! And the poor souls, they're taking it all so very seriously. What impact on you, on your personal feelings and your image of yourself did it have, having all this power?*

COON: All this power. [Laughter]

*Q: Well, you do. I mean, let's face it, a chief of mission is a very powerful individual. You're little America out there. You are the president, in effect.*

COON: There are a couple of things you have to remember: one is that it goes with the office, and not you as a person, so you have to exercise a fair amount of care in not getting a swelled head. That it is not you, Jane Coon, but it is the American ambassador that the whole thing is about. On the other hand, I think I would be considerably less than honest if I didn't say that I just *thoroughly* enjoyed the job. There isn't a better job in the world. It's a marvelous job. There you are, after all of these years in the bureaucracy, not having to *clear every blessed thing*. Being *in charge* of something.

*Q: Having your word be what goes.*

COON: Well, it's less that, because I think you do have to take into account a lot. But it is a wonderful job. It was great fun.

*Q: Not because of the perks, the physical perks that go with it, but just the freedom, you mean?*

COON: No, it's not so much the physical perks as it is the--gosh, what is it? Well, I suppose we all join the Foreign Service because we want to have something to do with the formulation and implementation of American foreign policy abroad. When you reach the chief of mission level, there you are abroad, and you may not be making the largest waves in the ocean, because Bangladesh is not the largest continent in the firmament, but you are orchestrating a relationship. And that is a lot of fun.

*Q: Must be. Did you and your husband find that, in addition to your own individual jobs, you had to pay attention to the other one's job, too? Did you ever have to go up there and sort of sort out things in his residence, or did he ever have to come down and be at a particular function that you needed to have a spouse for?*

COON: I'm still thinking about that last question, to be perfectly honest.

*Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Finish that by all means.*

COON: There was another element that I was just thinking about. I suppose in any kind of foreign service work, there is a lot of variety in any given day, but as an ambassador, you deal with an unbelievable amount of variety. Because it's not just the political section or the economic section, it's AID and USIS and the government of Bangladesh and all of the ministries of the government of Bangladesh, and the economic section, and the political section. I remember making a note--somebody asked me once what an ambassador did during a day, and I made a note of the incredible variety of things that came across my desk, and it was astonishing.

*Q: Is it a little bit like putting the pieces together of a puzzle? And you're the only one that has the solution?*

COON: To some extent, yes. You're not always putting the pieces together, because you don't have total control of the puzzle. Let's put it that way. I mean, the relationship is a relationship which the government of Bangladesh has something to do with, too, or many other countries. But yes, I think you have an overview which nobody else has, and that makes a difference.

*Q: And that must be fun, too.*

COON: And that's fun, yes. That's a lot of fun, because you're not constrained. This is something, I think that's one of the things career ambassadors have to learn, that theirs is an overview position. They're not a super-political officer or a super-econ officer. They are overseeing all of the work of the mission.

*Q: Could you possibly--I know every day was different--but could you possibly give me a typical day? If you can dredge up from your memory . . .*

COON: Oh, my stars. It's hard to dredge up from the memory, but I'd get up and listen to VOA at breakfast, usually having mangoes in the mango season, or papaya the rest of the year.

*Q: How early did you have to get up? Was it an early day?*

COON: My recollection is that I--I'm always a fairly early riser, six-thirty or something like that. After listening to VOA or BBC, I'd read the wireless file and the local newspapers, and then head into the office by eight-thirty or so. My car and driver and bodyguard would show up, and I would go about eight miles into town. One of the things that was rather good for ambassadorial hubris, was that my great black car would pull up in the circular driveway in front of the building in which the embassy was located. We rented the fourth and fifth floor of this perfectly dreadful building. (There's now a new chancery under construction). And there was always a police guard in the rotunda of the building one ground floor. As my car would drive up, the police guard of half a dozen--two or three of whom had been sound asleep on the bench--would finally leap into some sort of vertical position and whack their rifles on the floor in anything but unison.

And I would be ushered out of my car, march with my bodyguard across the rotunda up to the elevator. I had been told by the operator, with great pride, that it was the oldest elevator in Dhaka. And the button didn't work. So having marched with great dignity, my bodyguard would pound upon the elevator door until he attracted enough attention for the operator to bring it down. [Laughter] You would mount with all of your ambassadorial dignity intact, of course, to the third floor, where for security reasons you had to get off, and then walk up to the fourth.

Then I guess I'd start out by reading the telegrams, and on this particular day, perhaps there was a country team meeting, which lasted for an hour. Following country team, I might make some notes for myself from an instruction from Washington and go off to the foreign ministry with a junior officer along as note taker, to make a representation on some U.N. issue to the foreign secretary.

*Q: You said you'd make notes for yourself on this representation?*

COON: I would frequently make little notes to myself from Washington's instruction. Or have my secretary, if there was any detail involved, prepare what's known as a "non-paper." Where you would note down your talking points on a piece of paper, then leave it with the foreign secretary or the foreign minister, which saved all kinds of trouble, in terms of his side taking notes.

*Q: And you would take a younger officer, a junior?*

COON: I would generally take a young officer with me to be my note taker. I'd come back and perhaps the AID director would come over for a meeting on the--for example, the flood situation. [Telephone interruption] Say a Bangladeshi request for additional food assistance, in light of the recent floods. I might go home for lunch, and a short rest if I knew I was going to be going out that evening to a couple of functions.



*Q: About how long would you give yourself for lunch?*

COON: It depended. If I had to cocktails and dinner at night, I would sometimes give myself an hour and a half to rest. Eat and rest. Otherwise I might eat in the embassy snack bar, where I tried to eat with different groups of people, or I might have a business luncheon.

*Q: When you had a business luncheon, it was more than an hour, I'm sure.*

COON: Oh, yes.

*Q: Did you have many business luncheons at the residence?*

COON: Not a lot, because it was a fair distance.

*Q: Went to restaurants, did you?*

COON: Either that or was invited out by someone else. Occasionally I went to a restaurant, and occasionally home.

I might come back to the chancery at that point and receive a call from a newly arrived ambassador from, say, an Eastern European country, followed by a session with the DCM and the security officer over reports that the embassy had received that there was going to be some civil unrest and strikes in downtown Dhaka, not directed at the Americans but in the vicinity of the embassy. We'd have to make a decision on whether or not the staff should come to work, should come to work late, or what steps we needed to take to alert people.

Then on my way home, I might stop by and have a lengthy tea and chat with either a Bangladeshi political contact or with an ambassadorial colleague to discuss what was happening politically.

And go off to India national day, or a reception, and conclude the day with dinner at my house for a visiting Congressional staffer and key people from the ministries of food and agriculture.

*Q: And then you'd tumble into bed around twelve o'clock. Whew! About how often did you go out, or have people in?*

COON: It varied a lot by season. In the cold weather there was more entertaining, and you'd be out or entertaining probably four times a week, five times a week, maybe.

*Q: Of course you could have two or three things in an evening, couldn't you?*

COON: Yes, you might have more than one thing.

*Q: There might even be more than one national thing to go to.*

COON: Yes, although as I said, some of the missions were mercifully changing over to the vin d'honneur system, which meant only just an hour, from twelve to one.

*Q: And you'd just zip over there at noon, sign their book?*

COON: Just zip over there, sign the book, have a glass of champagne.

*Q: Did you find that some evenings you thought, "Oh, I just simply cannot get dressed and go out one more time this week"?*

COON: [Laughter] No. I don't know, that's just something you had to do.

*Q: How many embassies were there, there?*

COON: We had about thirty-five, forty missions.

*Q: Did you go to most of the national days?*

COON: I went to most of the national days. During that period we were not going to Soviet National Day, and of course we weren't seeing the North Koreans or the Libyans. Although the Iraqi ambassador and I got on very nicely, we didn't go to each others' national days, as I recall, because our countries didn't have diplomatic relations. There were one or two others.

*Q: What about clothing? Did you find that you had to conform in your clothing to any customs?*

COON: Well, I was very careful to dress rather conservatively. There were two guiding considerations. One was comfort, which meant light cottons, and two was modesty, which meant almost always long sleeves and high necks.

*Q: High necks and long sleeves--how did you find them?*

COON: Fairly high necks; I don't mean terribly high necks. I wore conservative cotton dresses to work most days.

*Q: Did you find actual dresses, or did you have to use, what do they call those things, "hostess gown" type things?*

COON: Oh, for the evening,--I discovered in Delhi a source for some very nice long dresses, embroidered dresses that were being done by a boutique for Bloomingdale's. In Delhi they were only about fourteen dollars apiece. So I got several of those. I also wore short dresses in the evening

The best thing about Dhaka, so far as dress was concerned--I am not exactly a fashion plate, nor have I ever been a fashion plate, but for the first time in my life, I set the styles. You see, I never could wear the wrong thing. It was absolutely glorious. [Laughter]

*Q: That's wonderful! You said you found your own source for these long dresses, because to find long dresses of a thin material that aren't décolleté is very difficult sometimes.*

COON: Yes, and these were all quite high-necked.

*Q: What you wore in the daytime sounds very much like shirtwaist dresses. Did you find pure cotton was the best?*

COON: Yes.

*Q: Could you find pure cotton?*

COON: I shopped like mad every time I came back here. I'd shop like mad for pure cotton, because it made all the difference, I think. Polyester is just awful. And you don't have to worry about laundry there. You have a dhobi--somebody to do your laundry for you.

*Q: I know we talked about how the residence was run, but how many servants did you have, did the embassy provide?*

COON: We had a full-time cook, and two bearers, and the part-time dhobi, who did the washing and ironing, came twice or three times a week, I can't remember which--and a couple of gardeners. I don't think I had an outside sweeper; I guess the gardeners did it.

*Q: Is this on the caste system the way it is in India?*

COON: To some extent, yes. My staff inside, the cook and the two bearers, all three were men, and two were Muslim, and one was a Christian, and I think the gardeners were Christians, actually. And then of course there was a chowkidar--a guard on the gate that was provided by the embassy, plus the police guards.

*Q: Of course you had a chauffeur.*

COON: And a chauffeur. Sounds like a cast of thousands.

*Q: Oh, I know, but it's absolutely essential to keep the place going. Did you have any health problems out there?*

COON: I was extraordinarily healthy; no. I had, you know, an upset stomach a couple of times, a touch of dysentery.

*Q: Is there a great history of dysentery out there?*

COON: Yes.

*Q: Amoebas, and things like that?*

COON: Bangladesh still has a very high incidence of cholera. The United States had sponsored a research institution in Dhaka from the late fifties known as the cholera lab. It did much of the early research on cholera, which has led to the oral rehydration method of treatment for diarrheal diseases.

*Q: Oh, was that so? That came through the--*

COON: Yes. It came from Dhaka. The cholera lab was transformed in the late seventies into an international lab, structured a little bit like the Rice Research Institute or the Philippines Simmet, the wheat research center in Mexico, with an international board of directors. It had the wonderful name of the ICDDR, the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh. They branched out from cholera and were working on a number of other diarrheal diseases. Of course, there's a tremendously high incidence of diarrheal diseases, and it's a major cause of infant mortality. So you felt you had some of the better medical talent around for those occasional bouts of diarrhea.

*Q: They understand their own microbes, too.*

COON: That's right.

*Q: Were you given any special awards when you were there?*

COON: I don't remember any, no. Oh, I got the performance pay a couple of years, I think. Either once or twice.

*Q: Oh, yes. I remember seeing that in the State Department magazine. You got it a couple of times.*

COON: Did I get it a couple of times?

*Q: Yes, you did. I can remember checking on it. You know, if you happen to know somebody, the name always leaps out at you. I wondered if the Bangladeshi made any awards. Some countries never do, and other countries fall all over themselves giving ribbons and things.*

COON: No, no. They do not.

*Q: Were there any things that you had to leave unfinished when--well, naturally this is an ongoing thing--but were there problems that you just couldn't resolve while you were there? Or did you feel that you got a handle on most everything you wanted to?*

COON: Anything like this is an ongoing situation. As I left, there had been fairly severe floods in June and July of that year, and it was very much up in the air as to what the situation was with respect to food requirements.

*Q: But the programs for which you had had responsibility, you felt they were well in train?*

COON: Many of them had started before I got there, and we moved them along, and they continued after I left, I'm sure. I think it's relatively rare for an ambassador to actually initiate a totally new program or policy. There are rare moments when this happens.

*Q: But as you looked back, when you were leaving, how did you feel about the job you had done?*

COON: I looked back, and I felt, you know, a sense of very real satisfaction. The president very kindly gave a private dinner for me, which he did not do for any but a few ambassadors. I think I generally felt very good about it.

*Q: I wonder if we could just hop back a bit, and let me ask you again that question that I had asked before: did you have to have any responsibility as a spouse for your husband's mission?*

COON: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, we didn't get back to that.

*Q: Oh, that's all right. It's just that you're the only one who can answer this.*

COON: Both Carl and I, I think I mentioned before, had what we called household managers, so that I had a sense that he was well looked after. I wasn't going to go up there with white gloves and run my finger over things. I mean occasionally I'd go up, and I would make suggestions. Carl is not somebody who is terribly conscious of his physical surroundings, so that it occasionally took a little bit of attention.

The only time when it was fairly important, was after His Majesty and Her Majesty made their state visit to the United States. As a token of their appreciation for Carl's role in this, they indicated that they would be happy to accept an invitation to dinner. One never quite knew when they were going to do this, so that we had only about four days' notice that Their Majesties had accepted Carl's long-standing invitation for dinner, and would be happy to come on such-and-such a night.

So I whipped up from Dhaka the day beforehand and pretty much did the planning for that, working with his resident manager. When Their Majesties came to dinner, it was always considered to be a confidential event that others didn't know about. I can remember conferring with the principal Nepalese who worked for the GSO--in fact he was so good that he ran the whole GSO section, really. I decided to use a small parlor instead of the dining room, because the dining room for four of us was going to be rather cavernous. It meant rewiring, getting some wires laid down for lamps and so on, so I asked him to come over, no explanation of why, but I said I wanted to do a certain amount of rewiring in that room, and I wanted it done very quickly.

He couldn't have been more attentive and more helpful and more cooperative, and before he left, he looked at me and he said, "Do you have such-and-such brand of cigars and such-and-such kind of brandy?" Which he knew was precisely what His Majesty drank and smoked. [Laughter] So that went well.

That was about the only time I remember actually. Carl had his national day in the winter, too, a little after mine. Anyway, I did not go up for his national day, and he did not come down for mine.

*Q: This particular incident, when the King and Queen came, did you get a frantic call from your husband, saying, "For heaven's sakes, come and cope with this"?*

COON: Well, it was sort of odd because we had been trekking and then gone on to a conference in Delhi. I can't remember--the deputy secretary or the secretary, maybe was coming through Delhi, and the South Asian ambassadors all gathered. I was returning to my post then. I could either go Delhi-Calcutta-Dhaka, or I could Delhi-Kathmandu-Dhaka, and it was slightly more expensive but more convenient to go Delhi-Kathmandu-Dhaka. Calcutta airport was awful. So I was on my way back to my post, and when we landed in Kathmandu from Delhi, Carl's DCM came out and said that His Majesty had accepted. This was on a Monday and His Majesty had accepted for dinner on Thursday. Well, I had to get back to my post, because I'd been away. So I went down and spent Monday and Tuesday, and came up Wednesday afternoon. And His Majesty came on Thursday, as I remember.

*Q: Cutting it a bit fine.*

COON: So I was cutting it a bit fine, but we made it. Also, every time I went up to Kathmandu I would take a bag of shrimp or crab. We had these soft refrigerator bags, and my cook would pick five or six dozen crabs, and I would take crabmeat and shrimp and other seafood up to Carl. He became very popular in Kathmandu for the table he set, because seafood was very uncommon there. In exchange, Carl had an avocado tree from which he must have gotten a thousand avocados one year, and I would take to Dhaka avocados and more temperate fruits.

*Q: Very nice. In effect then, your going up there really was the only way you had to get away from this goldfish bowl existence.*

COON: That's right.

*Q: And vice versa for your husband. Any last things you want to say about your tour as an ambassador, because it was a high point in your life, I assume.*

COON: Yes, yes. No, I can't--

*Q: Any changes you would make, if you could go back and do it over again?*

COON: Oh, heavens. I can't imagine anyone doing that job and not thinking afterward that they would have done something a little differently; of course you would do things differently.

*Q: Sure. But nothing major?*

COON: I don't, you know. One's not going to do it again, so not to worry.

*Q: Nothing that you thought, "Oh, that was such a terrible mistake, I've got to warn everybody: don't try that, because it doesn't work."*

COON: No, no.

*Q: By the time you get to be a chief of mission, when you've gone up through the service, you pretty much know how to behave--how to handle things?*

COON: Well, you hope you do. I mean, there's always going to be a gaffe or two, let's face it.

*Q: Did you have any adjustment problems when you came back?*

COON: Probably the wisest thing we did, and I look back on it and still marvel at our good sense, was the arrangements we made for a holiday on the way home. We have a couple of very good friends who have a connection with Alaska. We had canoed down the Yukon with them on another vacation. We arranged that we would leave our posts on the same day and meet them in Fairbanks, Alaska, where they had arranged a canoe trip down the Porcupine, a tributary of the Yukon.

We had planned the trip the previous summer, I guess, when we'd been home, but I somehow thought the odds were about one in a hundred that we could actually pull this off. Carl and I both scheduled our departure for the third of August. Carl took the Royal Nepal flight from Kathmandu, which stopped in Dhaka, and I got on in Dhaka. I was probably the only chief of mission to ever leave Dhaka with long underwear and a down jacket in her hand luggage. [Laughter] We flew to Hong Kong, spent the night, and then the next day got on a plane, and flew, it seemed like forever, to Seattle and Fairbanks, where we met our friends, and about three days later, we were north of the Arctic Circle in the Yukon territory at a place called Old Crow. We had a small plane fly in a couple of canoes and a couple of kayaks for us.

And we spent the next two weeks on a river entirely north of the Arctic Circle being entirely physical. And with no people. That was the best therapy I think anybody could ever have had.

*Q: Yes, I would think so, too. Plus the fact it was a decompression chamber. And cooled off.*

COON: And more mosquitoes than people. For ten days we literally didn't see another person--out of the fourteen days. So that was a wonderful decompression because both of us were exhausted. You know, packing and the farewell parties and all of that.

*Q: How did you manage to finish your posts at the same time?*

COON: We had begun in '81 within about six weeks of each other, and we managed to leave by sort of telling the Department over and over again for the previous six or eight months that we would be leaving on the third of August. Well, it's amazing how the Department gets used to a notion, if you just tell them often enough. [Laughter] And we worked it out with both of our DCMs. Mine took his home leave or vacation early.

*Q: How do you think Carl felt about you being an ambassador at the same time he was an ambassador? Do you suppose he felt it took away from his accomplishment?*

COON: No, I think he was delighted. I think he realized that I hadn't--particularly the latter part of the nine years I was out--had not been altogether happy in a spousely condition, you know, not working. So I think he was delighted that I had my post and he had his post. It's not something I think we'd necessarily want to repeat, because I don't think we enjoyed being separated that much and that long.

*Q: Didn't it cost you an awful lot of money flying back and forth all the time like that?*

COON: Well, it was about a hundred and fifty dollars or a hundred and sixty dollars a round-trip.

*Q: That's not too bad, but still you had to do it twelve times a year. You went up and he came back.*

COON: We didn't do it twelve times a year because we had our home leave together. If we'd been in Vienna we probably would have spent that much on the opera, and there was a great shortage of that sort of thing. There wasn't much else you spent money on at those posts.

*Q: Did you find, when you finally did get together, that you just didn't want to talk about the office at all, or did you used to save up things, and say, "I'll ask Carl how he would react?"*

COON: We tended to talk shop. And, Ann, I think I got ideas that I tried out in Dhaka from him, and he got ideas that he tried out in Kathmandu from me.

*Q: I think it's wonderful, because you're the only ones that I know of where the Service did get two, but not for the price of one. They had to pay double!*

COON: Yes, thank heaven. But they got more than two for the price of two, because we were both learning from each other. It did not occur to me before I went out just how useful this would be. I think there were a lot of mistakes I might otherwise have made or he might otherwise have made, but if one of us made them first, the other one was less likely to.

*Q: That's right; you wouldn't both make the same ones. How about when you came back here? Did you enjoy your next assignment?*

COON: Yes. I pretty much spent a year writing about the subcontinent, and I think I discovered that I'm not by temperament a research person, but I found it a very useful year intellectually.

*Q: That was at the--*

COON: At the American Enterprise Institute. Then subsequent to that I became dean of professional studies at the Foreign Service Institute, which I also found a very interesting and stimulating job.



*Q: Do you want to comment on that? What your main duties were?*

COON: Essentially, we were attempting to introduce a new curriculum for Foreign Service professional studies. I was attempting to bring into the process of curriculum design, not only the knowledge of Foreign Service officers, but some of the methodological skills of professional trainers. So I was trying to marry professional trainers and Foreign Service officers. I found that a very interesting management job.

*Q: Why did you decide to retire? Why now?*

COON: Why now? I think a variety of things. Carl had retired, and I couldn't quite visualize Carl--even assuming I got another embassy--in a dependent spouse role. Although presumably some of this computer business could be portable, I think it would be difficult. And I had reached a point where the bureaucracy was no longer fun, and when that happens it's time to get out. It just felt right to move on to something else.

*Q: You say you couldn't see your husband in a spousal role. Did that ever make you cross? Because you certainly had to be in a spousal role for long enough.*

COON: [Laughter] No, because I think this was combining with a sense that I'd sort of felt--

*Q: You'd had it yourself. Do you feel that, while this was a high point of your career, being an ambassador, and in his career, his being an ambassador, that you really sacrificed quite a bit those years?*

COON: Actually, I think I probably sacrificed more during the period when I was an office director and deputy assistant secretary, because I was working so terribly hard, and that, particularly the last two years there, '79 to '81, I neglected my family. In terms of not just my time, but attention and focus.

*Q: Sure, sure. I'm interested in this, because you're not the only one who has discussed this: of the ones who are married, there seems to be terrible guilt feelings among these very high-achieving women, and I'm sure that their husbands don't feel any guilt if they don't get home in time to take care of the family.*

COON: That's right; that's right. Yes. I felt very guilty about those years, particularly, that four years from '77 to '81. My children were--the youngest was--let's see, Ellen graduated from Andover in '79, and Richard in '81, so it wasn't as if they were little, and they were both in boarding school--but I still felt guilty!

You know, I can remember the Thanksgiving of 1979. On Wednesday before Thanksgiving the embassy in Islamabad was overrun. The kids were all home for Thanksgiving, and I managed to stagger in, I think, for about an hour and a half for Thanksgiving dinner, and the rest of the weekend I was in the office. And, okay, you know they understand that it's a crisis, but still . . .

*Q: But still . . . You know there were things they wanted to ask you about.*

COON: That's right. Yes.

*Q: A mother's the linchpin in the family, there's no question about that. But I just wonder if this is going to always go on. Is there no way that men can share the emotional burden of the children as well?*

COON: Carl changed his views, very radically, when he was widowed. He had always been, you know, home at seven o'clock or seven-thirty, and his wife was supposed to have the kids under control and fed and be able to sit down and have a martini with him. When she died, he realized that he had left the management and the raising of the children almost entirely to his wife.

*Q: Which I think all men of his generation did.*

COON: Exactly. All men of his generation. He changed his pattern a good deal. Even after we were married, there were some things that I could not substitute for. But more than that, I think he realized he just didn't want to live that way anymore. His relationship now with the youngest children--who were quite young at the time, and therefore he has spent much more time with--is really quite different than his relationship with the four older ones. So that I think he has a slight sense of guilt about that.

*Q: In fact, were we to ask him, he might give replies very similar to yours. It's too bad that somebody has to learn at such a terrible price. What do you look forward to doing, now that you're going to be a woman of leisure?*

COON: Well, I don't plan to make up my mind too soon and too quickly. I'm going to try out a variety of things, and look around, and not commit myself too soon. At this stage, I don't want another full-time job. Carl and I want to have a little time to travel. So we'll see. Maybe I'll take up carpentry.

*Q: Are you really going to do some gardening?*

COON: Yes, I think I'll do some gardening.

*Q: Right now, you said, you're just reveling in--*

COON: Right now is sort of a euphoric moment. I have a feeling if you came back in three months, it might be quite different. To discover you can go to stores when they aren't crowded, on days other than Saturdays, is quite a revelation.

*Q: Would you have any advice to give to young women who want a career in the Foreign Service?*

COON: Well, I think I was pretty lucky in terms of being able to combine family and career. I think it can be done, obviously, but I don't think it's very easy. For women to think they can have it all, I'm not sure that many of them will be able to do so; whether they come in as tandems and

look forward to a joint career with their husbands, or whether they come in as singles, and lose out on family life. I don't know. It is not as easy as a lot of women think, and a lot of us thought, perhaps, in the '70s that it would somehow be.

*Q: Roz Ridgway [Ambassador Rozanne Ridgway] feels that, in her case at least, had she been married earlier, she would not have become an ambassador.*

COON: Why, I wonder?

*Q: Had she married at a younger age, she feels she would have had to give more than she's now giving to a marriage, because you have to. Well, you did, Jane. You gave up the service for nine years. That's what she means. You did make it, but let's face it, you are the exception. Most people aren't as capable as you, and it's a combination of things.*

COON: Of course, it's a combination of things.

*Q: You're the ultimate tandem. I wonder if there will be any others.*

COON: I don't know.

*Q: It certainly is an unusual thing. But anyway, that's what she said. She just didn't think that it would be possible, and with the pressures that are now--*

COON: The pressures on her must just be phenomenal.

*Q: Oh, they are terrible.*

COON: I mean she must be working about a twenty-seven hour day, as well organized as she is.

*Q: Then I will ask you the last question I ask--*

COON: On the other hand, you know what? I would much rather be married than not, because, you know, time comes for all of us when we have to retire, and it's an awful lot nicer having someone there.

*Q: Are you saying you would rather be married--well, how can you say that, because you did make ambassador?*

COON: Either or. Okay, I'd like to have it both ways. [Laughter] That's right. But I'm not saying it's very easy to have it both ways.

*Q: No, no, it can't be. Because you have to pay in some way, and that's what you're telling young women: that they've got to expect it. Would you consider that the life is interesting enough, and worthwhile enough, that it's worth--*

COON: What, Foreign Service?

*Q: Foreign Service.*

COON: Oh, sure.

*Q: Worth doing again. In other words, you would not discourage anyone from coming in?*

COON: No. I am not a cynic. I think obviously things have changed since I was a young officer. The security environment I think is very, very different, so that our missions abroad in many areas are almost fortresses, and I think that changes life for many people in the Foreign Service. It inhibits, perhaps more than is necessary, getting out and traveling and getting around in the country to which you're assigned. I think there's some very good people coming into the Foreign Service now; I've seen in this present job. I've been in charge of the--[Interruption]

*Q: The very last question is, what do you consider the most significant achievement in your life?*

COON: Oh, good heavens!

*Q: I thought you'd like that.*

COON: Whew! What do I consider the most significant? I don't think I can pin it down to one thing, because I think there were things in my professional life, and I think there were things in my personal life, particularly on the family side. And I'm very struck by the fact that I'm not sure one ever knows what one's most significant achievement is.

I was just back at my fortieth reunion at Northfield, my secondary school, and I was recalling an Old Testament teacher, and an incident in her class, which remains vivid in my memory, and I attribute to that incident my long-standing interest in history. Now I, from my own egotistical point of view, would consider that a significant achievement in her life. [Laughter] But I'm sure she didn't think of it that way.

*Q: Oh, maybe she did, Jane. Maybe she did.*

COON: She probably wouldn't have remembered it.

*Q: That she was able to influence so many young people.*

COON: I mean which and how many of the people that you've come in contact with, at one time or another, has one influenced?

*Q: Then, what's given you the most satisfaction? That might be another way of putting it.*

COON: What's given me the most satisfaction? Okay, apart from my marriage to Carl--that's probably the greatest satisfaction--apart from that, possibly . . . When one becomes the instant stepmother of six, there are some rocky times. I think, possibly the different but generally very,

very satisfying relationship I have with the children now. So I guess that comes at least in part from the private life, but I have a lot of satisfaction in what I've done, too, in public life.

*Q: In a real way, you did have it all.*

COON: Yes, yes.

*Q: Well, I thank you very much for all of your cooperation.*

COON: Well, you are very welcome.

**JANEY DEA COLE**  
**Junior Officer in Training, USIS**  
**Dhaka (1981-1984)**

*Ms Cole was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York and was educated at Hartwick College, the University of Hawaii and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. After working in New York City several years, she joined the United States Information Agency in 1980. During her career, Ms. Cole served in Dhaka, Caracas, Katmandu, Calcutta, and in Islamabad, where she was District Public Affairs Officer. In Washington, she served in the East bureau of USIA and was a Congressional Fellow on Capitol Hill. Ms Cole was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

*Q: Well then, you were in Bangladesh from when to when?*

COLE: 1981 to 1984.

*Q: What was your job?*

COLE: I was at that point what they called a Junior Officer in Training (JOT), sometimes called a Public Affairs Officer in Training. We started off as a rotation. First you spent a month or so at the USIA office doing anything that needed to be done. You went out to the airport to greet speakers. You translated the wireless, which was full of static, with blips and stars and things that looked like the curse words in Beetle Bailey comics. And you had to translate those into letters and there was a whole code for that. You made tea when an eminent journalist came in. One of my jobs also was to turn up at my PAO's (Public Affairs Officer) house and make sure that his beagle, who was slightly senile, didn't peepee on anybody's foot. Fortunately I liked the beagle, he was a swell dog. Or to make sure that his Irish setter didn't get loose and jump on anybody. And I got a wonderful education that way. I got to see a real pro work.

*Q: Who was the PAO?*

COLE: John Core, who had a spectacular career.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

COLE: Well, when I first got there it was an Ambassador David Schneider, who'd been asked to stay on. I remember him saying it was terribly embarrassing because he'd already had his farewell parties and been given his silver tray. But he was not there for very long. And then Ambassador Jane Abell Coon arrived. Her husband, Carleton was our ambassador in Nepal.

*Q: Tell me, in Bangladesh, what was – it was called Dacca?*

COLE: Yes.

*Q: What was it like when you were there?*

COLE: Bangladesh, you know, we all fall in love with our first post, don't we? I remember just before I left Washington I was buying some clothing and I heard on the store radio that there'd been a coup d'état and General Ziaur Rahman had been killed. I was so shocked. And I remember the lady in the dress shop saying, was it somebody you knew? And I thought, well, it feels like I do.

I arrived in Dacca shortly after that, flying into Dacca during the monsoon when about two-thirds of Bangladesh is under. I came in just as the sun was setting and I was looking out over this great plain, this great estuary, and it was all silver, a sheet of silver. It was beautiful, just beautiful.

What was Dacca like? Well, at that point it was famous for having the worst embassy building in the world in terms of the physical appearance. The building belonged to the Ministry of Youth which occupied the upper floors. As you walked into the building it smelled like a toilet because that's how people used the ground floor. And then you could take this tiny and rickety elevator – run by a little tribal gentleman who used to sort of sit perched on a stool – which was always getting stuck between floors. Then the operator would stand up on his stool, knock open the little door in the top of the elevator, grab the cables and jerk them. Or, you could walk up the stairs which were full of homeless people who were living there. And in certain seasons, the stairwell was full of jute-moths, which, if they brushed against you and you had been perspiring would leave welts on your arm. The building also had a stairwell in the center which was intended to improve circulation. It was covered over with wire netting; someone said they must have put the wiring over it so people wouldn't commit suicide by jumping down. It was filthy and full of garbage. And it was so depressing.

Also, for most of the time I was working at the embassy there was a huge struggle going on in the government bank across the way, where the government was trying to fire all the people who did no work. It got quite violent and we used to have bullets bouncing off our windows. I was in the office that had the great big copying machine in it and all the supplies for tea and it was about the size of really a clothes closet. And then there was a desk jammed in there where I sat with my back. When they started to shoot, I would either run out and chat with the secretary or I would crawl under my desk.

I remember a journalist came to see me one day and stuck his head in and there I was underneath my desk. "Miss Cole?" I said, "Yes, get down, get down!" So, you know, it was typical junior officer stuff.

Now, what was not to like.

*Q: Yes. How about living conditions?*

COLE: Actually, they were pretty good. I was the first single woman to be given a house to live in. Previously, they had put all the single women into apartments for their own safety. But, I was supposed to be learning how to entertain like a USIS (United States Information Services) officer. And I was slated to become the deputy PAO as my follow-on there. So it was important that I have a house. And I got this darling little beautiful house. Nothing bad happened to me, so, that broke the back of that particular tradition.

*Q: Let's talk about your work. I imagine you did a variety of jobs. You know, take different aspects and say what you were doing and what the situation in which you were working was like.*

COLE: Okay. Well, I was there for a very interesting stretch of three years, a long time to be in a very difficult post. After the coup d'état the situation stabilized for a while and elections were held. However another coup d'état then overthrew the elected government. So, we were dealing with a lot of political turbulence. However, the main emphasis of our embassy was on development. The main thrust was family planning. The idea was that if you could help people keep their children alive they would have fewer of them. So there was quite an emphasis on conquering diarrheal disease because that's what killed most children. And on clean water and on getting family planning information to women. At the time it took quite a leap of faith and many of us thought it was hopeless. But, in fact it was largely successful. Population growth in Bangladesh has been brought under control. Now people in villages say, we used to have a lot of children because a lot of our children died; we don't have to do that now.

*Q: Well, did your work involve passing out information about this program?*

COLE: Yes. USIA handled a lot of the informational work with the press. In performing public diplomacy, as it's now called, we were not only talking to the government. We dealt occasionally with government officials but dealing with them was largely the job of the political section, the economic section, or other elements of the embassy. Our job was to speak to people who influenced public opinion, the gatekeepers they were called. And this was an interesting and exciting time to do this in Bangladesh because Bengali intellectuals, are very lively, interesting people whose brains do work. They are also ideologues in a way that Americans are not so I had to learn to think in a very different way and to present information within an intellectual framework where all the pieces were expected to fit together.

Journalists, of course, were principal targets as were university professors who, in a largely illiterate society at that time, exerted considerable influence both within their classrooms and outside. Performing artists and other creative people also had considerable influence and I did get to know some of them.

*Q: You mentioned that a lot of influential people were ideologues and you had to present things through their intellectual framework. Can you give us an example of that?*

COLE: Even at that time we were trying to make the world safe for American capitalism. There was, then as now, a great pharmaceuticals debate, having to do with intellectual property rights. So you had to be able to put intellectual property rights in a way that socialist-oriented people would understand what they were and perhaps be sympathetic to the idea.

Now, this is where creative people come in, because creative people live off their ideas they can understand that you can't have people stealing them or not paying them for their ideas. This led me to get involved with movies and moviemakers because the Bangladeshis made a lot of bad movies which were exported to the Middle East.

*Q: Were these like Bollywood films?*

COLE: They were the Bangladeshi version of Bollywood.

*Q: Did everyone have a song in it?*

COLE: Oh, several, and a wet sari scene. But they were pretty mild, pretty family oriented. They would appeal to South Asian workers in the Middle East but they were also watched by lots of other people in the Middle East because they were wonderful stories and the music was great. But the really upper class mode of entertainment was television. It was widely believed that a lot of movie actresses were women of dubious morality but the TV starlets were not.

*Q: How did the policies of the Reagan administration fit into Bangladesh at that time?*

COLE: Not easily. Just before that it had been common to emphasize the aspects of our society that might be regarded as socialistic such as our extensive public school educational system or Social Security. But after the Reagan administration came in you couldn't really emphasize those aspects of our culture. You had to approach it somewhat differently. And I can remember the PAO being called up for a meeting with the political office and the DCM and he invited me to come along. They were criticizing him for being so right and saying why is your organization so rightist? He said because that's who we elected president of the United States. You're perfectly right, that's our job. They tell us what to say and we go out and say it. He brought along a lot of material for them to read and their eyes pretty much glazed over and that was the end of the meeting.

*Q: Was there any spillover into Bangladesh from our embassy in New Delhi?*

COLE: Yes. I was in New Delhi an awful lot mainly negotiating for more resources. They had a very good book publishing program. USIA would get the rights to some American books that would be republished in India where instead of costing \$25.00 they would cost \$2.00. There was a system to get the publisher to distribute the books, USIA would keep some of the books, some of which would be sent to us in Bangladesh to give away. I remember saying, as a woman



functioning in a Muslim country I can't send whiskey as Christmas presents. I can send a book. And since status is a high motivating factor in South Asian cultures, having a book from the U.S. embassy meant you put it right out where everyone could see it.

Another of my responsibilities was to run our translation program. We translated books into Bengali which we then presented as gifts. Choosing these books, acquiring them, finding the people to do the translation, finding the people to do the editing, getting them through the process was quite a job.

We also ran something called Table of Contents, TOC, as well as something called Article Alert. TOC involved sending out to select recipients the table of contents of certain publications that were coming into our library, for example, we would send foreign ministry officials the table of contents of Foreign Policy Magazine. And people certainly liked getting this. Or we would send a playwright the table of contents of some magazine of theatre arts dealing with subjects he was interested in. The program was very, very, very focused; a select group of people were being provided with a service they liked a lot and that encouraged good relations.

I remember going along on a call to a powerful government official to be the note taker when I was on rotation in the political section. But the official just wanted to talk to me saying, you're the one who sends me that table of contents. I remember working on yours, I said, I understand you take an interest in the arts, sir. That was a blind guess because all Bengalis are cultured. He told me what he was particularly interested in and there I was, taking notes. When I handed him the non-paper, he just threw it in a drawer. When we left his office, my colleague said, "Well Janey, you were obviously the star."

*Q: Would the table of contents service bring them to the library?*

COLE: Yes, or they could call me up, or call up our librarian and ask for what they wanted. There was also something called Article Alert which was supposed to replace Table of Contents but people wanted both. This was a list of articles, from which you could select those you wanted to order from USIA. They were from thousands of different magazines. We would send them over or deliver them personally to provide the occasion for a useful conversation.

At the time, the government was starting a school for diplomats, like our Foreign Service Institute. They did not welcome visitors but I suggested coming over to deliver some material, bring the USIS librarian and find out what material they might want. I was one of the few people to actually get in and meet with the director who told me what kinds of things he was interested in and how he was using them. And then some of his deans and professors came through because word was out that there was this pretty little American lady sitting there with the head librarian. I got to meet most of the faculty. So, it was a real door opener.

*Q: How about the universities? So many universities around the world have a strong Marxist faculty and all the students are ardent Marxists until they come out and get into the real world. Then they become ardent capitalists. What was the university situation in Bangladesh when you were there?*

COLE: Well, it was pretty bad. In 1971, during the secession from Pakistan, the universities had been thoroughly trashed by the Pakistani army. Intellectuals were put up against walls and shot. Female students were raped; male students were killed. After that the university was just wracked by politics. We set a couple of goals for ourselves and then we used our resources to achieve them. We wanted to strengthen the teaching about the United States. We found that the people in the political science faculty although they were Marxists, were a little less devoted to Marxism and a little more interested in comparative studies of constitutions or political systems. So our strategy was not just to encourage a course about the United States, because that would be taught from a Marxist point of view but to provide them with more and better information. This was at the time when USIA was sending out piles and piles of copies of the U.S. constitution. We discovered that a lot of what they taught was driven by the books they had. So we helped do a textbook of original sources translated into Bengali – declaration of independence, the constitution, and a variety of other basic documents that you would need to understand the U.S. political system.

We also wanted to encourage teaching of American literature because of the high status of literature in their culture. Although we knew it was going to get a Marxist spin, we felt it's important to read Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost, poets who are not hard to understand and could affect the perspective, particularly of young people. We were able to put the resources USIA was providing into people's hands. We were able to give them material so the professors could lecture knowledgeably about Emily Dickinson or about Robert Frost or Ann Sexton or Sylvia Plath or whomever.

*Q: Was English pretty much a second language in the academic population?*

COLE: Yes. We were fortunate in that almost all educated people read English quite well and most of them also spoke it fairly well. Also, we were translating a lot of material into Bengali, which was kind of revolutionary and certainly it was helpful to the students. In that respect we were getting around the formal system as well as infiltrating it by putting these books out through publishers and donating them to little regional libraries and to high schools and learned societies.

However, our major thrust was on teaching English as a second language and getting U.S. content into the instruction. English teachers were remarkably non-ideological; their business was to teach their students how to read and speak English. So, anything that would make that easier they would use and we could provide them with a lot of material. I got to know most of the master teachers of English in the university and normal school system and I got very involved with the academies that were training the teachers who were then going off to the high schools and elsewhere to teach English. And we did a lot of programs designed to improve their English and a fair number to try to get resources into their hands. Using literature to teach English was very successful and we had a lot of resources to provide.

*Q: What about the press? What was the Bangladeshi press like?*

COLE: The journalists were great fun, but they were very ideological. They'd all been through the struggle for independence from Pakistan and were very political but they were interesting.

And so we did the old-fashioned things. We'd call on them and have tea and listen and try to find out what they wanted. Did they want to go to the U.S.? Did they want to get their junior reporters to the U.S. to see what real newspapers were like? Were they interested in American cinema? Well, we could send them Table of Contents from an American movie publication. Or, what book would they like. And what about The Wireless File? How did they get it; how did they choose articles; what could we do to get them to choose more, or use more, and publish more?

*Q: Where did Bangladesh fit at this point in the Cold War?*

COLE: Well, they wanted to be on the Soviet side because we were the enemy for not having supported them in 1971 in their war with Pakistan. So they would have liked to have been Soviet allies but there were difficulties with that. The Soviets didn't particularly want them. The Soviets didn't produce very much by way of aid because the Soviet theory was that you had to overthrow your capitalist government and become Marxist, Leninist and all your problems would go away, economically, and all would be fine. So they didn't provide any of the aid the Bangladeshis needed. They used Dacca as a dumping ground for their ambassadors; they sent one who didn't speak English. They did have a huge embassy compound however and their big asset was swimming pools and restaurants. Their technique was to invite intellectuals to come for the weekend; they could swim and could hang out in air conditioning so this was very seductive. They had a cultural center. They had a chess club, which was popular. They showed Russian movies. They had some things that were appealing. But on the whole, I think we were better armed.

*Q: Well, was India a massive presence? I mean, were the Indians doing a lot of stuff there?*

COLE: Yes, the Indians were actually fairly active and they were a huge, looming neighbor. Bangladesh had been part of Pakistan when it had broken away from India; India was the Hindus, Bangladesh was the Muslims and India was kind of scary whereas we were kind of warm and fuzzy. Our major competitors were really the Germans and the French.

*Q: I'm surprised the French were paying much attention to Bangladesh.*

COLE: Oh, the French pay attention to culture, don't they? Everywhere, even the most obscure places. They had a program for painters, which was actually pretty good; I met a lot of painters in Bangladesh who had been sent to France. The nice thing about the French is that they didn't tell them what to do; they just said, go to museums, spend three months, enroll wherever you want and off they went.

There was also a minor Bengali tradition of studying French rather than English. It must have been a sign of rebellion in the colonial period to study French and to look to France for your cultural linkage, rather than to England. They were still teaching French there and teaching it rather well. And the British Council, of course, was extremely active. I learned that they sent over people who were helping the Bangladeshis write their textbooks. And so I got hold of the people doing a literature textbook and gave them copies of Emily Dickinson's poems they thought were perfectly splendid and should be included in their textbooks. So I asked what if I give you some more to read and you choose what you think is suitable. So we got Dickinson in

and then they put a little Robert Frost in. But they decided Sylvia Plath wasn't suitable for children. There were others as well whom I can't remember.

*Q: What about the exchange program?*

COLE: Before I joined the Foreign Service in my earlier job I'd been on the receiving end in the program for bringing people to the U.S. So I knew a fair amount about what would happen these visitors in the U.S. And so I focused on learning how to run an international visitor (IV) program, skills that served me for the rest of my career. I don't see any great changes between the way the IV program is now and the way it was 30 years ago except that it's shorter now; we used to send people for six weeks and now it's four or three. It seems to me that we had a little less input in the program then; there's more creativity now. I can remember the point in 1986 where we started to design our own IV projects which wasn't something that we could do before. During the Reagan administration grants began to be given to private organizations to set up programs, for example a USIA grant supported a program for social workers, or for junior politicians, or teachers. And we would be asked to nominate organizations. In its early stages it was a mess but it became very efficient under what is now the Office of Citizen Exchanges and is partnered with private sector organizations.

*Q: How about your library? How well was it used?*

COLE: Thousands of people used it, it was perpetually jammed.

*Q: So many countries really don't have what amounts to a good library, a really open library system.*

COLE: No. They don't have the money for it, they don't have the mentality for it. Eventually USIA, now PD (Public Diplomacy) within the State Department, came to the conclusion that it was not our job to replace the public library system, that countries should have or to create it. So our libraries were severely cut back and focused on policy. But as long as we kept them they were awfully good. And fortunately in South Asia, they were able to keep libraries going. To be literate in English gave you status, so we had a self-selecting audience of fairly important people who patronized our library. Sometimes they were just students but they were going to grow up to be somebody, which was obvious. I thought our disinvestment in libraries was very sad.

*Q: Yes, I agree with you. I've often felt that our exchange programs and our various libraries and centers were so important and it's shortsighted to cut these out.*

COLE: Well, I don't think that exchanges have been severely cut. There was considerable criticism of the Fulbright program until Mr. Wick, who was for some eight years, the director of USIA, discovered that it wasn't really our program, it was a Congressional program named after a senator. And so the Senate was determined to keep it.

*Q: How did you find being a young woman embassy official in Bengali social life? How did that work?*

COLE: It worked wonderfully. You know, my FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) were great. At that point in Bangladesh the embassies were the place to work and the American embassy, which was famous for always paying you your salary, on time, attracted some rather marvelous people. So they made sure that everybody knew who I was. In South Asia, women have higher status than men. So Bangladeshis are flattered when the U.S. sends women officers. It means to them that the U.S. knows we'll be respected and safe there and recognized that Bangladeshis are spiritually and culturally superior people.

People wanted to invite me to their homes because this gave them status and recognized that they were advanced culturally. So I was very sought after and I would be out night after night and my PAO taught me to have goals for each of these occasions. Who was I trying to meet and what was I trying to accomplish? And he said, just keeping the channels of communication open is a perfectly valid goal. You may just be going there to see who's there, to see who knows who, who sits with whom, who's related to whom, what do they have on their walls.

*Q: What about lectures or performances and that sort of thing?*

COLE: Oh yes, we had quite a few American speakers, then called AmParts. These were people who were experts brought out by USIA who spoke at the university to the various ministries and training academies and confer with the editorial board of the leading newspaper. We have to have real expertise, just not a smart person. But this was the time of Charlie Wick's blacklist of people who were ideologically not acceptable. Walter Cronkite was one of them. You would propose someone and some little bureaucrat would write down, "not to be asked." They got it all wrong, they had a blacklist.

*Q: Well, after that did you end up going native, wearing a sari and all that sort of thing?*

COLE: Oh never. Not at that point. Never. I did have a sari that I'd gotten before I joined the Foreign Service and whenever the FSNs invited us to a party, I would wear it. And everybody just loved that.

Later on, it was towards the end of my career that the mentality changed and I also got sufficiently senior to say, the hell with the mentality, and I was able to wear my salwar kameezes for dress up in Pakistan. You needed to have pretty clothes, because Pakistani women were always beautiful. In fact, Pakistani men in their silks and their embroideries and their diamond buttons were also wonderful to look at. And what are we going to do, turn up in a little black dress? No thanks. Plus, the little black dress, you know, showed your lower legs, which were considered wildly sexual. You didn't want to do that. So being able to go out and buy a beautiful salwar kameez meant that you were properly dressed and that you had something to talk to the women about, even the very traditional ones. If they could talk a little English you could talk to them about what you were wearing and ask them for their advice and help. And I learned a lot.

*Q: Well then, you got exposed to everything in the business didn't you?*

COLE: That was what the junior officer or a public affairs officer – a PAO or a JOT – was supposed to do, see the full array of USIA activities. Plus we also rotated through different

components of the embassy. The secretary in the political section, the wife of the administrative officer, didn't think that this rotation made any sense at all and she wouldn't do anything to help me. So I arrived there with no desk, no telephone, no chair. So I asked the USIS FSNs to talk to their cousin who ran the warehouse and quickly a chair materialized. And when the chair arrived this nasty secretary had to point to a desk. And then a day or two later somebody produced a telephone for me, through the FSN conspiracy network. I did my couple of week's rotation in the political section and then I did Econ. The econ officer wanted somebody to run a catalog show for him. And so I called up my FSNs over at USIS and said, what is this? They said they'd go find out, so they did, and we set up a catalog show. And I also rotated through Admin, which was the section I enjoyed the most.

*Q: I take it you were hooked by this time.*

COLE: Yes, it's true. You know, my first couple of weeks I wondered what a nice girl from Brooklyn like me was doing in a place like this. But yes, I certainly came to enjoy it and I also came to appreciate the fact that for the rest of my career, whenever somebody had a really bad idea about what I should do I could always say, you know, I spent three years in Bangladesh. And they'd dismount and walk away.

*Q: Yes, I did this the same way. You know, when I was in Vietnam, I used that ploy quite often.*

COLE: Yes, so you know, there are a lot of people out there who have dues to pay; I'm not one of them. Go bother them. Yes, it works, it's good.

*Q: Well then, what, in '83 you left?*

COLE: '84.

**HARMON E. KIRBY**  
**NEA, Country Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh**  
**Washington, DC (1982-1984)**

*Ambassador Harmon E. Kirby was born in Ohio on January 27, 1934. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard University in international relations and served in the U.S. Army overseas for two years. His Foreign Service career included positions in Geneva, Madras, New Delhi, Brussels, Khartoum, Rabat, Lome, and Washington, DC. Ambassador Kirby retired on September 29, 1995. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 31, 1995.*

KIRBY: When I left the Seminar, I became Country Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

*Q: Today is the 5th of December 1995. You were Office Director for Bangladesh...or what was it called?*

KIRBY: It was called Country Director, Office of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh Affairs.

*Q: Can you give me the dates, so I can put them at the beginning.*

KIRBY: From July of 1982 to April of 1984, I was Country Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. And during about 25% of that time, when Howie Schaffer, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia, was on leave or official travel out of Washington, I was Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia, which also embraces, in addition to the countries I was directly responsible for, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka and Bhutan. I was frequently involved with those countries as well.

*Q: What was the situation in first, Afghanistan and then Pakistan in 1982?*

KIRBY: Well, I'll start by saying that all during the time that I was in that office, our two main preoccupations were: 1) to persist in the struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan, i.e., to try to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan, and 2) to try to restore the very close bilateral relations between the United States and Pakistan, which had obtained previously, i.e., up until about 1971-1972, the time of the Indo-Pak War over Bangladesh. As I mentioned in one of our earlier interviews, although U.S. relations with Pakistan didn't deteriorate as dramatically as did our relations with India following the Indo-Pak War of 1971, still our relations with Pakistan also declined. This occurred, first because the Pakistanis believed that we did not support them as wholeheartedly as we might have done in the Indo-Pak War, and second, because the Paks were in some period of internal, domestic political uncertainty and turmoil as they tried to work out new political arrangements. When I came in, in 1982, our main preoccupation was, as I said, trying to dislodge the Soviets from Afghanistan, by using diplomacy and other means...

*Q: The Soviets had gone in, in December 1979.*

KIRBY: Yes. And so I think it is fair to say that 1980-1981 saw the United States, and others, looking for a way to try to dislodge the Soviets by diplomatic and other means as available and necessary. And very close U.S. relations with Pakistan was actually key to that, given the geography of the area. In 1980 we began trying to improve relations with Pakistan partly because we thought that was a good thing to do overall for stability in South Asia and to help Pakistan develop economically, but basically to try to do something about the war in Afghanistan.

*Q: The Reagan Administration was fairly new, it had been in about a year when you arrived. Did you have a feeling of strong policy towards the situation in Afghanistan? You'd obviously been on the sidelines but sort of following this...I mean you were an Indo-Pak man, anyway did you feel that there was a firmer hand at the tiller for this particular area at this point?*

KIRBY: Well, I saw when I came in during the summer of 1982 was that there was a strong U.S. commitment to assisting the process that would end up by getting the Soviets out of Afghanistan. I think the Reagan Administration was fully committed to that. Indeed, in the early stages of the Soviet move into Afghanistan, the last year of the Carter Administration, with the shock that

came to the Carter Administration as a result of the Soviets going in, the Carter Administration itself was committed to getting the Soviets out, I think. This was also a part of Brzezinski's "Arc of Crisis" that we talked about earlier in these interviews. So, I think the Carter people, too, saw the Soviets going in as a "wake up call" and were determined to do what the U.S. could to dislodge them. But, sure, I think that when the Reagan Administration came in, they probably turned it up a notch. But, the commitment was quite clear.

*Q: So that in your heart of hearts, looking at that thing. In 1982, what did you think? Did you think that we could do it without an overt attack ourselves, did you think the Soviets would be able to stay on there and persevere? What did you think?*

KIRBY: I felt very strongly that the Soviets had to get out, and that we should do what we could to assist that process. I felt that from 1979 on. My personal, very uneasy feeling even before I went into the job, however, was that given the geography, and given the over-whelming preponderance of military power of the Soviets, it would be very difficult to get them out. On the other hand, and that's the sort of mind-set I took in with me, the other side of the coin was that, even recognizing the technology of the 20th century and that it was a new era and so forth, it was important to recall that historically that no foreign invader had ever been able to keep the Afghans down. That's an aspect of the dictates of geography too, as you know. Afghanistan is a terribly mountainous place and, indeed, early on it was evident that the Afghans, the various tribes, were not going to take the Soviet invasion lightly. So I came in thinking that it would be very, very difficult to dislodge the Soviets, but that it was worth the effort, that in the fullness of time it might well be possible to get them out. Nothing is pleasant about an inherently unpleasant situation, but I think one of the "pleasant" surprises during my first months, was to see how badly the Soviets were doing militarily. And in that early stage, 1982-1983, one began to think the Soviets were clearly not going to have it their way, and that if the pressure were kept on them, eventually they would have to leave.

*Q: I assume there must have been a mutual looking at this thing. But particularly from our military people, after all we had come out of Vietnam and had an idea of the limits of the possibilities of what an army could do. What were you getting from the Pentagon as sort of an evaluation of how the Soviets were dealing with this?*

KIRBY: Although I don't have a clear memory at this remove of all the specifics, I think that the reports that were coming to us from all the agencies around town, suggested that the Afghans, while obviously taking a number of "hammer blows" from the Soviets, were resilient and amazingly committed to getting the Soviets out, and that despite the vaunted Soviet fire-power and use of elite troops and so on, they were not doing as well as the "arm chair strategists" had thought they would. That this was all the more an argument for helping to keep the pressure on. My memory of the attitude of DOD and other USG agencies at the time was that Afghanistan was a worthy cause and that we should certainly assist. I don't think there was any unanimity on what the outcome was going to be or what the date of that outcome would be. But as time went on there seemed to be more and more reason to think that if the Afghans were going to stay the course, then all their friends in the world, from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia to Egypt to the United States and others in the Western world should stay the course too.



*Q: What sort of representation did we have in Afghanistan, if any?*

KIRBY: My memory is a little dim on that although it shouldn't be. I think the Embassy had closed at that time, but I don't remember. I would have to research that. If it was not closed by that time, it was certainly a beleaguered garrison. On reflection, I think we maintained a few people in Kabul throughout, but they weren't able to get outside the Embassy compound very much or get around Afghanistan at all. And for policy reasons the Embassy had no real contact with the Babrak Karmal Government which was in power when I came in, because we saw it as a Soviet imposition. But I think we stayed on at a middle grade, Chargé d'affaires level.

*Q: What about in Pakistan? Let's deal with the Afghan War first, then go to internal things. Were you there when the decision was made to give more sophisticated weapons to the Afghan fighters, the Mujahideen, at all?*

KIRBY: There were various kinds of important assistance going to the Mujahideen during my time, to be sure. The Mujahideen obviously always wanted more and more sophisticated equipment. As the Soviets began to improve their tactics, i.e., from the Soviet point of view--using helicopter gun-ships and so on, the Mujahideen and the Pakistanis, who were in liaison with the Mujahideen began making strongly the case for providing the hand-held Stinger missiles to bring the gun-ships down. The final decision to provide the Stingers in quantity was not made during my period as Country Director although the debate was going forward during that time.

*Q: Where did the Pakistan desk fit in the debate about more sophisticated arms to Pakistan and into Afghanistan?*

KIRBY: The Country Directorate didn't control that discussion, but we were certainly involved in it. We had a voice and could make recommendations on anything and all things relating to Afghanistan, but decisions on that set of issues were taken at a very high level. And, obviously there were a number of agencies making recommendations at that time. We were, from the Department's point of view, very much in the loop, however.

*Q: Did you at all feel that this was more the CIA war than the State Department war, in a way?*

KIRBY: Not in policy terms, I did not think so. It seemed to me that there was pretty good inter-agency coordination on the Afghanistan effort. I think that, by and large, the State Department took and maintained a strong policy lead. The NEA Bureau, which is where the Country Directorate is located, chaired a number of inter-agency committees which had to do with the war. Assistant Secretary of State, Nick Veliotis, and later Dick Murphy, chaired inter-agency sessions at their level. I chaired an inter-agency committee at the Country Directorate level which met very regularly to talk about policy and to make recommendations on policy. I think the State Department played the lead role in the policy discussions. The 7th floor and the White House were very interested in Afghanistan, so you had first, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and then you had Secretary Shultz, who were very interested in this. You had strong people in State, and I think State played its role very effectively.

*Q: Did you find yourself trying to explain the Afghan society, the clan system, to upper levels and all to explain that while there might be a certain (Afghan) unity against the Soviets, they fight among themselves too?*

KIRBY: I think that was very well understood. We did explain it. INR and the Country Directorate made these points regularly, but, of course, the major explanations about Afghanistan's ethnic and religious make-up had already been made at the very early stages of the Afghan War, before I came along. Yes, I think our government understood very well that about the only thing that most of the Afghans could agree on was that they wanted the Soviets out, but that there was by no means any political unanimity among them beyond that. The group of Afghan political leaders that the Pakistanis dealt with, and that we occasionally dealt with, I've now forgotten what the name of the coordinating group was, but it was comprised of 6 or 7 Afghan factional leaders--it was always quite clear from their internal debates and from what they said to us that there was no unanimity among them on anything. They were all "jockeying for position", all trying not only to get the Soviets out, as I said, but to position themselves for a leadership role following the Soviet withdrawal if it ever came. Our consulate in Peshawar maintained contact with those people, and we also saw them here. Rabbani and the others would come to Washington occasionally, and I would usually accompany them to see people on the 6th and 7th floors of the State Department. So, yes, our top officials had a chance to see pretty much directly at first hand the "fissures" among the Mujahideen political leaders.

*Q: Did you find yourself having to say or make the point that we should really do a certain amount of "fine tuning" about this or otherwise we might end up with a strong Fundamentalist group which we were already having terrible problems with in Iran, we might sort of "out of the frying pan and into the fire" type of thing. Was this a concern, an analysis of where are we going?*

KIRBY: It was of concern, and we did address it. It was a theme that figured in our policy analyses and meetings but it was not a first priority issue, not the biggest item on the agenda. At a time of crisis, you have to set your priorities and get first things first...the top priority was to get rid of the Soviets. We chaffed and worried about the issue, but it became more prominent at some stage down the line later in the middle 1980's, after I left the Country Directorate, when you began to see light at the end of the tunnel in terms of likely Soviet withdrawal. At that time I think concern about the Fundamentalists became a more prominent theme. There seemed to be a tendency on the part of some Pakistani officers in liaison with the Mujahideen to funnel equipment especially to the more radical and more Fundamentalist Afghan elements. This is something that, I'm told, figured in discussions between our people and the Pakistanis at various times along the way. My sense of it is, that this became a more prominent issue after we made the decision to supply Stingers, i.e., after my time at the Country Directorate. It then became a rather prominent issue for us to discuss with the Pakistanis "sotto voce". By definition, the Pakistanis were on the ground and in a way they held the "whip hand", it was thus hard for even our liaison people to control the flow of weapons entirely. But I think this is something that our people were concerned about but didn't quite know how to handle, although I wasn't privy to the discussions that might have occurred on this...say from the spring of 1984 on.

*Q: Turning to Pakistan. What was the situation in Pakistan?*

KIRBY: Well, the situation was that you had essentially a government over which the Pakistani military exerted strong influence. It wasn't a military government per se, but President Zia Ul-Haq, who had replaced Bhutto, was very much in charge of things, and the major appointments were people who had come from the military. And Zia and his government were committed to doing what they could to assist the Mujahideen to prosecute the war in Afghanistan. The Pakistanis and the U.S. shared the strategic perception that it would be detrimental to South Asia's stability to permit the Soviets to remain in Afghanistan. The Pakistani belief was that if the Soviets were able to ensconce themselves comfortable in Afghanistan in force, then that would over time put unbearable pressure on Pakistan. And, who knows, one day the Soviets might be emboldened to go into Pakistan. I always thought the latter point might be a bit exaggerated, but nonetheless, I think the Pakistanis took it very seriously.

*Q: You had a military dictatorship and you also had a...Pakistan which was playing the key role in helping force the Soviets out. Was it very definitely a feeling that we're not going to over-push democracy in Pakistan in this period?*

KIRBY: That's a good question. There was an inherent intellectual tension in the U.S. position towards Pakistan. We wanted Pakistan to develop toward coherent democracy, but we needed them to help solve an immediate regional strategic problem. I don't mean to imply that it was a tension that broke out visibly or audibly in our relations with them, though perhaps at some stage it did. Yes, we saw Pakistan as the key to a successful outcome, without a doubt, in Afghanistan. Successful outcome defined as getting rid of the Soviets, getting them back into the Soviet Union. Pakistan was the key. That was an important priority concern of ours. We felt strongly therefore that we would have to improve our bilateral relations with Pakistan if we were going to work effectively together on the Afghan issue. But, there were problems, as we perceived U.S.-Pakistan relations. You mentioned democratization. I think we pretty much concluded that while we should be able to continue to talk to them about democracy and the importance of moving toward real democracy, we should not browbeat them in the public square at high noon every day on the issue. But we should continue to talk about it. In some ways at that moment--I'm not saying that these were inherently more or less important than democracy--but the two issues that really threatened the warming of relations at that time, and right on through the 1980's, were, above all (1) the question of whether Pakistan was trying to develop nuclear weapons and (2) the opium poppy issue and the heroin coming into the United States either directly from Pakistan or from Afghanistan through Pakistan. So, our other important policy goals, while improving the bilateral relationship and working together effectively on Afghanistan, were to persuade them (a) not to go nuclear, and (b) to do something, either with our assistance or on their own, however they could do it, to control the hard drug traffic coming out of and through Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province. These were issues that engaged us regularly...every time we had bilateral discussions at any level, including the Presidential level and the Secretary of State level, these two issues figured very significantly. We always talked, to be sure, about the Afghan war but we also talked about these other two issues right up front and center. And, as I said earlier, these two issues were to continue to over-shadow the relationship right on through the 1980's. Democracy also remained an ongoing concern and was another issue that figured in discussions, but somewhat less prominently.

*Q: How did we see the nuclear issue developing? By this time the Indians had obviously nuclear capabilities.*

KIRBY: The Indians exploded their first device in 1974. The belief was that they were continuing to work on devices, but did not have a full-scale weapons production program. Our concern was that Pakistan was trying to match them. And indeed, there was intelligence that Pakistani procurement around the world pointed in the direction of a desire to develop a nuclear capability. We tried to use whatever diplomatic, economic assistance or other muscle was available to blunt that--to try to persuade them they didn't need a nuclear capacity and that any tendency for India and Pakistan to develop a nuclear arms race would be absolutely disastrous for both countries. That latter line is something that we believed profoundly then and now, and we spent a lot of diplomatic effort, including, as I said earlier, at the Presidential level on that.

*Q: What about the drug situation? Did we see collusion within the government with the drug producers or who were with the military?*

KIRBY: I don't know, but I don't think that at that time we concluded definitely that there was high level collusion between the government or military and the opium poppy/heroin interests. What we did know was that it was evident that despite their good words, for both political and security reasons, the Pakistani government was reluctant to move directly and forcefully against tribal leaders who had managed this trade for a very long time. We're talking about remote parts of Pakistan, where, by and large, the Pakistani government's writ nominally ran, but only up to a point. They didn't totally control everything that happened in every ravine and every valley. There are some pretty inaccessible areas up there in the Northwest and to go in and clean it out would have taken a major military/police commitment which might have run beyond their ability to do it. We thought they could do more, but we also recognized the inherent problem. Pakistani leaders worried about political stability in the region, and were concerned that if they roiled the tribes too much, they might have more on their hands than they could handle. But we kept pressing them.

*Q: Did we have a strong Drug Enforcement Agency presence there?*

KIRBY: Did we have a DEA presence in the embassy in 1982? I don't remember specifically, but I'm going to say that I think we must have had a representative or two.

*Q: But it was not a...I mean we weren't out flying helicopters or spraying crops and that sort of thing?*

KIRBY: No, we weren't doing that sort of thing. But we were trying to address the problem in other ways. You see, one of the quids for the quo of Pakistan helping the Mujahideen prosecute the war in Afghanistan, was that we would restore a large measure of economic and military assistance to Pakistan, and we tried to build into the economic assistance part of it a component that would reward them for doing more on the drug front. No, we weren't involved operationally, Central or South American style, I don't believe. I'd like to put just a little flesh on those earlier words when I said that drug and nuclear issues were taken up with Pakistan at very high levels. For example, when Zia Ul-Haq, the Pakistani President, came to the U.S. for a State visit in

December 1982--he arrived on December 7, 1982, had dinner at the White House and talks with President Reagan and other senior officials on that day--the drug issue was on the menu--not the dinner menu, but the bilateral discussion menu. Of course, Afghanistan and the nuclear issue were also on the agenda. But the need to control drugs and our interest in that and in encouraging the Pakistanis to do what they could on that front was taken up. Similarly, when I had the pleasure of accompanying Secretary of State Shultz on official visits to India and Pakistan in June-July 1983, the talks at the Ministerial level in Islamabad included a long session on drugs. It was a very, very serious discussion.

*Q: What was your impression of the Pakistan Foreign Ministry and of its Embassy here at home?*

KIRBY: As in all things we discuss, I don't mean to be goody-goody in my response. Over the years I've known a lot of Pakistani diplomats and have had considerable contact with the Pakistani Foreign Office. So, long before I went to the Country Director's job, I had formed a very strong impression of their high competence and expertise. The Pakistani Foreign Minister at that time was a very accomplished man, Yacub Khan, who had been an army general at one time. In the first stages of the rebellion in East Pakistan in 1971, he was the Pakistani commanding general in that sector. But, he was pulled out of East Pakistan and yanked back to West Pakistan and more or less put under house surveillance for the remainder of the turbulence and the subsequent Indo-Pak war, because Islamabad had found that he hadn't cracked down strongly enough in East Bengal. He had apparently been reluctant to use the troops against the population. Anyway, we were discussing 1982-84, when he was Foreign Minister. He is a very distinguished man. He had been Ambassador in Washington, I think in the late 1970's and also in Paris. While Secretary Shultz can, of course, speak for himself, and I suppose he has done so in his memoirs, I had the impression that he found his discussions with Yacub very beneficial; I sat in on many of those conversations and they always certainly were at a very high level. But the Foreign Office, too, was well structured throughout with people knowing their dossiers well, I thought. Pakistan's Washington Embassy was headed by a courtly former army general, and he and the Foreign Service officers in his Embassy did a very competent job.

*Q: During this 1982-1984 period, was there concern that India and Pakistan might go at each other again, or did this Afghanistan sort of push that off the plate?*

KIRBY: I don't think there was a high level of concern about that at that time. I don't remember our being concerned about that. Certainly what we all knew, anyone exposed to South Asian affairs or who had a background in South Asian affairs, was that there was no love lost between India and Pakistan. They had already had three wars and we all felt that part of our diplomacy was that at the first warning sign to try to ensure there wasn't a fourth one. But I don't think there were any major pointers toward renewed conflict during that period.

*Q: Did you get any feeling from Washington of sort of a difference of clientitis or something between the officers who were taking care of India and you were taking care of Pakistan? Sometimes this happens.*

KIRBY: It does happen sometimes, but I can happily say that during that period there was no such feeling at all. My office was on one side of a wall in the State Department. The Country

Director for India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, who was a good friend of mine, sat on the other side of the wall. That was Victor Tomseth. Victor was a very able Country Director. His only real prior association with South Asia at that point had been that he had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal. And so he didn't bring a lot of India-Pakistan baggage. However, he brought good judgment and common sense to the job, and he had a lot of people on his staff who had served in India and some who had served in Nepal. I thought it was a very, very collegial atmosphere; there were no sharp edges between my office and his during that period at all.

*Q: Is there anything else we should cover on this particular period before we move on?*

KIRBY: I don't think anything major. I mentioned Zia Ul-Haq's (Pakistan's President) State visit here. By the way, maybe I might say one word about that. It was an important visit in that it was supposed to symbolize the full restoration of close, friendly U.S.-Pakistan relations. You asked a very good question earlier about whether I thought State played much of a role in policy formulation on Afghanistan and I said, "Yes, I thought State was playing the lead policy role." State did take the lead in this whole set of inter-related, inter-locking Pakistan issues, even though the Department of Defense and other agencies had strong interests in Pakistani affairs. We really did play a key role, and I can give you a specific example of that. I was blessed, I must say, in that Country Directorate, by having superb officers working with me. They really were first-class...I mean there was a wide range of age and experience, but they were uniformly good, dedicated officers, who meshed very, very well with each other. When we began thinking, scoping out, if you will, the Zia visit, we sat down together in the Country Directorate and I said, if we put this together the right way, we will have a major impact on the visit. I said these are tricky issues: Pakistan's nuclear research; control of the drug traffic out of, and through Pakistan; U.S.-Pakistan cooperation in Afghanistan. I talked about the tension in our relations and some of the apparent contradictions and I said that we had to remember that our goal was to have the President, the Secretary of State, and ourselves "singing from the same sheet of music," and if we do this the right way, our principals would follow the script we wrote. But it had to be done the right way. And we did write a very good script for the visit. You know, Stu, how much paper work there is in getting a State visit together, right down to writing talking points for everything under the sun, both large and small, that might come up during the visit. The speeches were relatively easy to write--toasts, they just took time. What we really bore down hard on though, what we really wanted to get right was the policy papers for discussions in the Oval Office, the Cabinet Rooms, and the State Department. The big question was how to play this restoration of relations with Pakistan in a way that would strike a reasonable balance of interests: the nature and scope of U.S. economic and military assistance to Pakistan, doing things right together in Afghanistan and at the same time keeping Pakistan from going nuclear and persuading them to do some things we wanted done on the drug control front.

I remember the office gang had worked very, very hard, extremely hard, and we had gotten all of our papers in by the deadline, which was about 10 days or perhaps a week before Zia was due to arrive. My Deputy was there in the office with me about 6:00 on Saturday afternoon the day we concluded our work. We had "put it all to bed" as it were since our "book" on the Zia visit had now been submitted to the 7th floor. I was flipping the dial on my safe, and I asked, "How do you feel...exhausted? And he said, "No, I feel pretty good about it but how do you feel, boss?" And I said, "I feel just fine. I'm surprised at how well I think we've done, unless I've missed

something." And I said, "There's no way we can control it now, but if the big guys will just follow the script we've written, we'll be alright." Obviously, our senior leaders were very intelligent people and they could have done their own script. However, during the visit itself, it appeared that senior U.S. officials wholly followed the scenario our office had devised. I sat in some of the meetings during the visit, of course, but I didn't sit in all of them. The President and Secretary of State were sometimes alone with the two principals from the other side, but from what we heard in meetings as we were taking notes and from what we got from people who had sat in the White House meetings like the NEA Assistant Secretary of State, it seemed clear that all hands followed the script we had written from A to Z. It was remarkable the extent to which they did. I know this sounds a little self-serving, but we were given kudos from the top levels of our government for the script we had put together. It was a very tricky time, and the issues, the stakes, were very large. And I think this was a case where, as in so many other areas over the years, the State Department showed what it could really do in taking the policy lead and driving the policy process.

*Q: What about with Ronald Reagan? Was there any concern...he was notorious for being a very genial person but not being terribly well informed. That was a reputation. Was there any concern about this?*

KIRBY: I don't know whether there was outright concern. Let me just say it slightly differently. There was a desire on all sides that the President, while playing the genial host with the Pakistanis, which we knew that he would and should do, must find a way to say the things that really needed to be said to his guests on the issues of central concern, i.e., Pakistan's nuclear program and control of drugs. We were particularly concerned about the nuclear issue. We wanted the President to say something on the nuclear question so that the other side would know that the senior levels of our government did take this matter very seriously, as seriously as the rest of our bureaucracy had been telling the Pakistanis. This was my overwhelming question when people came back from key discussions at the White House in which I did not participate...I participated in some other events at the White House, but I was not in that presidential discussion. And, a senior State Department official who knew, came to me and said, "Before you ask, the answer is that he did raise the nuclear issue." I said, "Did he really for sure, honest to God?" And he said, "Yes, the President expressed himself on that subject and his interlocutor responded to him." We hadn't been concerned that somehow the President wouldn't understand the issue or would forget it completely, neither one of those eventualities was in the cards. We had wanted to try to ensure that the President's essential geniality, not so overlay or dilute this issue that the other man could go away saying that the problem was not as serious as lower level U.S. officials had been telling the Pakistanis. So, we had been at some pains within the bureaucracy to try to get people positioned around the President to ensure that he was very well briefed on the issue. I was informed immediately after their meeting that he had taken it up very directly with Zia. Which was all we could have expected.

*Q: Should we move on?*

KIRBY: Let me say one word on Bangladesh. It was a country that has always been important to me for reasons we discussed earlier relating to its emergence as an independent country and so on. We haven't said a single word here about Bangladesh. That almost implies that we weren't

giving any thought to that country in NEA/PAB during 1982-84. In fact, however, we spent a fair amount of time on Bangladesh during that period. Most of our effort was to encourage a return to democratic practices and to do what we could to assist their economic development. There was a sizeable economic assistance program. And there was quite a lot of contact at high levels during that period, certainly up to and including the Foreign Minister level. We had frequent contacts with their Embassy here. Bangladesh had a very senior man as Ambassador, Rashid Humayun Choudhury, a good friend of mine. I spent a lot of time with that Embassy and went out to Bangladesh on a couple of occasions during that period. That was a very active dossier because we were trying to help this still very new country get itself established, even though it was then undergoing a period of rule by a military man, General Ershad. We had correct relations with the Bangladesh government, relations which continued to develop satisfactorily despite the autocratic character of the Bangladesh regime.

*Q: How were they doing?*

KIRBY: All things considered, not badly. There were enormous economic problems because of the huge population, and the country often racked by natural disasters--tidal waves, hurricanes and what have you. But they were coming along and, although imperfectly, were still making some occasional small feints toward a restoration of democracy. And so we felt then, and now, that this new country, despite many strikes against it, was moving along toward the point where it could in time, play an international role. There have always been in the American government a strong feeling for Bangladesh. You know it's a story that goes back to the way they emerged into independence and so on. The State Department and the White House under successive administrations have always wanted to do what they could to help Bangladesh along economically and politically, and I think that has been a successful policy.

*Q: Speaking of Bangladesh, you had this peculiar situation where you had a Republican Administration and it was Ronald Reagan who came from the more right end of the spectrum and one of the "Articles of Faith" opposition to abortion and you had a large population in Bangladesh that was sort of the albatross around their neck. What was the birth-control issue there?*

KIRBY: I don't think it figured strongly in our relations with Bangladesh. Certainly there are other ways of arranging birth control other than through abortion. I think the people in the Administration who worried about abortion kept their focus on China where that issue got linked up with other issues. I don't remember it being much of a factor in the case of Bangladesh. In our economic assistance programs, we certainly had a program of rural health and hygiene for women. One aspect of that was advice on how you can control the size of your family, and I think we quietly went about that without any great challenge.

*Q: You mentioned China. Pakistan was sort of the key to our opening of China in the early 1970's. Was China an important factor at this point or what sort of factor was it in our relations with Pakistan?*

KIRBY: Well, I don't think that China was a major factor in our relations with Pakistan. China was a factor only in the sense that it was one of many countries that were determined to see the



Soviets leave Afghanistan. While China didn't give as much materiel support to the Mujahideen as some other governments did, philosophically in the UN, and elsewhere, the Chinese were making common cause with all those countries which were determined to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan. So in a way there was a compatibility in our respective policies toward Pakistan but I don't think China figured as a big issue as we calibrated U.S. relations with Pakistan.

*Q: Were we using Pakistan as a thermometer to find out what was happening in Iran at the time? Because we hadn't had relations since the take-over of our embassy in 1979?*

KIRBY: A very good question. I don't know about using them as a thermometer but certainly we were always attentive and interested in what Pakistan had to say about Iran. The Pakistanis, for their own reasons, were trying to improve their own relations with Iran. Part of that had to do with the struggle in Afghanistan because the Iranians were a factor in that struggle. I remember that Yahya Khan, the Pakistani Foreign Minister, made a visit or two to Tehran. Later I sat in on meetings where Secretary Shultz held discussions with Yahya across a broad range of issues, including Iran. My memory of it is that Yahya--I don't know whether he shared everything--talked to us about his impressions of what was going on in Iran. As I recall our saying (in effect) to the Pakistanis, "We Americans have on-going problems with Iran. Keep your eyes open and keep your powder dry, but we understand and have no objection to your maintaining your relations with Iran, and we hope that if you have insights that will generally be useful, you will share them with us." That was the tenor of discussions on it.

**PHYLLIS OAKLEY**  
**NEA, Afghanistan Desk Officer**  
**Washington DC (1982-1985)**

*Ambassador Phyllis Oakley was born in Omaha in 1934 and graduated from Northwestern. In 1958 she married Ambassador Robert Oakley. She accompanied her husband to a number of his postings in Africa and personally held a USIS position in Zaire and a number of high-level State Department positions. She was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

OAKLEY: I had applied for a job in the NEA bureau as the Afghanistan desk officer. The Soviets had invaded the country a couple of years earlier (December, 1979) and were in control in Kabul. We still had a small embassy there, headed by a chargé d'affaires. Of course everyone knew that we were supplying arms to the mujahadeen - the Afghan rebels, who were trying to throw the Soviets out. So when I became desk officer, I found myself involved in a very interesting and demanding task. I worked in NEA/PAB, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, which was headed by Harmon Kirby. I worked closely with a number of younger officers, who were assigned to the Pakistan and Bangladesh desks and had a very good time.

I felt that I had four main responsibilities: first of all, to support our charge and his staff in Kabul. When I started, the charge was Charles Dunbar; he was followed in 1983 by Ed Hurwitz. Both spoke Farsi or Dari, as the Afghans called it, and therefore could function effectively. I

think assignments to Kabul in this period must have been quite interesting, reporting on what the Soviets were doing, what their attitudes and operations were, and what Afghan attitudes were. The second part of the job was to work with all of the Afghan support groups in the U.S., of which there were several. In retrospect, I am sure that the CIA supported some of these groups in their overseas work, particularly when the Soviets were charged with the use of chemical weapons and with egregious gassing of Afghans in covered irrigation tunnels. There were a number of charges of “foul play” against the Soviets in the 1982-83 period. These followed the “Yellow Rain” incidents that had taken place in Southeast Asia.

*Q: From where were we getting our information?*

OAKLEY: Primarily from our mission in Kabul. It was, of course, limited in its coverage because it was almost impossible to travel outside the capital. We also got information from Peshawar, Pakistan where our consulate had been beefed up. There were lots of Afghans who crossed the border with Pakistan and talked to the various resistance groups who were either headquartered or had representation in Peshawar. There was also a considerable amount of news reporting; there were a number of intrepid correspondents who would accompany the mujahadeen, take pictures, and record their adventures. It was kind of “trial by fire” for many of them because they thought they had to enter Afghanistan to “earn their journalistic spurs.”

I worked with a number of NGO relief organizations that had representation in Afghanistan. Among these was “Doctors without Borders,” a French group that was doing relief work in Afghanistan. There was a serious effort being made to try to support the mujahadeen, who were primarily in the eastern part of the country, so that they could continue their resistance.

One of the major responsibilities I faced was the issue of Afghans in the U.S. requesting political asylum. I had to review and approve these requests. The Human Rights Bureau did the basic work on these cases, passing on the applications from INS and as I said, I would pass judgement on the *bone fides* of the petition. Of course, all of these Afghans wanted to come to speak to me. I found it tedious to go through the paperwork; I found my contacts with the asylees and refugees much more interesting and enjoyable. Most of the applicants came from the educated class, who had been brought to the U.S. by an active refugee resettlement program that was based in Pakistan. The Vietnamese program was used as a model. It was interesting that the Germans probably accepted more Afghan refugees than we did. They also choose many of the educated Afghans; there had been a German high school in Kabul and other outreach programs that made migration into Germany a logical consequence. We worked closely with a lot of the German-sponsored refugee groups.

Various conferences were organized in Europe to call attention to the allegations of chemical weapons use by the Soviets. This effort had an effect. I think one could debate whether the Soviets were using any such weapons after the beginning of the invasion. As time passed, I think it became evident that some chemical agents were being used for crowd control but that practice died down after the issue became one of international debate. I suspect they began to realize how dangerous the use of such weapons was for their own people in Afghanistan. Furthermore, I think the Soviets realized that they didn’t have to use such weapons; the bad publicity they were

receiving was just not worth the trouble. I think that they stopped using these agents or weapons after late 1982.

*Q: Was there any concern at the time about the mujahadeen's fundamentalism and the potential that had for the longer run?*

OAKLEY: Not really. At this time there were six major resistance groups - Gulbaddin Hekmatyar was considered to be the most fundamentalist and the strictest. He also had the most effective fighting group and received a lot of assistance. Hekmatyar is still alive, but he has been eclipsed by the Taliban. But in the early 1980s, he was considered to be the most effective resistance leader.

In those days, PAB's job was four-fold, trying to keep public attention focused on Afghanistan; trying to take care of our small mission in Kabul; dealing with the Afghan groups in the U.S.; and trying to take care of the refugee and humanitarian problems. I was very busy and really didn't have the time to worry about the longer range potential.

*Q: We know that the Afghan issue was of great concern to President Reagan. Were you getting pressure from the NSC? Were you aware of all of our activities in and around Afghanistan?*

OAKLEY: I knew that there were a number of on-going clandestine activities, but I had no idea about the details. For example, although I knew that we were supporting the mujahadeen and that CIA was somehow involved, I was not aware of the dollar amounts - that was a very tightly held fact. I did not feel that it was my place to probe into those activities.

Early on, it was clear to me that to keep a resistance movement going – such as the one in Afghanistan - three things were required. First, you had to have a native population that was willing to join an armed resistance; there was no substitute for such local involvement. Second, there had to be a safe haven which in this case was Pakistan for the mujahadeen to use as a base of operations (although Pakistan denied providing such a base - “plausible deniability”). Third, there had to be outside assistance, which we were providing, as were China and Saudi Arabia.

The Afghan resistance movement was always conservative. In its early days, it may not have been fundamentalist, but it was always conservative. I used to laugh about meeting Afghan leaders on my various trips to the region. I knew that most leaders would not shake my hand; that was just something they would not do. There were two leaders who were not Islamic fundamentalists: Mojaddedi and Pir Sailani. They were much more western; both spoke English; they were quite sophisticated and had been well educated, as were their children. They had relatives in the U.S. who were professionals; e.g. doctors. But they were never able to generate the same kind of support from the Afghan people as some of the other mujahadeen leaders. I think history has taught us that in a resistance movement usually one man rises to the top - such as Tito in Yugoslavia or Ben Bella in Algeria. That did not happen in Afghanistan because the Afghans themselves were so split by tribal loyalties and Pakistan found it could maintain control of the mujahadeen movement more easily if it were divided. By supporting the rivalries, the Pakistanis did not have to contend with one unchallenged Afghan leader.

*Q: The Pakistani involvement was always part of the equation. They had their own game plan.*

OAKLEY: Quite true. At this point, the Pakistani leadership was interested in “strategic depth;” in looking at the threat from India and they felt they needed a pliant Afghanistan behind them to face India’s power. If hostilities were to break out with India, Pakistan felt it needed to have Afghanistan fully on its side. The history of Afghan-Pakistan relations is very complicated; the Pushtun tribe dwells in both countries and Pakistan’s northwest territories are well known for their “independence.” The Taliban did not exist in the mid-1980s, they came later and sprang up in part from Afghan conservatism - but during the period we are discussing, there wasn’t the fanaticism we saw displayed in the mid and late 1990s.

*Q: Was there any concern for Iranian involvement?*

OAKLEY: Not really, because Iran was consumed by its war with Iraq. So Iran was not a major player in Afghanistan. There were a large number of Afghans from western Afghanistan who had fled across the border and had settled in eastern Iran. They were being assisted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. But this was not at all comparable to what the Pakistanis were doing for the refugees in the Northwest Frontier Province. There, large refugee camps had been established. Some of these camps were closed to outsiders because they were being used as military training grounds. Camps were set up all over the province, particularly around Peshawar. In 1983, I paid my first visit to Pakistan. I went to Quetta where I saw one of the fantastic ICRC (International Committee for Red Cross) hospitals for war casualties. It was very hot on the day I visited so I wore a short sleeved dress, but I did bring along a shawl to cover my arms. I was standing in the hospital when a young boy was dying, with his father and uncle beside his bed. They asked me to cover my arms, which I rapidly did. The young boy had internal injuries, which the doctors found in most cases to be fatal as it took so long to get to the hospital. I had this feeling that I could not fathom what they had gone through, just as they could not comprehend what I did and why I was there.

People who had broken limbs or limbs blown off by land mines usually recovered. The ICRC, almost from the beginning of its efforts, established a prosthetic program, fitting people with devices made in India, which although primitive by our standards, were very effective and useful. I will never forget standing outside the facility watching someone learning to ride a bicycle using an artificial foot.

After Quetta, I went to Islamabad and then on to Peshawar. My first impression as we drove toward Peshawar was that of Afghans walking in thick dust along the roads. The streets teemed with them, all heading for international refugee organizations’ headquarters to register and establish themselves. I thought Peshawar was a wonderful old Central Asian city, with an old souk, or market. I thought Afghan faces were as fine, dignified, and interesting, and as delicate as I had ever seen. I stopped in Mogadishu on the way home to see Bob. I really enjoyed that visit; it was a great introduction to the South Asia.

*Q: Was there a focal point for Afghan policy?*

OAKLEY: There was, but not at my level! I was the lowly desk officer. Certainly the Deputy Assistant Secretary and the Assistant Secretary were plugged in; they knew what the Agency was doing. But that was not my job. My focus was on the public face we were trying to present to the American public - about the how and why of what we were doing in Afghanistan. I wrote proclamations on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion that were issued by the White House - I wrote various speeches for our UN representatives on what was happening in Afghanistan.

I will never forget the call I received from Bernie Gwertzman of *The New York Times*, whom I knew slightly. We discussed Afghanistan in general and then he asked whether it was true that the CIA was spending \$100 million per annum on the mujahadeen. I told him that I didn't know the details of such activities! I was dealing with entirely different aspects of our Afghan policy. After the conversation ended, I immediately ran upstairs and told my bosses in the front office that I just had this phone call asking about dollar amounts of CIA support for the Afghan resistance. I reported that I had told Gwertzman that I didn't know anything about it. Later I learned that my report had filtered all the way up to George Shultz; someone then called *The New York Times* and the story that was printed did not talk of CIA support. In the early 1980s, information about CIA activities was very tightly held and therefore it was nearly impossible for any reporter to get confirmation of what was going on.

Clearly the Agency, supported by the White House, was the engine that drove our activities in and around Afghanistan. I was the public front for diplomatic efforts for Afghanistan, but that was not where the action really was. Nevertheless, I found it a wonderful job, but extremely demanding. I stayed on it for over 2 ½ years.

**JAMES A. LAROCCO**  
**Deputy Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1984-1986)**

*Ambassador James Larocco was born in 1948 in Evanston, Illinois. He graduated from the University of Portland (Oregon), and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He entered the Foreign Service in 1973. His overseas assignments include Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; Cairo, Kuwait, Beijing, and Tel Aviv. He was the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Near East Bureau 2001-2004. Ambassador Larocco was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.*

*Q: What about Bangladesh? It often gets lost when one thinks about the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. You had this rather nasty situation there for a long time.*

LAROCCO: It was calmed down by then, so Bangladesh was one of those countries that a newly tenured Foreign Service officer could essentially manage our relationship. I thought it was one of the best desk jobs in the State Department for a younger officer. No one looking over your shoulder. I, myself, spent very little time on it, and rarely did it reach the level of the DAS, and never can I recall it going to the assistant secretary or above.

I did visit Dhaka and fell in love with the Bangladeshis. I was one of those grad students in Washington in 1970 when Bangladesh independence was all the rage. So I knew a bit about Bangladesh and had always wanted to go there. I was not disappointed. They are among the gracious people on Earth.

My one substantive experience with the Bangladeshis involved our textile negotiations. I was called in by our DAS, Bob Peck, who said USTR had called and wanted to know if we had any special insights on what the Bangladeshi bottom line was in these negotiations. I said I didn't, but I would check. I called in the Bangladesh ambassador and I said I need to talk to you about the upcoming textile negotiations. Can we talk about it?

He said, "Sure. Let me check with Dhaka on this."

We met, and he said that the Bangladeshi bottom line was simple: don't hurt us. We are a poor, helpless country. Be nice to us.

That seemed odd. Most countries had massive briefing books, starting positions, fallback positions and bottom lines. Be nice to us? What the hell was that? Actually, the more I thought about it, it was pretty clever.

Don't hurt us.

What a great negotiating position! What kind of briefing books to prepare in response to that?

*Q: Sort of looking very sad eyed.*

LAROCCO: Very sad eyed. Like my beagle at supper time. It's irresistible, even for hardened trade negotiators.

I went over and talked to the USTR guys and said, "They are basically leaving it up to us to do it. They made it clear. Their only request was not to hurt them."

USTR ran some numbers by me, and I said that I was absolutely sure the Bangladeshis would say fine.

The Bangladeshis probably got more than they would have otherwise. I think USTR decided to be a bit generous as they caveated their offer by telling the Bangladeshis not to come back for years. The Bangladeshis kept repeating, OK, OK, OK. In the end it was the easiest negotiations I have ever seen.

The funny part about it was that USTR insisted on hosting a dinner to celebrate the agreement. I understood that an U.S. industry group was paying for the event. It took place at the Metropolitan Club, with industry representatives present. No one, however, checked on Bangladeshi eating habits. The Bangladeshis, few of them tipping the scales at more than a hundred pounds, accustomed to simple diets of rice and vegetables, were confronted with a big plate of prime rib that look like it belonged on The Flintstones tables. They just stared at it. They

simply would not even cut into it. I bet it was more animal protein than they would digest in a year. It was a tragic cultural faux pas, placing both the hosts and guests in embarrassing positions. This taught me the lesson that I believe we all know by heart today: research dietary and other customs before you host foreigners.

*Q: At one point weren't there two women leaders who really*

LAROCCO: That's today...Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina.

*Q: There is absolutely nothing between the two except hatred.*

LAROCCO: Poison darts day in and day out. It would be wonderful stuff for a mini-series. They would literally stab each other in the back if they could. Now they do it every way they can, politically, verbally or whatever. They try to make each other miserable. It is amazing that the country can progress with this battle that goes on. They are fortunate that they have the Indian economy surging and the Chinese pricing themselves out of the market. The country progresses despite a dysfunctional government. That's certainly something we Americans can understand.

*Q: Did you have Sri Lanka or not?*

LAROCCO: No. We had Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Right next to us was the NEA office that handled India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, which was good experience. Outstanding officers like Nancy Powell were there then. Nancy is now ambassador in India.

**LAWRENCE LESSER**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Dhaka (1984-1986)**

*Lawrence Lesser was born in New York in 1940. He received his BA from Cornell University and his MA from the University of Minnesota. He was in the Peace Corps in Enugu, Nigeria in 1964 and 1965. His foreign assignments included New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Brussels, Kigali, and Dhaka. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 12, 2002.*

*Q: So, we'll pick this up now in 1984 and you're off where?*

LESSER: I'm going to Bangladesh, to Dhaka, as DCM, which is my final Foreign Service tour. I retired in '87. I don't have much to say about the time after I came back from Dhaka from '86 to '87. It was only about an eight month period and actually I might have something to say because I have already had night thoughts there to the extent you're interested for this project in talking about the workings of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, which we already talked about a little yesterday, and of my subsequent experience working for the Office of the Inspector General as a reemployed annuitant.

*Q: Yes, also, you did some election monitoring and you already have done some, haven't you?*

LESSER: I'm going next month. Yes, and I'm also now a member of the Foreign Service Grievance Board and I could say a few things about that.

*Q: So, great, we've got a lot to talk about.*

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*Today is October 2, 2002. Larry, Bangladesh, 1984. In the first place, how did you get picked as DCM?*

LESSER: Well, funny you should ask because that was the first thing I was going to tell you anyway. This also is a prelude to a later discussion of how the system works and the effects of the Foreign Service Act of 1980. The DCM job in Bangladesh is a senior job; an FE-OC job. I was an O-1, and I had opened my window so that I was competing in an up-or-out system to get into the Senior Foreign Service. As deputy executive director in NEA, that was also a senior job. I had no realistic expectation of getting promoted out of that job, primarily because it's fundamentally an admin job and I was an economic officer, and so I didn't really think I would be very competitive, especially as the number of promotion opportunities was diminishing. So, there I was as the deputy executive director and actually part of the process of staffing overseas jobs including the senior jobs such as DCM in Dhaka. Howard Schaffer, who had been the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs, had been designated and was going out as ambassador and so working under Mac Gerlach, who was by then the Executive Director. I was assisting in looking for candidates to be his DCM (that position was coming vacant in the normal rotation). Howie was a very proactive kind of officer anyway, so he didn't need a lot of help, and he did a certain amount of his own recruiting, but Dhaka is not a garden spot. Actually it *is* a little bit of a garden spot, but doesn't have the reputation of being a very attractive posting, and it's very remote, halfway around the world from Washington, and it's in a part of the world, South Asia and Bangladesh in particular, which probably didn't have the image of being the place for fast-track people to go and anyway, what with one thing and another, no at-grade candidates were coming forward who were interested in the job and who were agreeable with Ambassador-Designate Schaffer. So, one day, one fine day, Stu, Mac Gerlach came back from a meeting with Howie Schaffer and he said, "Howie Schaffer wants to know if you would be interested in being his DCM in Dhaka." I said, "Well, I have a fairly nuanced view on that." The nuance was this, Stu. Back ten years or so earlier when I was the first and I think only economic officer on the Bangladesh desk, when Bangladesh was first formed, my wife said, "This isn't a very good idea, because they'll want you to serve in Bangladesh." She wouldn't have looked forward to going there. I told her, "I'll tell you something. They won't assign me there if I don't want to go. I pledge to you, dear wife, that I won't ever ask to be assigned there unless I have your agreement." So, that had been ten years or so earlier, but it wasn't a forgettable thing. Now, here it comes back. So, I said two things to Mac Gerlach: I said, "Well, Howie knows where to find me." He knew me well. We had served together in New Delhi. That was my first tour and of course he knew me in our assignments at that time, in 1984. I said, "Howie Schaffer can speak to me and I'd be happy to have that conversation." I don't remember exactly what the order of things was, but Howie Schaffer did ask me to come up to his office and told me that ... and I'll



be a little irreverent here in characterizing it. Let's say that he said, well, listen Larry, you're aware that I'm having some difficulty in filling the job of DCM and it looks like there's nobody available whose also qualified and so in desperation I'm going to take you even though you're not qualified. Well, he didn't say anything like that, at any rate, he did say, would I be interested and I said I'll have to discuss it with my wife. But notice, I didn't bid on the job. I had a bid list out. I was to be transferred that year and the DCM in Bangladesh was not on my list. So, I went home and I told my wife and I explained to her very carefully that I was not going against my pledge, but that I did want to take the job and that I thought that I would like it very much. I also thought it was probably going to provide the very best opportunity I could have for getting the promotion that I would need into the Senior Foreign Service. Our eldest child, our son born in Nigeria, was at college already and not living at home. Our daughter who was born in India as it happens (and who became a mother for the first time a week and a half ago, so I'm now a grandfather), my daughter was going into her senior year of high school at a DC public school. So, Harriet and I, Harriet being the wife, worked out an understanding that she would stay back the first year with Nina to let her finish high school because transferring to an overseas post for your daughter's senior year is a very stressful thing and really unfair to the child, and Harriet would join me the second year. On that basis I went back to Ambassador-Designate Schaffer and said I would like the job. They worked it through the personnel system, that is the seniors ceded the job to a non-senior, which didn't present any extraordinary difficulty, and that's how I got designated for the job. So, I was now in 'program direction,' whatever my background had been.

*Q: All right, in 1984, what was the situation in Bangladesh sort of internally and all and also our relations with them?*

LESSER: Bangladesh was the seventh most populous country in the world, a country that is approximately the size of Wisconsin. That was the conventional comparison. I prefer comparison with Louisiana, which is almost the same size.

*Q: Because of the Delta and all.*

LESSER: Because the Delta geographically has a greater resemblance to Louisiana. Bangladesh had about half the population of the United States. So, if you could picture half of the population of the U.S. in the space of Louisiana, you've got a beginning idea of what they had to contend with. So, it's an extremely densely populated country. We sometimes again a little irreverently say, well, yes, but the people aren't very big. One time when I was on the desk I made a visit out there. I may have already told you this story.

*Q: Go ahead.*

LESSER: I was at the airport getting ready to leave late at night and had some time waiting around. They had an unattended baggage scale and I think I may have stepped on it and it read my weight. The point is while I stood there a number of Bangladeshis happened by and once one saw, another one kind of sidled over and person after person weighed himself. I say himself, I don't recall that there were any women. Women aren't found walking around late at night in the airport. I got in position where I could read what their weights were. I must have seen 20 different people weigh themselves and not one of them exceeded 120 pounds. I weigh about 190

and I'm not fat. So, Bangladeshis aren't very big, but there are a hell of a lot of them. The country was characterized by the World Bank as the largest-poorest country in the world. A funny construction, but it's quite vivid. So, it was one of the few countries outside of Africa and Haiti that are in the category of poorest, and it was large with 110 or 120 million people. It's predominantly Muslim because the Hindus mostly left at partition in 1947 when East Bengal became part of Pakistan and so the country is predominantly Muslim. It doesn't match the stereotype of Islamic societies. The people are subcontinent people. They have a great deal in common with Indian Hindus; and they have their own Hindus because still 8% or 10% of the Bangladesh population is Hindu. Present-day Bangladesh is historically the hinterland of Bengal; if Calcutta is the center of Bengali culture and commerce, then Bangladesh was a hinterland to that, and I want to be careful how I say this, but historically, they were predominantly something of a left-behind people. Who are Muslims in South Asia anyway? To a very large extent they are people who converted from Hinduism, and why would you convert from Hinduism? Because you were low caste and not treated right in a Hindu-dominated society, so that a very large proportion of Bangladeshis are probably, I'm not a scholar on this, but this is sort of conventional diplomatic wisdom, probably are descendants of people who never had much of a place in their society. They are people therefore who carry around with them something of an inferiority complex. That works against them in putting together a stable political system and in putting together a rational plan for development. On top of that they fought a very bloody war of independence in 1971 with the help of India, which is not their natural friend because of the religious difference, with the help of India and not much help from very many other countries and certainly no help from the United States, attained independence, but started life as an independent country with some grave disadvantages, including that what infrastructure they had had been very severely damaged. Hundreds of bridges had been destroyed and you need bridges in a Delta country in order to move anything except if you're moving along the rivers by boat. So, here was a country which started with next to nothing. They had been a net surplus producer, a net exporter of rice at the turn of the century, but they had long since lost the race to keep their food production ahead of their population growth. They now had a tremendously large population, a very inefficient agricultural system, and an extremely inefficient infrastructure for moving things and distributing things. Their leading export product was jute - jute fiber and jute products - and jute is a very expensive and labor intensive material to produce and it was losing markets anyway.

*Q: Is it a vine?*

LESSER: It's not a vine, it's what would you call it? It's like, related to hemp or a tough grass and it makes a tough and durable material. In the U.S. its main use has been as carpet backing and they had a very large part of the carpet backing market in the U.S. The U.S. used to make a lot of carpets, but it was losing market share to plastic, to polypropylene types of products which are oil based and Bangladesh doesn't have oil. Then they were losing market share for the fairly obvious reason that their market was so seriously disrupted by the conflict that culminated in their gaining independence. So, jute in the best of circumstances wouldn't be the basis for a rise from poverty to a more comfortable economic situation, but these were far from the best of circumstances. This was an extremely needy country on a humanitarian basis, and also extremely needy if you were trying to project how they could become self-sufficient and take their place in the community of nations.

Politically, I haven't talked about that, maybe that's just my temperament. Politically, their independent struggle was lead by Sheik Mujibur Rahman, who was a fairly stereotypical street politician, a rabble-rousing politician, a great speaker and like others with that talent - one could point nowadays to Yasser Arafat as somewhat comparable - he's very good at rallying people and getting them really revved up to go after what they believe they're entitled to, but those are not the same skills that you need to run a government. He was the father of the country and he became the first Prime Minister and he was disastrous as the Prime Minister. He and many members of his family were assassinated. They were replaced by a general, and he too was assassinated. The army in various guises led the government, the Bangladesh army is a very professional army in the British tradition, but it doesn't have much of a mission. Bangladesh doesn't have designs on projecting its power outside of its own borders. It's not quite absurd, but they also don't have a very significant defense need because nobody is casting covetous eyes on the land of Bangladesh.

*Q: Particularly India.*

LESSER: But India, here was India, they provided the indispensable support that enabled Bangladesh to come into existence, but it would only be a matter of time before the more natural mutual suspicion would take over, and it's not just a religious suspicion. Bangladesh is down-river from India and water is a very precious commodity in a lot of places in the world, no less there, so that sooner or later, and in fact it was sooner, there would be conflicts between India and Bangladesh over water rights and the rights to dam and irrigate and divert the waters of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges. So, when I got there in '86, the senior general, General Ershad was the head of government.

*Q: You got there in '86 or '84?*

LESSER: Sorry, thank you, I got there in '84. I left in '86. Ershad was still there, however. Thank you. Ershad was the head of the government, which had a cabinet that included several military people and a somewhat larger number, I don't remember exactly how it broke out, of civilians who were themselves a mixture of people with political backgrounds and people with credentials as academics or technocrats, and it wasn't a bad mix. All the same they had been in power for a while and there was a lot of movement from the two main political parties for the military to go back to the barracks and allow the civilians to take over. I might say a little more about the political parties, but maybe I can skip it for now. Ershad did hold elections during the time I was there and he civilianized himself. He retired from the military, ran for president, and won. So, they successfully accomplished a transition from military to civilian rule that was not very disruptive. As a kind of sidebar, this was the third country where I served that had a military government. A kind of a little oddity of my career, but when I was in Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, General Lamizana was the head of the government. When I was in Rwanda, General Habyarimana was the head of the government, and here General Ershad, the senior army general - in fact in all three cases, they were the senior army leaders who were the chiefs of state or chiefs of government. In all three cases a think a dispassionate observer would say, well, it's not great, it's not democracy, it's not Jeffersonian, but it's probably better than any realistic alternative. The fact was that the two main political parties at the time, the Awami League

headed by Mujib's daughter, Sheik Hasina, and the BNP, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, headed by Begum Zia, the widow of the assassinated second leader, those parties, well, to begin with, the two heads, the two women at the heads of the parties couldn't stand one another and couldn't agree on who would cross the street first. The parties were in a constant battle with one another and it didn't look like they would transition into a democratic government, and also it didn't look like either party was equipped to fight or limit corruption. So, it would have been difficult to have any confidence if one of those parties was in charge. There was also no chance of the two of them getting together and having a kind of unity government that would be an improvement over a government led by top military people. So, there you are.

Now, how are our relations with Bangladesh; I think you asked that, too? Our relations were remarkably good. Our role in the independence struggle had been to sympathize with Pakistan and to argue; in fact Kissinger's famous expression that took him to Pakistan came out of that struggle. We tilted to Pakistan and of course we bet on the wrong horse there because once the Indians got into the equation, there was no question that Pakistan would not prevail, Pakistan was going to be rendered asunder and turned into two countries. I think in retrospect most people would say that was the better solution than what we were thinking of, let them go their separate ways. But the Bangladeshis very deeply resented the role of the United States during the independence period and here I was 13 years later and relations were extremely good. Many elite Bangladeshis would say always with a smile that they would love to be the 51st state. We're not too surprised to hear that from some places, but with that recent history and they said we owed a blood debt. Occasionally they'd throw it up at us, but it was only as a kind of negotiating ploy or a rhetorical device. The fact was that the Bangladeshi leadership believed strongly that one way or the other they needed to throw in their lot with us. They needed us to be on their side, that the international consortium giving assistance to Bangladesh would do so only if the Americans were in favor of doing it. So, as an American diplomat doors were opened very thoroughly and it was always a pleasure to be dealing with Bangladesh. They also, however, regarded it as a way to keeping leverage and of being an international player that they would have good relations with communist countries and radical Islamic countries. They did certainly have a very large Soviet embassy there. There was also a PLO office in Dhaka.

*Q: PLO means?*

LESSER: The Palestine Liberation Organization.

*Q: We were not talking to them in those days.*

LESSER: We were not. That's correct. But the Bangladeshis gave them the status equivalent to a diplomatic mission. That's all that really needs to be said about that. Bangladesh also didn't have very deeply established institutions so that in doing diplomatic business with them we would find that, well, for example, the Department would ask us to make a demarche encouraging the Bangladeshis to vote in favor of our position on some United Nations issue. The director general at the foreign ministry would hear us and say - just for example - he might say, okay, that sounds right, we're with you. A week later we would get a cable from New York saying that Bangladesh had voted the other way at the UN, and I'd go back in or our political counselor would go back in and ask what happened, and the answer if he was being frank and candid which Bangladeshis

generally are, the answer was well, we instructed our ambassador there and he doesn't always read his mail and he's a retired army general, even senior to Ershad. He does his own negotiating among the missions in New York and I guess he decided not to follow those instructions. Well, thank you very much, but it does kind of say, what's the point of our doing all of this business? That was a frustration we felt that maybe there's a little bit of a cross-cultural thing here. I don't think the Bangladeshis would have understood very well if we said this is no way to do business. *It is the way that they do business.*

*Q: Yes. In the first place, what was living like in Bangladesh at the time, because one always thinks of a place where every year they have a flood that kills thousands of people and you think of it as being life as on stilts? It's like being in Venice or something like that.*

LESSER: Well, people are living quite nicely in Venice, Stu. Out at the edges life is very perilous for Bangladeshis. I had heard of the great typhoon, which occurred, when, around the same time as the independence struggle, '71 or '72. It was said to have swept away and this is you know, you sort of have to stop over the number, 400,000 or 500,000 souls swept out into the Bay of Bengal. Now this is a typhoon, not the river flooding which is annual and predictable, but this is a tropical storm, which comes in periodically and is relatively unpredictable. That's one of the all time greatest disasters of the world, but there's a couple of things to be said about that. One is it's interesting for starters that people say maybe it was 400,000 maybe it was 300,000, maybe it was 500,000. Why don't they know? Well, I don't think most of the people living in those areas that were swept out to sea were even recorded people. These were people out on the extreme margins. Why didn't it happen before? Because people weren't living there before. Why were they living there now? Because the country was so densely populated that people had pushed out to areas that were fundamentally unsuited for human habitation. That means maybe nine years out of ten you can live there and grow rice there and make a living, but that tenth year you're going to see a major storm and it's going to sweep everything away. Well, there shouldn't be human communities living in places like that, but there were. Those were out at the extreme edges and that doesn't speak to the great stability of the greater part of Bangladesh, which has a system that has developed over the centuries of coping with the changes in the weather and the changes in the water level. Road traffic was generally very congested and there were a lot of roads that would be washed out during the floods, but an awful lot of traditional transportation in Bangladesh is on the rivers themselves and it's a very beautiful thing to be in *Sonar Bengal*, Golden Bengal.

Bangladeshis are very sentimental about their country. They love their country. They love it with a physical love and you can appreciate it when you get out into the country and especially when you get out into these locally designed wooden boats; some with sails and some with oars and some with poles to push them. It's a beautiful place and it's a pleasure to live there. Furthermore, the urbanized educated Bangladeshis we dealt with are sort of born talkers. They like to shmooze, they like to socialize. They like to tell you what they know and if they run out of what they know, they go on to tell you stuff they don't know, and it's up to you to sort out how much of it to trust. The ones who have money and status love to invite foreigners, and foreign diplomats in particular, to their homes and they serve wonderful food there and regale them with wonderful stories. So, life in Dhaka was really quite pleasant. There's not much crime; practically no violent crime at all. A lot of accidents, a lot of health risks, but no more than many

other places. I would say that in the U.S. diplomatic community, the majority of people were very happy to be serving there. The ones who had representational responsibilities who were out in the community and meeting Bangladeshis were probably happier, the happiest of all, but even if you weren't, it was not a hard place to live comfortably.

*Q: Well, during this '84 to '86 period were there any issues that particularly came up?*

LESSER: You would think I would know it right off. In a way I think I'm going to say there were none. This was a period of very smooth relations. During that period there were external matters that affected our life. I mentioned that there was a Libyan embassy. This was also the period when the U.S. attacked Qadhafi, bombed places where he was thought to be staying and there were demonstrations and threats against U.S. diplomats around the world, particularly in Islamic countries. Although Bangladesh is not typical, they do have a considerable fellow feeling with other Islamic countries and so we perceived a high threat level at various times and I was sort of the lead person along with the regional security officer to deal with the ministry of interior and make sure that we were getting the protection we needed and that we were being kept apprized of their political intelligence of any threats that might be directed against us. There were some nervous times, but there were no actual incidents. Well, I can remember one incident where this was not directed specifically against the U.S. There were also labor actions called *hartals*, which meant essentially a shutdown of everything and they were scheduled by one political party or the other or by labor unions supported by political parties. When there was a *hartal*, mobs would go into the streets to make sure that no vehicular traffic was allowed to move. Dhaka has an enormous fleet of bicycle rickshaws and sometimes the *hartal* included them and sometimes it didn't. The main thrust was to keep the modern sector, the people who were driving cars and buses, from moving around and bringing economic life to a standstill sometimes for more than a day, sometimes for, I don't recall that it ever was more than about three days at a shot. We had to make a decision. Our embassy at that point, we had not built the new highly secure embassy. We had the upper stories of a five or six story building in the heart of the old downtown business section, but all of our personnel lived several miles away commuting distance in an area that had a lot of these nice single family houses. There was only one main route and only a couple of alternatives to go between the two. So, when there was going to be a *hartal*, there would be no way for our personnel safely to go between the office and home. One time I was downtown at the office when an unscheduled set of demonstrations was occurring and I honestly don't recall what the occasion was. I don't think it had anything specifically to do with the U.S. So, my driver and I did not have an armored car (the ambassador did), and we started moving weaving through side streets to try to find a way around where we knew there were angry demonstrators. We happened to emerge into one square which turned out to be the wrong place at the wrong time, just a bad guess, and we got spotted by a few youths, a couple of them with bricks in their hands. (You couldn't stone cars because there are no stones in Bangladesh. It's just, it's vast, a river.

*Q: Delta.*

LESSER: Delta, thank you very much. So, there is a very large brick making industry and the bricks are the building material of choice and so people could get bricks, but they couldn't get rocks.) This fellow charged the car at full speed and cocked the brick and threw it at the car from

maybe five feet distance. But he missed. I had dived down so that if it did come through the window I wouldn't be at the window anymore, and my driver had done the same. But the guy missed the car completely. The guy, he may have speed, but he's never going to pitch in the major leagues unless he gets better control. We were able to escape from that. That was probably the closest I ever came in my entire Foreign Service career to getting hurt.

Returning to the question you started with Stu, were there any issues? The answer is no. There were no serious bilateral issues between us and Bangladesh during those couple of years and we were, there was no reason for there to be any. They were doing a pretty good job at moving along in the hope that something wonderful would happen and they would eventually find a way to be more self-sufficient and some of those things did happen.

*Q: Did we have a Peace Corps aid program there?*

LESSER: We had a large aid program. We did not have a Peace Corps program. There had been Peace Corps in East Pakistan. They left I'm not sure when they left, but I think they were gone quite a long time before the independence struggle and they had never come back to independent Bangladesh. They have since come back in relatively small numbers and we used to talk about the desirability of having the Peace Corps, but some of the old suspicions of the U.S. lingered and anyway, they were getting, they were getting assistance from a rather large, just about half of our total American direct hire personnel were USAID people.

*Q: Was there any particular tie or affinity between Bangladesh and the province of Bengal?*

LESSER: I'm trying to recall. I think you know, in the long term of history of what I remember and what I don't, I must be a relatively non-political person. Good thing I was not a political officer. There were a lot of Bangladeshis who had connections to West Bengal. There wasn't a great deal of human traffic between the two and there was not much trade traffic either between the two. They had grown apart. Remember that they were apart, not just from '71, but from '47 from the initial partition. Although there are a lot of Hindu Bangladeshis most of whom probably must be Bengali, Bengali speakers, there were no great efforts made and there was never much of an issue to get closer relations with West Bengal. You know, on the list of languages around the world, Bengali - and we do persist in saying Bengali for the language and Bangladeshi for the nationality - Bengali as around the sixth most spoken language in the world. It's easy to miss that because it's spoken in a part of the world which hasn't weighed very heavily in geopolitical affairs. On the Bangladeshi side, until very recent years when a few novelists have started to appear, especially women novelists, there wasn't much of a cultural history of literature either or music. On the West Bengal side there is a greater intellectual tradition. That goes with what I said earlier about the cultural difference between the Muslim and the Hindu Bengalis.

*Q: Yes. Lately, a woman novelist has been having a lot of trouble from Bangladesh because she's moderately feminist I guess. Were we at all interested in the role of women there at the time or was this something we left, that was their problem?*

LESSER: No, we had the Women in Development Program - WID - which AID had in a great many countries and we had a WID officer in the AID mission. There was a considerable

willingness to support assistance to projects that were particularly aimed at women. One famous example is the Grameen Bank which was founded by a famous Bangladeshi whose name escapes me for the moment, but he's still around and he was the inspiration for a great many other such banks. This bank loans very small amounts of money to people in villages who do not have any other access to a monetary system and the small amounts are large enough to buy well, let's say, a sewing machine or a farm animal and not much more. They found phenomenal success directing loans that rarely were more than \$100 in value to people who then paid them off and made it the basis of little home businesses that generated some cash. The overwhelming majority of those loans were to women and that was understood from the beginning that this was going to benefit women first and foremost. So, we were strongly aware of the importance of women. I should also say that my ambassador, Howard Schaffer's wife, Teresita Schaffer, also a Senior Foreign Service Officer and subsequently an ambassador herself to Sri Lanka, for the tour of duty in Bangladesh she went on leave without pay and she did a little bit of work here and a little bit of work there. Like me, she was an economic officer and she did some work on the situation of women in Bangladesh. Her high profile meant that what she worked on got looked at by the Bangladeshis and by the powers that be here in Washington. So, yes, there was a lot of women-oriented development activity.

*Q: This was during the Reagan administration?*

LESSER: Yes, it was.

*Q: How about family planning, birth control and all that, all that leads to abortion and the Reagan administration had very strong views on that.*

LESSER: We had a strong population program. One of its characteristics was to promote contraceptive use and at that time, I'm not an expert on this, we were pushing to some extent a so-called cafeteria approach, which is to make all kinds of contraceptive services and methods available. There was particular emphasis on condoms for men and you could find condoms were available at an extremely low price because we were subsidizing them. The U.S. government provided them and the Bangladesh government distributed and they would charge an extremely nominal amount. They were available at all these little kiosk types of places, places by the side of the road that would sell individual cigarettes and things that people like to chew, just little odds and ends. It always included condoms and so there was a lively market for condoms and presumably a lot of use. I think it's next to impossible to take a country like Bangladesh with an enormous number of people with a very low literacy rate, especially among women, but also low literacy by world standards among men, and great shortages of medically trained personnel and public health trained personnel and expect to have very dramatic results. So, I don't recall what kind of statistics there were and anyway, statistics on family planning tend to be a little suspect and population statistics about Bangladesh would be less than accurate as well. There was a program, a vigorous program. It was by the usual measures of such programs, relatively successful and well accepted. It did accord with the policy of the Bangladesh government and we did not to my recollection run into any objections or problems from Washington that we were going too far. I don't think we were going too far. We were not supporting abortions. No doubt there were abortions being performed in Bangladesh. I'm not familiar, I say that, I say no doubt, but I don't have any personal knowledge of that.



*Q: Were you there during the flood time?*

LESSER: Well, there's a flood time every year, but not every year is there a very serious flood. One year the streets of Dhaka were pretty thoroughly flooded for a few days and that was somewhat disruptive to activity in the city. They could have droughts, too and we experienced that. I don't have any dramatic recollections of being there for floods. These were a couple of normal years.

*Q: Where did you go to get away from things? Could you travel up country or what would you do?*

LESSER: Let me tell a little story about my ambassador. You know, the traditional idea of what a DCM does is essentially one big thing and also incidentally one other thing. The big thing is the DCM is the inside man or if he's a woman, the inside woman, who kind of keeps his eye on the operation and is pretty much available any time that something comes up. Keeping track of what the various agencies are doing and being aware of all of the administrative stuff and scheduling stuff and like that. Okay, and that's certainly what Howie Schaffer wanted me to do. And he's the outside man, and since the DCM is also going to be the charge when the ambassador is out of the country, well, then that's the second thing. He's got to know enough about what the ambassador is doing so that he can step in and act for him. That was our basic arrangement. Early in my tour I became friendly with the Bangladeshi director of rural electrification a project receiving AID funding. Actually it was funded by a lot of donors in different parts of the country, but AID was the biggest donor and the program was modeled on our own rural electrification administration (which is one of the hardest names of an organization I've ever had to pronounce). "Rural electrification." The director was a colonel on secondment, a colonel in the Bangladesh army, and he invited me to join him on the rural electrification boat for a long weekend down among the rivers in the Sunderbans, a part of the country which has almost no people, but does have man-eating tigers and is a very interesting geographical area. I said, gee, I'd like to do that and I went to Ambassador Schaffer and I said, I've had this invitation, could I go. He said, "Well, you know, Larry, I kind of picture you as being the inside man and trips like that are what I do. But since he's asked you and since it would be a little awkward for you to have to go and tell him that I told you you couldn't go, yes, of course you can go, but keep in mind what I said." So, I went and I had a wonderful trip. It was a marvelous experience. But I made a mental note that I would never ask Howard Schaffer again for permission to travel up country or down country or anywhere beyond walking distance from our office, and I never again asked him. He made a lot of wonderful trips all over the country and I made two more trips both of them at his suggestion. One was when the country director for Bangladesh came out from the Department to spend a few days with us. Ambassador Schaffer and this fellow didn't get along particularly well, didn't like each other particularly well, and so Ambassador Schaffer said, "Larry, I have a trip for you. I would like you to take (I'm not going to mention his name) on a trip to Chittagong [the port city], and have a good time."

*Q: And keep him away from me.*

LESSER: And keep him away from me, that's right. So, I took that trip and very much enjoyed it. I saw some really fascinating things, the most fascinating of which was the ship-breaking industry of Bangladesh. Ship-breaking means that when a ship has reached the end of its useful life, they take it for its final voyage which is to go out into Chittagong Harbor, rev up the engines full blast and drive it right into the beach as high up on the beach as it will go and then little Liliputian people climb all over it with welding torches and take it apart. They sell the pieces, the scrap metal and anything which is salvageable like furniture and maybe machinery and the like. Bangladesh was one of the two or three important ship-breaking nations in the world. I watched ship-breaking on that trip. Then very late in my tour, this involved Chittagong again, we got the first ever U.S. naval ship visit to Bangladesh. A very nice, show the flag, thing, what you do with friendly countries, and the U.S. naval ship docked out in Chittagong Harbor because the port is too shallow to accommodate large ships, and Ambassador Schaffer went out there the first day and had a couple of ceremonial things. Then since my children were out visiting during that time, he said, "Larry, why don't you take your kids out?" We had a wonderful visit. At night on the ship we had a little launch that took us between the port and where the ship was three or four miles out at anchor. That was a wonderful trip and it was a very nice gesture on his part.

So, where did I go? When I had leave I would get out of the country, but not necessarily go very far. I went to Nepal and did a little bit of trekking on one occasion. I went to Bangkok, Thailand a couple of times because there was a direct air connection between Dhaka and Bangkok. Bangkok is a very interesting place. I went up country in Thailand on vacation and I even went to Calcutta for a vacation, arranged to stay at the Calcutta Club and I played golf in Calcutta for three or four days. That's where you went. There were people who went further afield. It's interesting that people, Bangladesh is a lovely country, but nobody in Nepal would come to Dhaka for vacation, nobody in Calcutta came to Dhaka for vacation and certainly nobody in Bangkok did. From our perspective all of those places looked good for a little R&R.

*Q: What about, was there any pattern of Bangladeshis coming to the United States?*

LESSER: Coming in what sense?

*Q: Well, not really as visitors, but workers.*

LESSER: There was a slow trickle of Bangladeshis. You encounter them now and that's probably what you have in mind: running restaurants. A very large number of Indian restaurants are actually Bangladeshi restaurants. Taxi drivers in a number of cities, particularly New York, include Bangladeshis. They had a pretty good system of the people who would come to the States helping the newcomers to find a place as many immigrant communities have done throughout American immigrant history, but compared to India, the number of Bangladeshis coming to America is very small. It just so happened, Stu, that this morning and today is the 2nd of October, 2002, I was mediating at the DC Superior Court in Small Claims and a group of six Bangladeshi jurists were ushered into the court because they're here on a little study trip. My mediation supervisors were not aware that I used to live in Bangladesh, but I've now told them and I got to talk with the visitors for a few minutes. That of course, that kind of flow of visitors to learn and then go back and apply some of it, that was happening almost continuously.

**MARY JO FURGAL**  
**Assistant Public Affairs Officer**  
**Dhaka (1984-1986)**

*Ms. Furgal was born and raised in Illinois. She attended a number of colleges and universities in the US and Austria, including the University of Chicago, where she pursued Library Science Studies. She entered the USIA Foreign Service in 1978 and served as Cultural Affairs Officer in Colombo, Madras, Katmandu, Dhaka, Bucharest and Harare as well as in Washington, DC. Her assignments were primarily tandem assignments with her Foreign Service Officer husband. Ms. Furgal was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.*

*Q: Well, you went down to Dhaka from when to when?*

FURGAL: We left Kathmandu '84 and went to Dhaka '84 to '86.

*Q: What were you doing?*

FURGAL: Then I was the APAO, (assistant public affairs officer) but essentially I was a CAO again. There are only two of us so the boss did the press work and I did the cultural.

*Q: Now, Dhaka, you know, I've had very mixed reviews. Some people think it's a terrible place and other people said it's one of those hidden places in the Foreign Service that everybody talks about how awful it is but it was really great. How did you find it?*

FURGAL: Oh, I loved it. I really liked it. The people were wonderful, just wonderful. There was almost nothing to see and do. I mean, after India, there wasn't nearly the amount of music and fine arts. The Muslims did not portray Allah, so the fine arts didn't really develop very well.

*Q: I'm surprised because aren't the, the Bangladeshis, aren't they out of the Bengali culture and the Bengali culture is so rich.*

FURGAL: The emphasis there was more on poetry and drama. You don't see a lot of art galleries. There's wood carvings and embroidery, items like that, but not portraits. Half of the country seems to be poets; it's just amazing. They would write a poem at the drop of a hat. My father died while I was there and zip, I was straight to the funeral home; the janitor wrote me a poem on the occasion.- When my husband was promoted he wrote another poem. It was amazing. We enjoyed it.

*Q: Well, in the first place, were you hit at all by floods and things of that nature?*

FURGAL: Not in Dhaka directly. The south, around the Sundarbans, was hardest hit. But we lived on the edge of a rice paddy and during the monsoons, it would be a lake. We personally

didn't experience flood we did, however, when we were in Sri Lanka. We had friends that lost family heirlooms and had to be evacuated by Marines who came for them in little rowboats.

*Q: What about on the cultural side, did we have a library there?*

FURGAL: We had a library open to the public; what was nice about it was that my little office was in a separate area. It contained the library and the cultural affairs staff while the USIS headquarters were across town in the embassy. So I had a wonderful time in Dhaka.

I had two PAOs, one left after one year and one chap came a year after I did. They're both retired by now and not in the area. The second officer was gone often, I think I was acting PAO five times in less than a year; his father wasn't well, then his father died; his marriage was breaking up so he went home since his wife had not joined him at post, and finally to sign the divorce papers. He seemed to be out more than he was in post. It was good managerial experience for me but sad for him.

*Q: Well, how about, did you get a feel for the students? The university there was an important part of your work?*

FURGAL: Yes, it was the exchange and speaker programs, similar to the university situation, I described in Madras... The student radicals and the ones that would periodically have demonstrations tended to be from the non-science faculties because they couldn't see a decent future. They got into university; their parents beggared themselves to support them and although they would get stipends, the dorms and the food were terrible. It was really kind of pathetic. And then after they received a three year degree in history; what would they do with it? There was no chance to go to the United States with a three-year degree and a limited pool of low-paying teaching jobs. So, in my experience, these would be the students who would demonstrate and become radicalized, much more so than science students.

*Q: Did they attack your offices and all?*

FURGAL: That would happen in Korea every spring, but not in the countries where I served. Bill Maurer, my boss the second time in Colombo, used to tell stories about the libraries in Korea; it seemed that every spring the students would riot, the American Center libraries would be ransacked, then repaired and it would start all over again.

*Q: Did you have much connection at all there with our consul general in Calcutta or anything like that?*

FURGAL: Not really; not at my level in Dhaka, anyway. There was probably more at my boss's level or through the political or the economic section. You know, Henry Kissinger was famous for saying that Bangladesh was the armpit of the universe. That attitude probably colored our reaction when we learned that we were going to Dhaka. We were not terribly happy in Kathmandu when we found out I remember the U.S.A.I.D. director's wife telling us how much we'd end up liking it and we did. It was the people; the people were so wonderful. They call them the Texans of South Asia, just really warm hearted and receptive to our outreach.

*Q: Well, that's great. Did you feel we had a pretty good exchange program?*

FURGAL: Well, we never thought we had enough grants. Europe still received proportionately more at that time. I think South Asia's getting a little more now because of the perceived Muslim situation...

*Q: Well, was Islam a factor, a major factor in your work?*

FURGAL: No. No, not then. I left there in '86 and I visited briefly in '91 to see my old staff. We used to say that the Bangladeshis were more Bengalis than they were Muslim. You didn't see a lot of women in burqas then; my staff were all Muslim but some drank, a few smoked, but during Ramadan, they kept Ramadan probably better than most Catholics keep Lent these days. They were wonderful people. In fact, there's one visiting in the States right now; we're going to see him in October.

**HOWARD B. SCHAFFER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Bangladesh (1984-1987)**

*Ambassador Howard B. Schaffer was born in New York in 1929. He graduated from Harvard University and then served overseas in the US Army before joining the Foreign Service in 1955. Overseas, Schaffer served in Malaysia, India, Korea, Pakistan, Cyprus, and as Ambassador to Bangladesh. In Washington DC, he served in the Office of Personnel, as the Country Director for Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka, and as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 1997.*

*Q: Then in 1984, you were appointed as U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh. How did that come about?*

SCHAFFER: NEA deputy assistant secretaries were ordinarily appointed as ambassadors in South Asia. In 1984, a vacancy arose in Bangladesh. I decided to let my interest in that job be known--as is done by most Foreign Service officers in such circumstances. I told Murphy about this interest; I think I was a logical candidate in light of my experience and background in the area. I obtained the Department's backing; there was no other candidate whom the White House pushed. In Bangladesh we have had a succession of Foreign Service officers. I think there was one ambassador in Dhaka who was not an FSO, but he had considerable AID experience. It is obviously not the kind of post which attracts your typical political ambassador. There may be someone in academia or in the private sector who might have a particular interest in that post some time in the future, but the record to date would suggest otherwise.

So I had no problem obtaining White House approval nor were the confirmation hearings difficult at all. My hearing was attended by only one Senator--Rudy Boschwitz. He was

chairman of the sub-committee of the SFRC that dealt with the region. But his sub-committee actually never played much of a role in shaping policy, unlike its opposite number in the House. Boschwitz himself knew little about South Asia.

The confirmation hearing was held not only for me, but also for a colleague, Paul Boeker, who had been proposed for the position of ambassador to Jordan. Boschwitz decided, for whatever purpose, to feature me as “his” kind of candidate--someone with long experience in the area. I think he used me as a foil against Paul. Boeker had worked in the White House on the NSC staff as the NEA specialist, but had never actually served in the Near East. So I sailed through and eventually Boeker was also confirmed, but only after considerable difficulty. Boschwitz also used the occasion to vent his displeasure with the administration’s Near East policies, which Boeker had helped formulate when he had been in the White House. He had no particular complaint about South Asia policy, insofar as he was aware of it.

I attended the ambassador’s course, but only sporadically. I would have liked to have come to more of the sessions, but in the summer of 1984 I had to deal with what turned out to be a false crisis in South Asia. There was concern on the part of the NSC staff that a war was brewing between Pakistan and India. The Department was instructed to do something about it. In retrospect, we can see that those fears were considerably overstated, especially by NSC staffer Sharin Tahir-Kheli. (The episode came to be known in the State Department as “Sharin’s War.”) Nonetheless, there was considerable work to be done, particularly since I had allowed the two country directors who worked for me, one dealing with India, the other with Pakistan, to leave in the late spring to take on their new DCM assignments overseas. So I became pretty much desk-bound in the summer of 1984. I was simply not able to walk off the job and attend the ambassador’s course on a regular basis. I did sit in on some of the course sessions and took part in some of the trips. I regret that I did not give enough time to take the full course; I wish I could have. I am sure that it would have been very useful. I would also have found it useful to be able to attend language courses as many ambassadors did on a part-time or even full-time basis as they prepared for their assignments.

I had some concept about the organization of the embassy from my previous experience. I had visited it on a number of occasions--twice as deputy assistant secretary. The latest of these visits had taken place in early 1984 when a chiefs of mission conference was held in Dhaka. I stayed on after the conference for further consultations. So I had a pretty good idea of what awaited me. Yet ironically, of all of the countries in South Asia, Bangladesh was the one with which I was the least familiar. I had never served there, nor had I been associated with Bangladesh policy before I took over as DAS. I must confess that I did not follow developments in that country as closely as I did events in most of the other countries in the area.

In general, I was quite satisfied with the embassy organization that I inherited from my very capable personal friend, Jane Coon. I also had no problems with the policies that were in effect, many of them recommended by her. I thought the embassy was functioning well. It enjoyed good relations with the government and with important elements of Bangladeshi society. It also had very good working relationships with other U.S. Government agencies that worked in the country. My initial intention therefore was pretty largely to leave the embassy as I found it. As I

became more familiar with the operations, I did make some changes. But initially, I was inclined to follow Jane's approach.

We had no problems integrating non-State personnel into the embassy. I think we worked together quite nicely. I tried to improve coordination with the AID mission. That mission was a large organization and I thought it was very important for the embassy staff to have greater contact with its chief and its key officers. I made it my business to become involved in what they were doing, though not to the point of becoming a hands-on manager. I know that the AID people welcomed my interest and relished getting me out into the Bangladesh countryside to look at their projects.

I tried to keep Jane's DCM, but he was intent on moving on so I brought in my own man. I saw the DCM as the "inside" man responsible for the day-to-day management of the embassy. I instructed him to focus on that role. I took the role of the "outside" man as well as the over-all leader. I found my staff to be quite good. There had been a considerable turn-over which was unfortunate, but that was beyond my control. The tours in Bangladesh were generally short, making a high turn-over almost inevitable. The AID mission was different in this respect. It had many officers who welcomed their assignments to Bangladesh to a much greater degree than did the embassy staff. The assistance program was one of the largest that AID ran anywhere. Many AID officers, recognizing the advantage that a Dhaka assignment had for their careers, would ask for extensions of their tours. There were some embassy officers who did so too, but that happened much less often.

We had no problem with malfeasance or illegal activities in either the consular or administrative sections. That never became a problem, although I have to say, that in those days there was probably less attention paid by ambassadors to such matters. They did not neglect the potential problems, but were not as deeply involved as they might be today. I think there was less stress, as a general rule, on such things as visa fraud, etc.

I saw my own role as being responsible for the conduct of the embassy, for making contact with senior figures in the political, and economic and military areas. On its domestic side, the political area included both pro-government and opposition leaders. I traveled a lot both to familiarize myself with the country and to meet leaders who lived outside the capital. The latter task was not a large one because although Bangladesh has a large population--it was at the time the eighth most populous country in the world--it is a small country in area and political leaders tend to come to Dhaka at one time or another, if they do not actually reside there.

I would give speeches and interviews whenever I traveled and in Dhaka as well. I did a considerable amount of that. I must say that I was not really sought after that much--even though the American ambassador was viewed as "first among equals." He or she was always considered an important figure, especially in light of the sizeable assistance program we had in Bangladesh. These days we could not afford a similar program. At one point during my tenure, the annual amount of assistance--including food--passed the \$2 billion mark. I thought it was most important to have close and continuing relations with the mission director and his senior staff. I chaired weekly country team meetings, as well as periodic reviews of economic policies attended

by the DCM, senior AID officers and the economic counselor. AID was located right across from the Chancery on the other side of a public square.

I did approve the annual assistance program, although I must confess that I had relatively little input. The AID mission was carrying out a well established program and I kept myself fully aware of what they were doing, to their pleasure. Much of my travel was designed to visit projects. I was satisfied that the program was effective and that the relationship with the Bangladesh government was close and going quite well. I would have to say that I had no great interest in pushing certain projects, except perhaps for rural electrification where I did weigh in strongly, but it was almost unnecessary since I and the mission saw entirely eye-to-eye on the problem and the solution. It welcomed my strong support. Overall, I would say that my relationship with the mission was very positive. I don't want anyone to conclude from my remarks that I should have participated more in the management of the assistance program. If I had found projects I didn't like, I would have registered my dissent.

We had a USIS operation. It was quite small, but a key element in our mission. It was housed outside the chancery. We had representation from CIA. We had a potential problem because the station chief had contact with people that I would see. This practice was a hold-over from the past. I had no objection to this, provided I was given a full briefing of what the CIA Station was doing with these contacts. I became quite satisfied that both Station Chiefs--we had a turn over during my tour--were leveling with me. So that issue never became a problem.

The station's preoccupation was its operations against Iron Curtain countries. They were not particularly interested --properly so--in what was happening in Bangladesh. In my opinion, CIA operations in Bangladesh would have been absurd given the propensity of Bangladeshis to discuss all issues incessantly. It would have been very foolish indeed for us to pay for information that was readily available in the street for nothing.

We had a military attaché. He was of little consequence in meeting our goals. The contacts with senior influential military officers during a period of two years of martial law when the military had a key political role - were carried out by me and to some extent by the political counselor and the DCM. Therefore, the military attaché was limited to more technical issues, like arranging training programs, ship visits, etc.

We did not have a military assistance program. That possibility was raised from time to time by the Bangladeshis--particularly when President Ershad visited the U.S. in 1983 at the time I was DAS. There were several reasons why we did not want to initiate such a program. Among the most important was the strong possibility that it would be misunderstood by the Indians. That might have led to a deterioration of U.S.-India relations as well as Bangladesh-India relations. India would not have felt threatened, but it would have viewed such a program in the context of its long-standing policy that significant military or political relations between its neighbors and countries outside South Asia should be discouraged. That still remains New Delhi's position.

Our overall policy was primarily designed to support the economic development of this desperately poor country. That is why we had such a large - and, in my view, effective - assistance program. That is also why I spent a good deal of my time worrying about the



economic future of Bangladesh. I must admit that I had very little hope that Bangladesh would significantly improve its economic situation. Now, I have more hope that it can do so. I thought then that the best we could hope for was for the country merely to keep its head above water--both literally and figuratively. No one at the time would have imagined a mini-boom stimulated by the discovery of natural gas. That has given a major boost to Bangladesh's economic prospects. In my time, there were some expectations that natural gas fields might be found and exploited. But natural gas was not at that point a factor that could be counted on to help Bangladesh's economic development--or that influenced our thinking about it.

During my tour I was pleased with the Bangladesh government's economic policy. It had moved away from the economic policy of past regimes and was stressing that the public sector--which included large enterprises that had been nationalized when the country broke away from Pakistan--would have to shrink and the private sector grow. We were concerned about corruption in the public sector and reminded the government of the risks involved in not stopping it. But corruption in Bangladesh is almost endemic. It is even worse now than when I was ambassador.

We were, of course, proponents of a market economy. That was my constant theme. We never discussed the issue of free trade, since it had little bearing on Bangladesh's economy.

The most important economic development for Bangladesh during my time there was the rapid development of a ready-made garment industry that became a major exporter. This development helped Bangladesh's economic prospects immeasurably. Bangladesh was able to take advantage of the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA). This enabled it to obtain export quotas. Had such a quota system not been available the industry would probably not have started. It would surely not have attained the scope that it soon did.

I spent far more time than I had ever expected to do on negotiations with the Bangladeshis on their garment exports to the United States. Negotiators from USTR, Commerce, and State would come to Dhaka and we would advise these Washington teams about Bangladeshi positions. The negotiators were there to deal with the problem that as its garment industry expanded Bangladesh often reached its quota for a particular garment item, men's shirts, for example, long before the year for which the quota had been calculated had ended. We encouraged the Bangladeshis to diversify their output in order to avoid this problem. With my strong support, our negotiators tended to be fairly generous in their treatment of Bangladesh exports. They generally took the position that Bangladesh was a very poor country that deserved special consideration.

I had had no previous experience in dealings with trade matters and they had not figured significantly in my briefings in Washington before I first went to post. Nor was my DCM or my economic counselor versed in the issue. Under those circumstances, I found it useful to turn to my wife for assistance. Just before we went to Dhaka she had been director of the Department's Office of International Trade, so the garments issue was right up her alley. When she accompanied me to Dhaka she was obliged to take leave without pay under the regulations as they were then interpreted by Personnel. Her considerable expertise was a great help not only to me but also to the Bangladeshis. They too were for the first time becoming involved in significant trade issues and had very little knowledge about how to deal with them. My wife

handled the internal embassy bureaucracies of her own involvement very well. As far as I was aware, the economic counselor had no problem with her intervention.

One of our major efforts in Bangladesh was to assist the government and NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in pressing forward on their family planning and population control programs. These programs were highly important and highly visible in Bangladesh. The country had a succession of governments with different agendas before, during and after I left. But they all strongly supported family planning. President Ershad gave the program his personal attention. He would travel around to various public health facilities to inspect them and call public attention to them. I would occasionally travel with him. I heard very few political objections from the Islamic parties. I had expected more. The programs, which we assisted with major funding and the assignment of experts in the field, were probably the most successful of any undertaken in the region. They have had a serious, positive impact in stemming population growth. It was effective for three reasons: a) the whole-hearted support of the Bangladeshi government; b) the very important contribution that foreign organizations made--most notably AID; c) the willingness of the Bangladeshis to undertake a variety of imaginative approaches to contraception and its delivery to the people.

On the political side, I favored a return to a constitutional and democratic regime. When I reached Dhaka the country had been under martial law for a couple of years following a bloodless military coup. In international affairs, we did not seek any kind of alliance or political understanding with Bangladesh. We wanted it to remain independent and to pursue its own foreign policy. We accepted its non-aligned preference. Of course, we tried to win Bangladesh's support for our positions at the United Nations and in other international bodies. We did not want Bangladesh to follow the Indian model of that day, which was to lean toward Moscow while remaining officially non-aligned. In general, we got the support we thought possible given Bangladesh's circumstances and were satisfied with the bilateral relationship.

The Indians would have preferred that Bangladesh follow New Delhi's pro-Moscow lead. But it would be overstating the case to say that the Indians applied major pressure on Bangladesh to persuade Ershad's government to do so. The Indians recognized that a military regime in Dhaka was unlikely to hew to the Moscow line. They were prepared to live with that.

To my surprise, by the time I got to Dhaka the Pakistanis had developed quite a warm relationship with Bangladesh. In part, this was due to the common concern in both countries about India's strength and perceived aspirations in the region. Early in my tour, an important soccer match took place in a stadium close to the embassy. The match was for the South Asian cup; the finalists were Pakistan and India. I heard wild cheers emanating from the stadium. When I asked what was going on, I was told that the spectators were all cheering because Pakistan was winning. Later that evening, I met a senior officer of the Army. I told him that I had not expected a Bangladeshi crowd to cheer for Pakistan. He said that he had lost dozens of family members during the fighting in 1971 - the war of independence - all killed by the Pakistan army. But, he went on, he had been in the stadium that afternoon and found himself cheering for Pakistan, too. I think those comments tell you a lot about India's position in South Asia.

We aimed at raising the standard of living through economic development and population control, we supported the return of a constitutionally-elected, democratic regime, and accepted Bangladesh's pursuit of a genuinely independent and non-aligned foreign policy. These had been for some years the major goals of U.S. policy in Bangladesh. As deputy assistant secretary, I had had a hand in developing this policy. Accordingly, Washington gave me considerable latitude in its implementation. The NEA Bureau and other policymaking offices were confident that as an experienced senior officer thoroughly familiar with existing policy, I could be fully trusted to carry it out. I was quite content with that situation. I developed a close working relationship with the desk officer (once one finally took over the job on a regular basis) and together we handled matters, keeping in touch quite frequently. I was often able, with his assistance, to develop my own instructions. No one objected to this. Many of the senior officers in the NEA bureau saw it as a load off their shoulders. My actions allowed them to devote more time to problems they considered more important than confronted them in other South Asian countries.

We had a very unusual communication arrangement at the time which strengthened this approach to policymaking for Bangladesh. A number of telephone lines had been set up for a summit conference of heads of Islamic states a few months before I got to the country. When the conference was over, the embassy purchased one of the lines. That helped out communications with Washington immeasurably since the regular phone lines were unreliable. However, while this system enabled us to talk to Washington, Washington could not initiate a conversation with us.

I found that one-way street a great boon. I could get in touch with Washington by phone to put across my ideas or to find out what was going on. At the same time, I was spared unwanted hassling by the Department. The line was not secure, but much of what I needed to convey was unclassified anyway. When I wanted to deal with more sensitive matters the desk officer and I would use double-talk, which I hope would make our discussions meaningless to any surreptitious monitors. Because of the time difference, I would often catch the desk officer at his home just before he set out for the Department. He was my primary confederate in my policy dealings. The country director was happy with this arrangement. He was a busy man. He once told me that he spent 60% of his time on Pakistan and 40% on Afghanistan. The rest, he added, he spent on Bangladesh.

Aside from the United States, many foreign governments were interested in the economic development of Bangladesh. Indeed, I soon concluded that any country that had any serious concern about economic development and humanitarian relief in the Third World had some kind of mission in Dhaka. Additionally, there were a large number of foreign non-governmental organizations with large and active programs. They included some big, important American ones such as the Ford Foundation and the Asia Foundation. They had good programs and we kept in close contact with them. This was especially true of our relations with the Asia Foundation because it received most of its funding from the U.S. Government.

There were no serious problems of coordination among the aid donors, U.S. and foreign, government and non-government. We had a good collaborative effort. This was greatly assisted by the working of the Aid-to-Bangladesh Consortium headed by the World Bank representative. The ambassadors of the consortium countries would meet regularly together. Aid directors and

their staffs met one another more frequently. It was an excellent arrangement for all concerned, including, most importantly, the Bangladeshis. When I arrived, the domestic political situation was static. General H. M. Ershad, who held the title of "chief martial law administrator" and as such ran the government, was interested in attaining legitimacy for his regime. He wished to return to constitutional government, no doubt with himself still in charge. Other martial law regimes in Pakistan and Bangladesh had gone down this road before and it was clear to all concerned that this was what the general had in mind.

There were two main opposition parties: the Bangladesh National Party and the Awami League. Both were led by strong-willed women who were close relatives of powerful, deceased male leaders. Begum (Mrs.) Khaleda Zia, the BNP leader, was the widow of General Ziaur Rahman, who had led the country from the mid-1970s until his assassination in 1981. Sheikh Hasina Wajid, head of the Awami League, was the orphaned daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh who had been killed in a similar coup in 1975. Neither of the opposition parties wished to take part in an election or to do anything that might provide legitimacy to the Ershad regime or to his efforts to return to constitutional government--under his rule. Ershad sought to push by giving greater scope to political activities in Bangladesh. At one point, when it seemed that these new freedoms were threatening to get out of hand, he cut back on the parameters of acceptable political activity.

Our interest was in fostering constitutional government. We urged all of the political parties to participate in the process. One of my achievements as ambassador was to establish a more trusting and closer relationship between the embassy and the government and the embassy and the opposition parties, both of which looked at us with some suspicion because they thought we were in Ershad's camp. In addition, the leader of the Awami League believed that the U.S. government was particularly opposed to her party. Indeed, some times in her darker moments, Sheikh Hasina felt that the assassination of her father in 1975 was in part due to our involvement.

These concerns were aroused, for example, when similar rumors circulated about a CIA role in the assassination of Indira Gandhi, which occurred soon after I arrived. I was able, through a very carefully scripted effort, to develop personal relationships with both Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina and the senior members of their parties. This helped me to persuade them that the U.S. government, while carrying on appropriate diplomatic contacts with the Ershad government, nevertheless was not taking a position favoring his party over others. The U.S. was prepared to deal with both of the opposition parties these women led, and would do so easily with them as government parties should they come to power.

I think Ershad probably found my initiatives toward the opposition somewhat troubling, but he did not make an issue of it. In any event, he was fully aware of what we were doing. I made no effort to conceal my movements--such efforts would have failed in any case and would have given rise to even greater suspicion--it would have been dead wrong had I been so stupid as to try. I was very pleased when at the end of my three years in Dhaka, Sheikh Hasina had a luncheon in my honor to which she invited all of the leadership of her party. I have seen her subsequently, both when she was prime minister and when she was in opposition. So our relationship has lasted for many years.

One of the things I did, in the course of my efforts to support a return to constitutional processes, was to seek to persuade the Awami League to participate in parliamentary elections which Ershad had called in 1986. I proceeded with this very quietly--against the advice of my political counselor, who thought that I was taking too active a role. I never cleared my intentions with the Department of State; so it had no knowledge of what I was doing. But I felt that, given the trust the Awami League had in me and my knowledge of the political situation in Bangladesh, I could quietly lobby for its participation in the elections. The Awami League did participate in the elections, although the Bangladesh Nationalist Party did not. I was told later by Robert Peck, my successor as deputy assistant secretary, that the Department suspected that I was up to something, but decided it would be best to let me handle the matter in the way I wanted.

The nature of the government changed very little when martial law was lifted and elections held. There were two elections in fact, one after another. First came the Parliamentary elections which were closely followed by the presidential elections. In the latter case, neither of the two opposition parties participated. But the elections were a visible indicator that constitutional government was being restored. General Ershad became Mr. Ershad, resigning his military commission, since the constitution barred military officers from becoming president. However, there was no question even after the elections as to where power lay--it remained in the hands of President Ershad and the power structure he had established earlier.

The military continued to play an important role. Ershad was a master at manipulating the army, the dominant armed service branch. He made certain that those whom he regarded as possible threats would be assigned to positions--preferably far away--where they could not threaten his rule. He tended to woo his close--and useful--military supporters. He appointed as his successor as chief of staff a rather weak figure who would not stand in his way or try to lead the military as he had. With this unimpressive, lightly regarded officer in position, Ershad could be confident that the military would continue to look to him. In any case, the military was very supportive of Ershad's constitutional regime. There may have been a few officers who dissented - the embassy picked up some rumors to that effect - but Ershad was strong enough and clever enough to deal with them. This dissent never reached the point where we in the embassy seriously considered the possibility of the Ershad regime being overthrown by military officers.

I saw Ershad quite frequently. I tried not to see him too frequently; I did not want to create the impression that we were "in his pocket" nor did I want to leave the impression that we were dictating to him. So I would see the president about once a month or every six weeks. What I tried to do was to measure my contacts with him--quite deliberately. I had no trouble having access to him. I would see him periodically in social occasions, but those were never conducive to discussing issues. They were rather stilted. I did succeed once in doing something that was quite novel for Bangladesh. I invited the president to my residence for dinner and he came. This was quite contrary to his policy, but I was very anxious to spend some time with Ershad while General Vernon ("Dick") Walters was visiting. Walters was then the U.S. permanent representative at the United Nations. After much wrangling we worked out with the government some arrangement which allowed the president to come to my house without any breach of protocol.

That meeting went very well indeed. Though I had some concern about how it would come out, I shouldn't have because Walters is a great raconteur with an astonishing ability to entertain; he took over and the conversation flowed easily and happily. It was a great evening.

Ershad did attend national days, but he did not go to ambassadors' residences for any reason. I thought that he was a very shrewd man, though not a very good popular politician. This was not for lack of trying. He was reserved and if not altogether humorless certainly not a barrel of laughs. He had a good idea of where matters stood and I think he was very successful in moving in the directions--political and economic--which we supported. He moved slowly and judiciously on economic development--at about the speed that the country could absorb. He was not mean spirited; nevertheless the opposition distrusted him. But he allowed the opposition to make its points, unlike many other Third World countries. He remains active in politics as an opposition leader. I'm quite surprised that he was able to adjust to that new and unfamiliar role. He had had little experience in the give and take of parliamentary debate and other aspects of his opposition party responsibilities.

Politics were alive and well in Bangladesh in my time there. They were regarded very much like a sport. People enjoyed talking about politics incessantly; politics were very much in the life blood of the Bengalis. We can see the same phenomenon in West Bengal in India. The Bengalis there, a majority of them Hindus, have the same zest for politics as their fellow Bengalis do in Muslim-majority Bangladesh. This Bengali fascination with politics is one of the reasons we were able to maintain and even extend our political contacts beyond the majority party.

The Soviet Union was represented in Bangladesh, although the Ershad government was quite cool to it. In fact, Bangladesh in those days focused on relations with the U.S., Pakistan and the PRC. It quite rightly saw the Soviet Union as a close supporter of India. But it maintained a relationship with the USSR and even received economic assistance from Moscow. I got to know the Soviet ambassador. At first, the Soviet pretty much ignored me. We had a strictly formal relationship. But with the change in regime in the Soviet Union--the accession of Gorbachev--the foreign ministry in Moscow apparently sent out instructions which limited restrictions which had been put on Soviet diplomats. After that, the ambassador and I had a much closer relationship, as did our subordinate officers.

I would periodically see my PRC colleague. I never learned very much from him. We never had any problems that would have been resolved through the cooperation of either the USSR or the PRC. My closest contact in the foreign diplomatic community was probably the Pakistan High Commissioner--there were two during my three years. I maintained good contacts with the Indian High Commissioner--there were also two during my tour. I had in the eyes of the Pakistan and Indian high commissioners a special position as an American South Asian expert who had served for many years in their countries. It was only natural therefore for them to have good relations with me, and vice-versa. But the contacts with the Indians were not particularly rewarding - professionally speaking. In part this was due, as I suggested earlier, to Indian suspicions about our motives and actions in Bangladesh. They felt that somehow we were seeking to undercut their position. I had a much easier and more productive relationship with my Pakistani colleagues.

The 1986 elections caused great problems. They were seriously marred by fraud. This gave rise to a very interesting situation on election day. As election returns began to come in from the districts to Election Commission headquarters, early indications were that the opposition was doing very well. Then, all of a sudden, the Commission announced that counting would be suspended. For 24 hours matters were at a standstill. When counting resumed, the tide turned in favor of the ruling party. Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the Awami League, the opposition party which had participated in the elections partly as a result of my urging and negotiations, angrily made public her party's displeasure about the process and the results.

Subsequently, there were a number of by-elections. Some of these were prompted by the election of candidates to more than one seat. That meant that they had to give up one of their seats, prompting by-elections to fill them. Those elections were won hands- down by the government party -- even in those districts that had handily elected a member of the opposition in the general elections. Under those circumstances, the opposition understandably was furious. Sheikh Hasina expressed her dissatisfaction to me personally and asked me to do something about it. There was not much I could do to get the election results changed. I urged her to make the best of it and to participate in Parliament. After my departure, the Awami League decided to withdraw from Parliament. We did make our views known to the government-- at least informally-- lest it might think that we did not object to their fraudulent electoral activities.

I think the political situation today is transformed because Bangladesh has two major parties contending for people's votes. On the other hand, there is not yet the concept of a loyal opposition. Elections are free and fair but nevertheless the losing party almost automatically questions the process and the outcome. It questions the authority of the elected government; then quickly demands that the government step down and new election held under impartial auspices. Neither the Awami League nor the BNP, when out of power, has been content to play a loyal opposition role in Parliament and to await the end of the five-year parliamentary term. Yet even so, one should not overlook the great improvement in the political process in the last 13 years. At least there is now what has come to be called "illiberal democracy." When I was there, the prevailing mode was authoritarian.

But even in 1986, I had hopes that the process would move toward a more democratic form. I saw some glimmer of hope. I didn't think General Ershad could stay in power indefinitely. There was considerable unrest among the Bangladeshi. The opposition parties, despite government harassment, had managed to marshal substantial loyal followings, giving me hope that Ershad's downfall was just a matter of time. I expected that it would be brought about by disturbances in the street. That eventually happened, although later than I had predicted.

One of Ershad's strong points was that he was a survivor; he knew how to manipulate the political system. He was blessed in having as his major opposition two women neither of whom was as adept as he was in the manipulation of the system. The women were personally at odds; it was very difficult for them to agree on how to oppose the General. When they did reach a consensus, in 1990, they forced the government to step down--it was no longer supported by the military, much to Ershad's disappointment.

Bangladesh is known throughout the world as the home of some of the most devastating cyclones on earth. I was witness to one, which turned out to be a relatively minor storm--it killed only 15,000 people. Bangladesh in 1970 lost 300,000 or more people--some estimates go as high as a million. Interestingly, because the cyclone I witnessed occurred at a time when very little else was happening in the U.S.--it was Memorial Day weekend--it received unusually extensive coverage in the American press. AID was instructed to assist in any way possible-- and a large amount of assistance flowed from the U.S. to Bangladesh. I consider that a positive example of what is now known as the CNN effect--real time coverage of earth-shaking events which have impact on TV viewers who then pressure their governments to remedy or alleviate the situation.

I visited the ravaged areas. There is no question that the devastation and loss of human life must have some impact on an observer. But after having spent so many years in South Asia, it took a great deal to horrify me. After seeing poverty, destitution and the consequences of natural disasters for so long, you expect them to be part of the rhythm of life in that area. One is of course shaken by the situation, but one recognizes that all of these maladies are part of South Asia life. For us South Asian specialists, the horrors of poverty and natural disasters are not as striking as they would be to someone who has spent his career in Western Europe, for example.

My three years as ambassador were personally very rewarding and enjoyable. The Bangladeshis are a very engaging people. We used to say that they were among the few people in the world of the mid-1980s who both liked and respected Americans. I felt that the U.S. government had a very important role in Bangladesh. The AID mission and I developed a good dialogue with the government. I think we were able to have a major influence on the government, both through advice and as a result of our assistance. We were able to convince the government to adopt sound economic policies which would lead to a rise in Bangladesh's standard of living.

I am aware that Bangladesh is viewed, among donors, as one of the poorer countries in the world - an "international basket case" as Henry Kissinger allegedly said. (In fact, it was someone else, Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson, who used that phrase in Kissinger's presence.) I tried to change that image somewhat, in part to encourage staff to apply for vacancies arising at my embassy. For example, we used the STATE magazine, which featured Dhaka as its "Post of the Month" at our urging. Photographs were taken suggesting that the post was not as terrible as the popular conception had it. The most telling commentary on Bangladesh was articulated by my Egyptian colleague. At his farewell party hosted by the diplomatic community, he said that there were two things that could be said of an assignment to Bangladesh. You cry twice -- once when you are assigned and again when you are ready to leave. And that was so true.

My tour was rewarding in part because I learned a lot. On the management side, I was impressed by the importance of having a successful predecessor. In such situations, you just follow the practices that he or she established until new circumstances call for change. Ambassadors should not wade into embassies and turn them upside down, either because their style is different from their predecessor or because they want to leave their own mark.

On the substantive side, it is important in any country to do everything possible to develop relations with the opposition. It could eventually become the government party, even in



Bangladesh which was in my time run by General Ershad and the military. In fact, both Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia later became Prime Ministers.

I believe that it is vital that an ambassador become fully involved in the activities of an AID mission, USIS and the Peace Corps, if there is one in-country. We did not have a Peace Corps in Bangladesh at the time I was there, but a program was started later. I would add that it is also very important to establish a close relationship with the CIA contingent.

I believe that traveling throughout the country was a very important task, even in a country such as Bangladesh where roads and accommodations were rather primitive, particularly outside of major cities. Travel in Bangladesh was often overwhelmed by the attention that local authorities gave to security.

The final lesson I learned was that it was most important to maintain as close relations as you can with Washington. That includes periodic consultations there. In my case, I had the support of the Department, which had known me and I had participated in the U.S.' basic policy formulation for Bangladesh.

**TERESITA C. SCHAFFER**

**Ambassador's wife**

**Dhaka (1984-1987)**

*Ambassador Schaffer was born in New York and later educated in France. She received her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr College and joined the Foreign Service. Her Foreign Service career took her to Israel, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in September 1998.*

*Q: In 1984, your husband Howie was appointed Ambassador to Bangladesh. You had to go on leave without pay. Did you have any problem with that requirement?*

SCHAFFER: I really didn't. I could not help noticing that the rules on what ambassadorial spouses could do and could not do kept changing. It seemed to me that the shifts were always very strict when they applied to me, but were eased as soon as I was no longer affected. That said, I think there are valid reasons why ambassadorial spouses should be limited in what they can do in terms of regular mission employment.

Non-governmental activities were also touched upon by the regulations but the do's and don't's were much murkier. Theoretically, the burden is on the mission to register objections with reasons if any dependent of a U.S. employee seeks employment unrelated to US government work. Ordinarily, that is an ambassadorial responsibility. If the spouse in question is his or her own, the responsibility for passing on the appropriateness of employment falls on someone else. I tried to find out what the procedure was to obtain employment approval, but never got a clear answer. In my case, the question of employment only came towards the end of our tour in

Bangladesh when I was approached by UNICEF to provide some editing services. I dutifully wrote a memorandum to the DCM explaining the situation, including remuneration and length of employment. I pointed out that the stipend would be a fraction of what I was making as an FSO; I ended the memo by stating that if my potential employment might create any problems for the U.S. government, I would of course decline the UNICEF offer. In fact, UNICEF was an activity that did not interfere with U.S. policy and therefore I was pretty sure that my potential employment would be approved.

At the time, we had two children -- eleven and nine by the time we went to Bangladesh. They went to the American International School in Dhaka. At that time, the school only went up to the ninth grade; since then, it has expanded to include high school. Only about 25% of the students were Americans and only about 50% of those were dependents of U.S. government employees. The schools included children of missionaries, employees of international organizations and NGO's. Dhaka had and has quite a substantial international community. Today, for example, in addition to governmental and private aid organizations, there is a substantial American business community, which did not exist in the mid-1980's. Most of that business community is focusing on the natural gas fields that have been discovered in Bangladesh. In our time, and I believe still today, Dhaka was a key location for the global assistance community -- sponsored both by nations and international organizations.

Let me give you thumb-nail sketch of Dhaka and Bangladesh in the mid 1980's. Dhaka was a city of 4.5-5 million people. Like other cities in Bangladesh, it had grown very rapidly which required considerable "temporary" housing -- shanties. The downtown area was very crowded; it consisted of the old city, mostly down by the river, and commercial areas which were only obvious to residents. There was not much of what we might consider as a modern downtown. The Embassy building was one of the first structures in Dhaka to have an elevator; it was located in the downtown area. It was a five story structure of which the U.S. government occupied about the three top floors and the ground floor. It was a fire trap. Any child could have set it on fire and destroyed it in minutes. The consular section was on the ground floor; it had all of the charm of a basic unadorned dungeon. The building was shaped like a donut -- or a chimney. It was located on a very busy downtown circle -- typical of all the downtown streets. All of Bengal is crowded; Bangladesh is well known as the most crowded country in the world.

Virtually all of the American community lived in three suburban neighborhoods. Interestingly enough, I have returned to Dhaka in the 1990's, and all those neighborhoods are part of the inner city; they are not the "burbs" any longer. The city has grown out so that now it includes the suburbs of the mid-1980's. But then, these suburbs were almost exclusively residential; they were filled with substantial housing -- for the foreigners and the upper Bangladeshi class. There were no buses at the time, but rickshaws -- bicycle driven conveyance seating anywhere from two to six or seven -- flourished. In the suburbs, one didn't see many "baby-taxis" which are essentially motor scooters with a passenger compartment. All of that has also changed now.

The buildings in the suburbs were almost never more than two stories high. We lived in Gulshan. An increasing number of embassy chanceries were located in the suburbs -- most of them in converted villas. The US government began building a new chancery -- Howie laid the foundation stone -- which opened after our departure in a neighborhood called Baridhara, also

close to the American School. The architectural plans had been developed and approved before our arrival. We were in Bangkok, on our way to Dhaka, when the second Beirut bombing took place. Howie quickly called our Embassy in Dhaka; he found out that in light of that bombing, all chancery building plans were about to be reviewed to assure that they met security requirements. He then called FBO in Washington with a request that the Dhaka Chancery plans not be held up; a new building was desperately required and further delays would only make a bad situation worse. FBO and the Security Office did insist on some changes, but the construction was not held up for long.

Our social life revolved around three groups starting with the Bangladeshi community -- government and private people that needed to be cultivated -- and whom I came to know fairly well. The Bengalis take their culture -- literature and music -- very seriously. Bangladesh has always had a lot of intellectual ferment -- as has Indian Bengal. So we did see many intellectuals -- from universities and some press, although that group was not particularly impressive. There was also a quite sizeable group of people who were devoting their lives to rural development.

The Bangladeshis were very friendly and cordial. They are very warm and sentimental. Americans on a personal level have had very good relations with the Bangladeshis. The state-to-state relations were somewhat strained in the early years because Kissinger was dead set against Bangladesh independence when the issue arose.

The Bangladeshis love to talk. Although I was not formally a diplomat, I could hardly change my spots; so it was a great opportunity for diplomats and other foreigners to really become acquainted with these wonderful people. There was never any dearth of sources who were ready and willing -- even anxious in some cases -- to give you their take on events and their commentary on "what was going on on the inside." Of course, some of that may have come from the normal backbiting one finds in all societies, but once you have taken that possibility into consideration, we never lacked a pretty good picture of what was going on. I still well remember a welcome party given us by the American Defense Attaché. In attendance was a roomful of senior Bangladeshi military officers. I had been at similar parties in other countries; they usually were quite pleasant but essentially non-substantive. But in Dhaka, one after another of these officers were taking Howie off for private tête-à-tête to tell him clearly what each thought about governmental policy or military affairs -- at a time when the military ran the government.

One interesting aspect of this Bangladeshi trait was that on some occasions, I would also become the target of their substantive comments. In general, the military -- with some notable exceptions -- was the group that was most likely to view me as the "Ambassador's wife" and therefore to discuss with me only matters of family life, such as children. There was a noticeable change in this military attitude as the wives of the generals became professionals in their own right. For example, one of the senior intelligence officers was married to pediatrician who was working for "Save the Children." She was a real live wire and it is through her that I made many friends.

Bangladesh had a large number of domestic NGO's that were active in the countryside -- health, education, micro credit and family planning. On credit, the most famous was the Grameen Bank, which is world famous. It made small loans and became a model for efforts in other parts of the

world. It should be noted that that Bank was by no means the only player in the micro credit program. It was not even the only impressive participant.

So we spent a considerable amount of our social life with the rural development community. In fact, I worked on a couple of AID projects writing on women and development. In the course of collecting background on this issue, I made my own circle of friends -- primarily women activists and development activists in the local NGO world. Some of my contacts were new to the Embassy, although Howie's predecessors had to pay some attention to this sector of the Bangladeshi scene. Howie's immediate predecessor was Jane Coon. She may not have targeted women activists as a focus group, but she was acquainted with some members. I think that I became more involved -- in part because of the AID projects and perhaps my role was therefore somewhat unusual.

The other major players in our social life was the American and diplomatic community. Then there were our children's community, which was a new group for us in an overseas context. We had a big house which was used by our children and their friends to play in and to watch television. On any given day, one would probably find eight bicycles parked in our driveway. Their owners and associated coke cans were inside. Occasionally, we would invite the parents of these children to the residence for a social occasion. We tried very hard to involve our kids in American community events. This turned out to be somewhat problematic for reasons we really had not anticipated. Both of our kids, and particularly the older one, were very sensitive to living in a "fishbowl." as the Ambassador's offspring. They did not want to be shown off. On the other hand, they were very pleased to live in a large house to which they could invite their friends. So they had some mixed feeling about their situation in Dhaka. I had to use some domestic diplomatic skills to calm any ruffled feathers that arose because of their situation.

I had no fear of walking the downtown streets by myself, although I tried to abide by the local custom and covered up as much as possible. I noted that even though I was well acquainted with South Asia from my experiences in Pakistan and India, Bangladesh is a more crowded country. The distance from which people will stand and stare at Westerners is noticeably closer than it is in other countries. I found that at the beginning that made me quite uncomfortable; people just stood and stared; that was unique I think in South Asia. Once I had to change a tire on my car in one of Dhaka's suburbs; by the time I finished, there must have been 40-50 small boys just standing and watching. Here was a foreign lady, with diplomatic license plates, changing the tire on her car. That was a sight which they most likely had never seen before.

For three months a year, the weather in Dhaka was absolutely delightful. In December, January and February, it was like Spring as we know it. March and April were very stormy -- violent thunderstorms and sometimes hail storms. Then came the hot and rainy season until September and October when the heat would ease. Cyclones, which unfortunately hit Bangladesh from time to time, are not seasonal, but may occur almost at any time. When they did occur, the coast area was most affected. You could almost count on at least one headline grabber every two or three years with devastating floods. Bangladesh is a country which in normal years is one-third under water all year -- that is roughly the area covered by rivers. In the monsoon season, two thirds of the country is under water -- in normal years -- and more than that when there is a major flood as might be caused by a cyclone. Most of the country is at sea level -- or not too far above it -- and

very flat. Excess water has no run off opportunity; so it just spreads over the countryside. I did not have an opportunity to visit the countryside after a major flood. I did see what happens in a “normal” flood year.

I did travel quite extensively. Between June and September, one would see a lot of water covering the landscape. One reads a lot in the U.S. and other parts of the world about disastrous floods, but I have reached the conclusion that too much water is better than none or too little. A flood will undoubtedly wipe out a crop, but it will also enrich the land so that the next crop season will probably be a bountiful one.

Poverty is of course quite noticeable both in Dhaka and the countryside. The interesting aspect of Bangladesh is that once you become somewhat acclimatized, you can see a lot of hope in the rural countryside. Urban poverty is much more troubling because the city dwellers don't have a patch of ground which can be cultivated and from which some nourishment can be grown. Rural people tend their villages well. Every Bangladeshi village looks well kept; the courtyards are swept; the bazaars are filled with colorful chili peppers; there are small yards with chickens if not filled with plants. It is true that the dwellings are rather primitive -- mud huts with thatched roofs -- but you don't have the feeling of deprivation that you might have in an urban shanty town. Floods of course have a serious impact on these villages, but they seem to recover and return to their normal lives. No one in the rural countryside has any accumulated wealth; they live from day to day and a disaster certainly wipes out any gains that may have been made. But these are not your standards images of a rural slum where there is no hope and a steady grinding down.

The urban shanty towns are very depressing. I was not a daily visitor, but I certainly saw enough of them to be quite depressed. Some of them were not too far away from the modern parts of town. For example, the Sheraton Hotel was then and still is only a few steps away from one of the grungier shanty towns that I have ever seen. I also wandered around some pretty modest neighborhoods with Mustari Khan, who had started a family planning program, Concerned Women for Family Planning, focused exclusively on urban dwellers. She and her network of workers in these neighborhoods showed me around.

What is always startling about the shanty-towns is that they are populated by people who moved to a city in order to improve their standard of living. In a lot of cases, they are hoping against hope that they will find some kind of employment in the city that will earn them enough money to lift them and their families out of poverty. But in fact, a lot of these people end up being urban “casual laborers” standing on a curbside awaiting to be picked up for some work that day -- or a couple of days -- for some field work.

Bangladesh, except for a small part of the country, had no stones; without that resource it is very difficult to build any roads. So they made bricks and broke them up. One would see in different parts of the country huge piles of broken bricks upon which workers -- very often women -- sat with a hammer often under some kind of tattered umbrella. They would pound away breaking the bricks into smaller pieces which could be used to provide some stability as a sub-surface for a road.

Despite the depressed sights that one encountered, I had great hopes for economic development in Bangladesh. It was and is a country that has learned to do something with almost no resources. This was true even before natural gas was found. Even before that major event, I saw some hope for the future. That was largely due to the work I did for AID; that allowed me to look at some projects in depth -- those that involved micro credit, education and family planning. These projects focused essentially on women and families, but somewhat outside the usual "box." I found that well run programs -- those that had found ways to get beyond the cultural inhibitions against direct assistance to women -- were really able to make a difference in people's lives. It was clear that since the level of subsistence was so low, any improvement would seem gigantic; nevertheless, when one woman took out a loan of \$20 to buy a couple of chickens and eggs, she clearly had improved her standard of living by some important measures, even though she was a long way from having arisen above the poverty level. That woman's experience helping herself opens up possibilities in her eyes; that is enough justification for hope for the future.

I contrast my experience in Bangladesh with the experiences I had in Egypt which I visited because I was supposed to become the Egypt country director. The contrast was devastating and I was very depressed after my visit to Egypt. In Bangladesh, there were projects run on a shoe string, staffed by women with five years of schooling -- which was already a watershed for them because there were not that many women who had lasted that long in school. These employees were provided training -- cleverly designed -- and then put to work and lo and behold, something positive actually occurred. Egypt, on the other hand, was the recipient of a rather generous aid program, but the assumption was that nothing could really be achieved unless the projects were staffed by college graduates who were rather passive and awaited proposals to be brought to them. After my conversations with Egyptians, I came away much more pessimistic about development in Egypt than in Bangladesh.

When I went to Bangladesh, I took a project from my old office with me. Dick McCormack, the then Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs, asked me to write a paper on future challenges to US trade policies.

Indirectly, this project brought me in contact with some South Asia trade experts. At one point, I was asked to go on a speaking tour in India and Pakistan to talk about trade policies. I mentioned to someone in the Bangladeshi Foreign Office that I would be doing this; he immediately invited me to speak to the incoming group of Bangladeshi Foreign Service officers. I agreed and then almost immediately came an invitation from the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce to discuss trade policies before it. That was followed by a similar presentation in Chittagong. I think it was about a year after we arrived when the U.S. government "called" a category of Bangladeshi clothing exports -- that was the beginning of a process which might eventually lead to the establishment of quota negotiations. This was of interest of me because in my last assignment in Washington as Director of the Office of International Trade I was responsible for the work of the Textile Division. Like most of my predecessors, I tried to stay as far away from the Textile Division as I could because their work was very arcane and not particularly intellectually challenging. But I could not escape having at least a nodding acquaintance with the textile regime then in being. So before the Bangladeshi negotiating team left for Washington, Howie asked them to the residence. The head of the team was a person who was to become a minister in almost every cabinet since then, but who at the time, had just joined the then government having left the newspaper world.

He was going to take a couple of senior civil service people with him. The three came to the residence to discuss the process and the substantive issues. At the time, once a “call” was made, the importing country had the right to restrict imports to the average of 12 of the last 14 months - I believe those were the ground rules at the time; they have been revised since. Only through negotiations could that level of imports be changed. Also at the time, many textile imports had been increasing at double digit percentage each month; a “call” was almost certain to be imposed under those circumstances. The return to the average was bound to be catastrophic to the foreign textile manufacturer; that of course was a major incentive for countries to negotiate.

In any case, this is a classic story illustrating how the Bangladeshis had historically looked upon their relationships with donor countries. Bangladeshis are utterly unembarrassed by being assistance recipients. They know they live in one of the poorest countries in the world and believe that assistance from others is a natural and expected practice, if not an obligation. So as we sat around in our study -- the Minister having arrived almost forty minutes late -- eating cheese cake -- good cheese cake -- and drinking tea, the Minister said that he had been thinking about the upcoming negotiations. He said that he was inclined to start his presentation by pointing out that Bangladesh was a very poor country with just one successful export -- the one that the U.S. wanted to limit. His conclusion was under those circumstance, that the U.S. could not possibly impose import limits.

Even though my mouth was full of cheese-cake, I interjected some negative sounds. I walked the Minister through the process -- awful as it was. In the textile field, the U.S. essentially forgets all of the virtues of free trade and open markets that we trumpet so often in other situations. In fact, textile negotiations are essentially a horse trading session. The textile lobby quite openly wanted -- and wants -- to restrict imports; it doesn't care whether the goods are manufactured in a developed country or one that is economically at the bottom of the ladder. I tried to impress on the Bangladeshi delegation that reliance on the good-heart of the U.S. would not be a successful strategy; in fact it might result on a strict limitation of imports based on the 14 months rule which would have been a disaster for Bangladesh. I suggested that they engage in negotiations hoping to achieve some more or less tolerable limit, which then they might get increased at least marginally by making their economic situation presentation. But they had to be prepared to make some accommodation to the U.S. position.

The team went to Washington and after two rounds of negotiations -- I think it was two -- the two countries reached some agreement. I don't remember the details, but I believe the compromise was acceptable to the Bangladeshis.

I worked on the trade policy paper for about four months and the Department kept me on the payroll while I was engaged in writing that paper. Then AID advertised for a person to write a paper about status of women in Bangladesh. I submitted a bid which I won. The contract was just about to be signed when the Inspectors arrived. When they heard about my forthcoming employment, they told me -- much to my surprise -- that I had to obtain formal approval from the Director General to undertake any employment. I don't know whether that was true, but when State Department inspectors speak, you tend to listen -- very carefully -- particularly as an ambassador's spouse. Whatever you do as a spouse is magnified and reflects on both you and your spouse. I knew that the AID project would have absolutely no bearing on Howie's activities

or US policy. So I cabled Washington outlining the situation in Dhaka, suggesting that I was qualified to conduct the survey in light of my experience and that the pay was considerably below my previous earnings. I asked for authorization to proceed with the AID contract. I got a positive answer quite quickly but was asked to insure that the contract be granted so that neither the Ambassador's nor the AID Mission Director's offices would be involved in its approval nor in any subsequent review of the compliance with its terms. Those terms were included in the contract and I was able to proceed with the work.

I produced a report that AID published. It was initially intended for in-house purposes, but in fact the Mission began to distribute it rather widely in Bangladesh. Soon it became quite popular and we had many requests for copies. I suppose that my position as an ambassadorial spouse which gave me access to high level and influential Bangladeshi gave the report a scope that it might not have had if it had been written by someone else. That helped to make the report much more attractive which was no doubt of help to AID which was anxious to have the status of women in Bangladesh recognized by as many of the leaders of the country as possible.

For this project, I worked almost entirely from secondary sources because that was the contractual emphasis. AID wanted me to survey what had already been written on the subject and to fill any gaps through field work. But primarily, AID wanted a comprehensive study of what already had been said on the subject. I found a lot of material because Bangladesh had always been a popular target for assistance from a large number of donors. It had also attracted a good number of anthropologists and sociologists and students of village lives in less developed countries. I was able to find a lot of both published and unpublished material written mostly by people who had some expertise in the subject matter. I think my paper provided a rather interesting picture. On one hand, there was a lot of truth to the stereotype that many Bangladeshi women were poor, downtrodden, and discriminated against. On the other hand, there was abundant evidence of a women's network, which was kept essentially hidden from public view, but which was nevertheless an important aspects of many women's lives. For example, there was an indigenous network which both stimulated and allowed a savings program by spreading the word about techniques and methods to achieve some positive results. These savings were certainly never reflected in the national statistics.

At the time I was in Bangladesh, women's literacy rate was about 20% -- according to the optimists-; most of whom came from families with means. When you face a situation like that, you have to consider the causes for such illiteracy. Part of it is of course tradition; if a woman had an illiterate mother, she most likely would end up the same way. The interesting question was what factors made the exception stick with her education until she had broken the cycle of illiteracy. I think that intelligence was certainly a major factor along with an enormous amount of drive. There were a number of girls who had both attributes, although some had never completed the five years of schooling that most experts believe necessary to maintain literacy. I remember one woman who had been recruited to work on a NGO's family planning project; I met her in a sort of artificial situation. The special assistant to the secretary for population matters was visiting the country; the Health Minister -- a big impressive man, with a jovial manner -- took some of us to a nearby village where a couple of project workers were asked to meet the visitors. One lady, probably in her 40s, was called upon; she was a traditional midwife who had been recruited to work on a project designed to improve baby care and family planning. She was



asked if there was anything she wanted to say to the Minister; there certainly was! She launched into an angry denunciation of the support her project was receiving from the Health Ministry. My language competence was just enough so that I could catch the drift of her remarks, Hers would have been an astonishing performance in any country, but was especially unusual in Bangladesh where the cultural stereotype expected the “seen, but not heard” attitude towards women. The Minister took it pretty well; his personality allowed him to accept such criticism without undue resentment.

The cultural change had started much before my time. My observations indicate that it is continuing and that the status of women is improving slowly, but surely. But I don’t have a good answer to the question: “Why in Bangladesh?” Other countries have started with the same cultural base with relatively few women improving their lot. In many of these countries, the progress, if any at all, has been glacial. Bangladesh far outperforms many other nations who started from a very low base.

Many of the characteristics of Bangladeshi society are shared by West Bengal and India. They all tend to be very crowded places in which culture and language are very much cherished. I am told that village life is very similar throughout the region. India, in some places, also enjoyed some bottom-up development as occurred in Bangladesh. Pakistan, on the other hand, is different. Development at the village level is still rare. I am not sure why that is. The Punjab would seem to be a much more fertile ground for that kind of development. It is agriculturally rich -- so is Bangladesh, but in a different way. The Punjab has been the bread-basket of Pakistan for years. The Punjabi, both Pakistani and Indian, are considered as farmers without peers and the backbone of the rural middle-class. There is no comparable group in Bangladesh. But for whatever reason, the rest of society has not developed as rapidly in West Bengal as in other regions of South Asia. This may be due to a greater collective desperation in Bengal where the per capita income is so much lower than in the neighboring areas or to other factors, but the discrepancy certainly exists.

My second project for AID was primarily a follow-up to the first. I was asked to review projects in Bangladesh which were then -- or had been -- in operation, and which essentially focused on women in development. That required a general survey and a more specific analysis of the three or four which seemed to have especially effective. That did involve some field work. In general, I concluded that one of the keys to success was the staffing of these projects by good and dedicated women. There were a number of different approaches to that issue which had worked well. That was fundamental. Furthermore, In Bangladesh, many family planning projects had been successful both in meeting their family planning goals as well as other developmental objectives. Education was one of the most difficult areas, although in a very nascent stage, I did note a trend which now has fully blossomed; it was called then “non-formal education” -- an experimental program for 8-9 year olds who had dropped out of first grade -- most Bangladeshi went into first grade.

The use of TV for educational purposes had not yet taken hold since if a village had a set, it would most likely have been in the house of the richest man and not generally available to the population. Occasionally, a set was available in a public area or occasionally the rich man would make his set available at certain times to the villagers, but these were exceptions to the general

rule. At the time, TV may have been useful for news dissemination but not for educational purposes.

My third project was done with UNICEF which was in need of an editor for a report on the status of children in Bangladesh, part of a worldwide series. A number of different people had been asked to contribute to this publication and I was asked to pull these disparate efforts together into a meaningful whole. It turned out to be a huge job; I only had time to complete the first stage before we were transferred; someone else completed the task.

I should mention that besides these professional projects, I had other tasks. For example, I was on the school board for most of my three years in Dhaka and I was President for two years. I organized a Little League for softball players. In a place like Dhaka, if your kids want to have a sports league as they knew it in the U.S., then one of the parents has to organize it.

Looking at the Embassy from the outside, even though perhaps through somewhat biased eyes, I thought it ran well. The staff was uneven -- not surprisingly. Dhaka was a "sleeper" post; that is it had a terrible reputation in the Foreign Service, but most people enjoyed it once they got there. I thought that the Department made a real mistake in limiting tours in Dhaka to two years. It was true that Dhaka was a 25% differential post and the two year limitation applied to all posts in that category. My perception was that the AID Mission, whose staff was mostly on four year tours, had a better opportunity to become familiar with the place and had a better time. A State Department employee spent the first 6-9 months becoming acclimated and the last 6-9 months packing and preparing for the next assignment; that doesn't leave much time for serious concentrated effort. It was not a good return on its investment for the Department. Some of the staff never mentally settled in. This is particularly unfortunate in a place like Bangladesh where local culture and country travel take some adjustment and some effort to become acquainted with the country and to enjoy it. The Department's tour policy tends to channel some people's attitude toward a "TDY mode". They can spend perfectly good days at the pool or on the tennis courts, but the impermanence of the assignment tends to detract from the substance of the tour. I think it also effects people's enjoyment of their tour. So the two year tour is a perverse policy in some respect; it is intended to alleviate the concerns of staff going to hardship posts, but in fact, it may just have the opposite effect.

The morale of the Embassy staff was by and large quite good. Single women were relatively few and their social life may have been somewhat restricted. But as in most cases, the development of an active social life depended heavily on the drive of the individual, but in general, I think morale at the Embassy was quite high.

I did a considerable amount of public speaking. I found it very satisfactory. As best as I can recollect, most of my speeches and discussions revolved around economic subjects. The tour in Bangladesh was a wonderful opportunity to enhance my understanding of economic development. As I suggested before, the key to Bangladesh development was the "bottom up" approach; that is development started at the grass roots. That was a very valuable lesson. I don't think that the Bangladeshi experience is unique, but that does not mean that that experience can be transplanted or replicated elsewhere. Each situation is *sui generis*; adaptations must be introduced as you move a model from one country to another. It is true that in all development

efforts one has to deal with people, but each population has its own culture which requires that you adapt the fundamentals to each situation.

Bangladesh is not a country where the government likes to make decisions. The easiest thing to do is to postpone a decision. That tendency is not uncommon in South Asia. A decision taken might be the wrong one and the opposition will leap on it. This tendency is particularly true in the civil service. A military overlay on a government tended to off-set this reluctance particularly in those areas close to the military's hearts. To get a "yes" or a "no" out of a South Asian government could sometimes be quite difficult.

That tendency is always a challenge to aid donors because almost always their programs are intended to bring some change in some behavior. The recipients understand that and are not always eager to agree to such changes. Our AID mission had some targets and objectives in the area of development with which I was most familiar; namely the family planning field. Bangladesh was just beginning to be a success story in this area. In about 1978, the military government had decided that it needed to get serious about family planning. By 1985 -- a year after my arrival -- the statistics began to show that the program was having some effect -- at least at some district levels where certain programs had been active. The data showed a decrease in population growth rate or an increase in the use of contraceptives. By the time I left, the national data began to show the impact of the family planning program. It takes a long time for these programs to show an impact but eventually they certainly did in Bangladesh.

Of course, we had a very active social life. We entertained at home and went out a lot. The social life among the foreign diplomats was very active and fortunately usually there were various Bangladeshis at these functions. We had a staff at the residence of about seven, all of whom had been employed by our predecessors; they worked out quite well.

I also had close contacts with the American community -- a role that many ambassadorial spouses play. When I later taught the ambassadorial seminar at FSI, we had some presentations on the relationships between an embassy and the American community. Some of the speakers referred to the three circles that an ambassador and spouse have to deal with: 1) the local people, 2) the diplomats from other countries and 3) the American community. According to them, one of these circles gets less attention than the other two. They were concerned that in most instances, it was the American community that was the step-child. In our case, I think that in Bangladesh, it was the other diplomats who got less attention. In part, this was due to the fact that we had children in school which brought me in much closer contact with the American community than might have been true otherwise. This was my first experience with having to take an active role in American community affairs. I thought it was essential for the smooth operation of that community. Ambassador Coon didn't have enough time to devote to the American community; she had her cook bake some chocolate chip cookies, and that was probably the most important single requirement for insuring that the American Women's Club performed effectively. That huge plate of cookies was essential to any function hosted by that Club and insured some measure of success. Jane Coon did start a tradition that Howie followed of having the Ambassador address the Women's Club annually; I started that tradition in Colombo. But in our previous tours, we had never devoted much time or attention to the American community. We focused on the local community; for example, we always learned the local language and mixed

with our host country nationals as much as we could. Both Howie and I had jobs which required visits to the countryside -- away from the capital.

In Bangladesh, we followed a similar pattern. We traveled a lot all over the country. But it was difficult to arrange such trips; it required a certain amount of mental energy to travel. Bangladesh is not a tourist-friendly country. That I think put much greater premium on the life of the American community -- the school, the pool, the tennis courts, etc. So I made a point to be at the pool so I could get better acquainted with the American community; I took up tennis which I found wonderful exercise -- where else could one get tennis lessons for 60 cents an hour? My efforts were useful to Howie who was able to stay up to date on the mood of the American community and what issues it was worrying about at any one time. It enabled him to work on American community problems before they became major irritants. This was a new role for me, but I enjoyed it after a while.

It is hard to say what impact, if any, having Ambassador Coon, a woman, as Howie's predecessor might have had on our lives. Certainly people had become accustomed to the fact the US could be represented by a woman. People knew that I was a Foreign Service officer on temporary leave of absence. That was another factor that led me to be fairly active in American community affairs because I did not want to leave the impression that I was "too good" to mix with my fellow Americans because I was a Foreign Service officer.

I should end this discussion by noting that I learned a lot more than I expected from my two years in Dhaka -- about management, community morale, and how ambassadors can and should relate to the American community. My tour as the ambassadorial spouse was a real learning experience, which I think benefited me greatly in some of my future endeavors. I had not expected it to be such an educational experience, but I am certainly glad I had the opportunity. My view from the outside taught me what works and what one needs to be careful about if one is running a mission -- personality issues -- particularly as they applied to senior officers -- lack of attention to details, etc.

Although according to the rules, I had no special status as the spouse of the Ambassador, in fact, I was deeply involved in the daily life of that community and looked to for leadership. I learned a lot about running meetings from my experience as President of the School Board -- more than I ever did in the Department. The Board actually had to reach some decisions and it needed good leadership to bring it to that stage.

I have maintained my contacts with Bangladesh. I have used them professionally in two different post-Foreign Service roles. I have returned to Dhaka on several occasions. I went back soon after becoming Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia -- I cut the ribbon for the new chancery. That was a pleasure! I also visited Dhaka while Ambassador to Sri Lanka; that was partly official, partly personal. And then I have been back several times since. So I have a deep continuing interest in that country

**HERBERT G. HAGERTY**

**NEA, Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh  
Washington, DC (1984-1987)**

*Herbert G. Hagerty was born in New Jersey in 1932. He graduated from Columbia University in 1954 and from the University of Pennsylvania with a MA in 1956 before joining the US Navy. After joining the Foreign Service, Hagerty served overseas in India, Norway, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In Washington DC, he served as the Director of the Office of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh Affairs and as the Director of the Office of Intelligence Liaison. Hagerty was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: Today is September 13, 2001. Herb, you wanted to just make a certain qualification?*

HAGERTY: Yes. As Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh (PAB), my attention was heavily focused on Afghanistan. But before saying anything else, I just want to make it clear that in what I have said from my years in Pakistan and what I will be saying now about my years in NEA/PAB, I haven't gone back to check every subject or the sequence of events that occurred. I was out of the Pakistan 'loop' when I was in Sri Lanka, and I may have made references then that in fact apply to the period that we're just about to discuss. I also want to underscore that neither during my four years in Pakistan nor in my three years in the Department as PAB Director three years later, did I have official access or the clearances to be officially aware of covert action programs in which the U.S. may or may not have been engaged at the time. It was obvious to the press and to the world at large that the U.S supported the courageous Afghan effort being made to oust the Soviets from their country, as well as the outrage of the Islamic world occasioned by the Soviet actions there. Although much information is now available from books and articles written by the players about the apparent U.S role in support of the *mujahideen* most of what I knew and understood at the time I inferred from my own day-to-day observations, rather from any 'insider' information or direct involvement.

*Q: Okay, then you're back in '84 and you're on the desk. I mean, you're the office director, the names changed. I always call it the desk, but anyway...*

HAGERTY: The "office," that is, me, my Deputy Office Director, and four Country Officers (two of whom worked on Afghanistan).

*Q: Yes. How long were you there? You were there from 1984 to when?*

HAGERTY: Until 1987, three years.

*Q: Maybe some of these will overlap, but let's talk about Pakistan first.*

HAGERTY: Yes. I was going to say I think that it became clear to me as I came into the job and came back to Washington to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh affairs, that I was not going to want for help in dealing with Afghanistan. A lot of official Washington was "acting" as Afghanistan Country Officer, often up to and beyond the level of a "seventh floor" principal like

the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. As for Pakistan, I had a somewhat freer hand; I didn't have quite as many "helpers." Actually, I quickly found that much of my work had to do with attempting to maintain our relationship with Pakistan across a broader and longer-term spectrum of U.S.-Pakistan relations than what a lot of official Washington was looking at Pakistan for, i.e., in the context of getting the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

Bangladesh was the quiet patch in my turf. We had no real problems with Bangladesh, and my Bangladesh Country Officer was highly competent, despite, at times, being my junior-most subordinate. My dealings with Bangladesh were essentially on economic issues that we dealt with through USAID and our AID mission, and the large economic assistance program they managed.

*Q: Well, usually in a three-year thing you'd have at least one typhoon or flood or something?*

HAGERTY: Oh sure, and I can't remember. It's such an endemic thing that during one of the monsoon, summer or winter, a piece of Bangladesh the size of New Jersey floods out. But Bangladesh was otherwise, as I said, my quiet patch. I made several trips out to the area while I was the Director, visiting both Pakistan and Bangladesh (and stopping in New Delhi to see friends along the way and to play a round a golf). Remember that Bangladesh at the time, like Pakistan, was a functioning military dictatorship, and so we had serious human rights concerns in both.

*Q: Well, before we move to the sort of the guts of your time, which would be Pakistan and Afghanistan, how did you find during this time relations between your office and the one dealing with India? Because this has always been one of these classic cases... I'm wondering at this '84 to '87; how did this go?*

HAGERTY: Well, let me give you a little history. Up until the late 1960s, NEA/SOA (for South Asian Affairs) handled all of South Asia; It was then was divided into two offices, one for India, Nepal and Ceylon (INC) (now INS once Ceylon became Sri Lanka) and the other, for Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh (NEA/PAB). The two office directors at that time, Doug Heck and Jim Spain, insisted that the connecting door between their offices be maintained. When I came back in 1984, the suites had been rearranged, but in such a way that they were still sufficiently contiguous that we continued to have a sense that this was a sub-region in which problems dealt with in terms of U.S. relations with one country impacted on U.S. relations with the others. As I have said earlier, Indians and Pakistanis often saw relations with the U.S. as a 'zero sum game,' a gain for one had to mean a loss for the other, despite our best efforts to suggest this was nonsense.

*Q: How about, still looking at this relationship, did you or your counterpart on the India side get cables from the ambassadors in either country that led you to sit down and say, well, what's really happening here and sort of add them together and divide?*

HAGERTY: Oh, no question. We were colleagues, sharing information and impressions, obviously. Both offices got all of the South Asia-related cables, so we each knew what the other was receiving and sending from and to the field and, memo form, to our superiors. . The key was

that at the Assistant Secretary, or 'sixth floor' level, as well as at our level, we were determined to make sure that the sense of competition shown occasionally by the Delhi and Islamabad embassies -- and that the two ambassadors tended to reflect in their argumentation to Washington -- was measured against to what was in the best interest of the United States as a whole, as seen from Washington. We had personal and professional ties across the offices, and more than a few -- like me -- had served in India and Pakistan, as well as other countries in the region. So there was a sense that we could talk to each other about what seemed best for the U.S. You should recall that when the Country Director system was established under Dean Rusk, the former SOA director (Carol Laise) asked Rusk whether he looked upon country directors as representatives of their ambassadors or as his representative to their ambassadors. He was perfectly clear on the latter, and I believe every Secretary since then has reflected this same view. Put simply, the U.S. view looks different from Washington than it does from any other capital in the world.

Of course, we also had to support and look after our ambassadors...there's no question about that. But we believed it was our duty to take what they said and then help our Department masters to weigh their recommendations in the broader context of their Washington responsibilities, i.e., from the perspective of the Secretary of State, rather than from the perspective of an ambassador's office in New Delhi or Islamabad or Dhaka. There were pitfalls in this, but we always tried to maintain a Washington perspective, even if it occasionally annoyed our respective ambassadors. Apart from that, the other thing at factor was that the INS and PAB office directors, over the years -- usually friendly colleagues -- sought, if possible, to resolve questions at the level of their 'fifth floor' offices, so as to keep the issues in their hands as they worked to present recommendations up the line.

*Q: Well, it's almost dangerous to kick decisions up because the farther you kick them up the less expertise you have and*

HAGERTY: You lose control, of course. So when a cable required a quick response, an officer in PAB or INS could prepare a draft and then have the other office review it make sure that it reflected our best combined judgment, while taking into account the views of the ambassador at one or the other post. Then we were in a better position to deal with the often daunting coordination process as the draft cable, with the incoming attached, moved through lateral clearances (if needed) and then up the chain to that 'magic' level where someone on the 'sixth floor' or the 'seventh floor' (or occasionally the NSC or the White House) would decide that he or she had the authority to authorize its transmission. And, of course, there were times when the PAB and INS Directors did present divided views.

*Q: Who was your counterpart on the India side?*

HAGERTY: Well, Grant Smith was and then Peter Thompson. Grant and Peter have both gone on to ambassadorships. Grant, I think, to Uzbekistan, after having been the DAS for 'drugs and thugs,' as it was called, and Peter Thompson, with ambassadorial title, in charge of the final stages of the negotiation process on Afghanistan. Then I believe he went to a job dealing with the residue of the breakup of the USSR in Central Asia.

*Q: Well, then, let's move to Pakistan, I mean did the Afghan side almost dictate how we dealt with Pakistan? How did this work out during this period?*

HAGERTY: Well, Pakistan was clearly critical, just as it is today with considerations about Bin Laden and Afghanistan following after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

*Q: And it was just two days ago the World Trade Center was destroyed.*

HAGERTY: Two days ago, right. You look at Afghanistan and you see immediately that it is not merely landlocked but is virtually isolated from the world. So you get there either via Pakistan or via Central Asia -- in those days, the Soviet Union -- or you get there via Iran. Other than air, those are the only ways in. Well, the three countries and those three access routes were in fact critical to the ways in which the war to dislodge the Soviets was playing. The Iranians were obviously involved in supporting up to a million Afghan refugees in Iran and -- presumably -- the Afghan Hazara-based (Shiite) resistance against the Russians in western Afghanistan. The Russians, of course, were supplying their effort by air and overland across the Oxus River and then down through the Hindu Kush mountains, where it was being harassed regularly of course. Meanwhile, support from the Islamic world, from the West, and presumably China, was coming into Afghanistan via Pakistan from the many nations opposed to the Soviet presence in Kabul. Contributions consisted of support (and NGO assistance) for the more than million Afghan refugees inside Pakistan, as well as for food aid and weaponry. And on the last part of the route into Afghanistan, such commodities moved westward over traditional routes and by traditional means -- on the backs of men or camels or mules -- through the Sulaiman mountains, as in the days of Alexander the Great, Darius, and Babar.

As I understood it from my Western press contacts, the Afghan *mujahideen* were operating mainly out of the refugee camps on the border. They would sortie into Afghanistan for several weeks of sustained fighting, then return, handing their arms on to others on their way in or holding on to them -- as have traditionally for centuries. In the later stages, I was told that many sold their weapons for hard cash -- up to \$300 for an AK-47 -- certain that others would be available when they went back to fight again.

*Q: I mean, so much of this was one of these covert-overt things. I mean the world knew what we were doing, but did you get, I mean what were you getting, what was your involvement in the war, the insurgency?*

HAGERTY: I have already described my earlier role. But as PAB Director, my key objective was maintaining a U.S. relationship with Pakistan that assured its support of the struggle in Afghanistan being fought by the *mujahideen*, while at the same time carrying out our responsibilities -- under tough U.S. laws aimed at limiting the Pakistan nuclear program and monitoring for human rights conditions. So you can see there were problems. With regard to Afghanistan, I worked with our International Organizations (IO) Bureau, for instance, to make sure that we also lined up the votes in various international forums to condemn Soviet actions and to support the Afghan fight against the Russians. In a series of overwhelming annual United Nations General Assembly votes, we would try to get at least one vote more than the previous year. And we succeeded in bringing the number of abstentions down -- to nine, then eight, then



seven, I guess -- in UN General Assembly voting to condemn Soviet actions and to call for Soviet withdrawal. These were margins unheard of for the General Assembly, So, it was big issues and small issues, but it all had to do with the mobilizing support and opinion. I also helped organize a two-day conference at CSIS on Afghan refugees, for instance.

*Q: CSIS being?*

HAGERTY: The Center for the Study of International Studies. It's a Washington 'think tanks' and I arranged their support of it. Our lead speaker there was Jean Kirkpatrick, who was then UN ambassador. Other U.S. actions covered a wide swath, but as I said I had lots of help on Afghanistan because lots of other people were involved. There was, for instance, Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs on Afghanistan, there was a Special Assistant to the Secretary of State; and behind me I had extremely diligent desk officers. There were two of them. One of them was Phyllis Oakley, who moved on to be an Assistant Secretary in her own right; she was followed by Desire Millikan, who has continued on to a meteoric career herself. Phyllis was to become the Department Spokesperson, in part, as a result of her impressing George Schultz in an appearance on National Public Radio and, in general, in her dealing with the press as Afghan desk officer.

*Q: How about the NSC because this is, you got there in '84 and so Ollie North was still I guess running supreme? Did he cast his eyes over your way or were you fortunate?*

HAGERTY: Not really. The only time that I had any kind of awareness of his presence was when a PanAm jet was hijacked to Karachi. That was right in his special operations bailiwick at the time. I was aware that the people that I was dealing with in the Counter-Terrorism Office and in the Department Center were also dealing with him. As it turned out, the Pakistanis stormed the plane on their own, killing the terrorists but unfortunately killing a few passengers also. That's the only time I was aware of his presence.

There were occasionally problems dealing with the NSC, the usual problems. In particular, you'd send something over, a letter, for instance, with well-considered and thoughtful text, only to learn that it was signed by the President with changes made by the NSC staff without any further consultation with the Department. So the next time you saw it, say as an outgoing cable, it was already "approved" by the President or by someone on his behalf. This left no way to correct errors that might have been introduced into it by unknowing people at that end. That's been a problem of the NSC system for a long time. During the Reagan administration, it was particularly difficult because, with Reagan, you never knew who actually had signed it off. It was clear that he wasn't personally involved or signing off all those things. Reagan frequently did not follow up one-on-one meetings with a Memorandum of Conversation (known as a 'memcon'). He had a one-on-one with General Zia, and when he emerged from the meeting, he reportedly put his briefing paper on the desk of the secretary and said, "I did it."

Relations with the NSC staffers were sticky at times, for Department Country Directors in particular. NSC staffers often preferred to deal with more senior levels in the Department, as befitted their own sense of self-importance.

*Q: What about, was everybody sort of looking over their shoulder at Iran, I mean, here Iran was to use their term, they were our great Satan at the time.*

HAGERTY: That's right, they were.

*Q: But yet, they were involved essentially on our side against the Soviets.*

HAGERTY: Well, the great thing was that the communiqué published in 1980 by a meeting of the Islamic Conference Organization in Islamabad was jointly drafted by the Pakistani and Iranian foreign ministers. That language stood up for the whole of the war to get the Russians to withdraw. We didn't have to deal with the Iranians; we dealt with the Pakistanis, and the Pakistanis would deal with them. We were dealing with other members of the Islamic Conference, of course, the Egyptians and the Saudis especially, but we really had no basis on which to deal with the Iranians after the hostage crisis. On this particular subject, our aims and theirs were the same.

The real problem was the Afghan resistance; it was itself divided six ways out of seven with various figures within it being unable to deal with or work with other figures within it, each of them having had a history of warring with each other. One of the great mottoes talked about by USIA at the time was "Let Afghans rule Afghans" or "Let Afghans be Afghans" -- a sort of the follow-on to USIA's earlier "Let Poles be Poles." But anyone who knew Afghanistan was aware that if you let Afghans be Afghans, they could end up killing a lot of each other. They did this during and after the insurgency, and they haven't stopped doing it since.

*Q: Was there at your level was there any sort of political life to look at in Afghanistan or were you following the?*

HAGERTY: As I recall it, the Embassy received had no reporting of consequence from inside Afghanistan. We depended heavily upon the world press, and occasionally, a chance to talk to some NGO or neutral or media representative who came through and had traveled there. But not many people were really traveling to Afghanistan at the time. Some, who were no longer there, would talk a lot about what the Islamic schools were doing in the rural areas. And it was those small Islamic schools that set the tone for what became the Taliban. No question about it, though, if you put the seven Afghan resistance organizations on a spectrum from ultra conservative *jihadists* to Islamic moderates, the ones that were doing the bulk of the fighting were probably at the extreme conservative end. We all assumed that those elements received the bulk of the outside support, since that is where it would seem to do damage the Soviets the most.

*Q: Well, in a way it's very much the same way I served for five years in Yugoslavia. It was well documented that during World War II that the Communists were the one group that was fighting and the Serbian nationalists and the Chunks and others were spending more time going after each other and so the Communists got the bulk of the equipment and came out on top.*

HAGERTY: I guess it was obvious that this was happening in Afghanistan too. We used to get questions about why does the U.S. seem to support only the most conservative Islamics and so forth. But why not? They appeared to most informed observers to be carrying the main burden of

the fight. It wasn't the Taliban either. The Taliban came into it after the main show was over. They had been fighting out in the countryside, yes, but it was after the main battle was over for Kabul that the Taliban moved up from Kandahar and fought its own war against fellow Afghans.

*Q: During the '84 to '87 period, what was the, how did the war go?*

HAGERTY: Well, it appeared to go better for the Afghans, for the resistance, partly because they were getting better arms. It was during this time that the effectiveness of the "Stingers" against the Soviet helicopter gunships essentially took the helicopters out of the war. Then on the ground, of course, there were reports of heavy Soviet casualties. And on the Afghan side too. But for the Russians, it began to be a running sore, and it was clear that by late 1986 the Soviets were beginning to look for some way to get out. They had a tiger by the tail, but they didn't know how to let it go.

It was then when you had an active UN effort aimed at facilitating withdrawal. The UN serves such a useful purpose for situations like this. A special representative was appointed by the UN secretary general, with the support of the General Assembly, clearly with our support and clearly with the support of the Islamic Conference, to attempt to work out some arrangement with the Russians for a withdrawal. That eventually was what happened, but not while I was Country Director. But by the time I left PAB in 1987, that process was playing out, and it looked to me as if it was going to produce what we all hoped it would -- a Soviet withdrawal. It just didn't work quite as fast as that, but by the time I retired from the Foreign Service two years later, it had produced a success in Afghanistan -- and ultimately in Europe, where the 'Iron Curtain' also came down.

*Q: I have a feeling the young men were out, you say mainly from the extreme right, fighting the war... You had a bunch of graybeards sitting around, literally with long beards, sitting around in the camps talking a big game of politics and all that. Were we monitoring what they were saying or were they inconsequential?*

HAGERTY: They were perfectly happy to expose all of their divisiveness in public, over and over and over again. There was little hidden about what they were doing and the fact that some of their groups were doing a large part of the fighting. I'm not saying that the 'gray beard' groups were totally out of it, they were active too, but they just weren't as effective. I suppose they didn't have the religious zeal that enabled the extreme right wing to put up with the casualties they suffered and the dangers and privation they face to put up a tough fight when it was so uneven in the early days. I think it's quite remarkable that the insurgency continued so well for that long; it didn't seem to wear down the Russians down like the quagmire in Vietnam did the U.S.

*Q: What were the divisions? Is it a religious division or was it a tribal division?*

HAGERTY: Among the seven?

*Q: Among the Afghan groups, was it down to the clan or family?*

HAGERTY: There were clan, family, ethnic, and linguistic divisions, all with long histories. I can't remember many years later, who was the Uzbek leader, who was the Tajik leader, who was the Pathan leader, who was this leader, who was that leader, but they had all of these ethnic differences. They had regional differences from within Afghanistan itself that separated them as well. Every one of them would have told you he was a God-fearing Muslim, and they all were. For some, it was a different sense of zealousness than it was for others, so that their degree of Islamic orthodoxy was what sometimes appeared to be the most obvious difference, but in fact differences were fundamental in language and culture. And all they all had rivalries and bitter memories going back to the early days of their opposition to and repression by Zahir Shah's monarchy.

*Q: There's not an Afghanistan.*

HAGERTY: Yes and no; Afghanistan is a geographic entity. It was defined by British and Russian agreement at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. But as of the middle of that century, there were three kingdoms. When later under one king, it was only loosely run from Kabul. And even in the 1970s, under the last government in Kabul before the local Communists Parties took over, if that government of the king wanted to be successful in replacing a provincial governor, he had to send army units with the new guy -- a bit like the way the Royal Navy had to change ship captains centuries ago when they had to make sure that the new captain coming in wasn't killed by the incumbent before he presented his credentials. It was that kind of thing.

There's always been a strong sense of regional independence across the face of that country in terms of sturdy people with, you know; to say it's hilly is rather mild. Its main boundaries are mountainous and fluvial, and it's got an 18,000 foot range cutting right down through the middle of the country, east to west. All of this sense of independence, territorial turfdom, and warlordism are endemic in such a country. And in Afghanistan, the internal divisions have been exploited for centuries from beyond its boundaries by ethnic rivalries that pay no mind to boundaries or the more modern conception of statehood.

*Q: While you were in Pakistan,, the president was Zia al-Haq?*

HAGERTY: Zia al-Haq was President, Chief Martial Law Administrator, and Army Chief. He was moving toward restoring, gradually restoring democratic rule. He held local bodies elections, district councils and then elections were held over time for the provincial assemblies, and then finally -- on a non-party basis -- for the National Assembly. A Prime Minister was appointed, and martial law was lifted, but Zia stayed on as president with enhanced constitutional powers. The then-prime minister visited Washington, had a very successful visit here in the late stages of the Afghan war. Things were going better for Pakistan. Our relationship was on the up swing. We restored a lot of that sense of confidence in us that our failure to come to their assistance at other times had destroyed. And on balance, we had a very good relationship with Zia, despite nuclear and human rights issues. He was, of course, much maligned abroad and despised by the ineffective, and often venal and corrupt, politicians he had displaced at home.

Yes, his rule was authoritarian, but at any given time during Zia's presidency there were probably fewer people in what I would call 'political detention' than there had been under

Zulfikar Bhutto, whom he replaced. In fact, the last years of the Bhutto regime were filled with midnight sweeps of people and politicians, and they'd just disappear. Zia was a remarkably "velvet glove" dictator in this sense, and I don't mean to be apologetic for him. But he eventually did move the country -- albeit slowly -- in the direction to which he had committed himself. His public remarks were often quite candid; he would be perfectly happy to admit that he'd made a mistake. His original commitment when he took power was that he would restore democratic procedures in 90 days, and when he was asked about that in a later press conference after deciding not to do so fast, he said, "Well, I just didn't know enough about how bad it all was. It'll take time, but we'll do it." When the previous president's term expired, and he chose to add "President" to his other titles of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA), he was asked by the press if he had enough time to do all three jobs. He said, well, he thought it would take only another "fifteen minutes a week" to be President, because all he would have to do was receive ambassadors now and then. His most operative and powerful titles were the other two, and some Pakistanis, in jest, translated CMLA as "Contrary to My Last Assertion," a reference to his successive decisions to stay on in power.

I'm not saying that Zia wasn't harsh when it came to imposing Islamic penalties. Flogging was installed as a way to deal with criminal actions, adultery for instance, but when they tried to apply amputation of a hand, the old Islamic penalty for theft, they couldn't find an army doctor who would allow himself to be ordered to do it. I think he came to power with a sense that something had gone wrong with the great idea of Pakistan being the country for all Muslims, and maybe the thing that had gone wrong was that the people weren't Muslim enough. If being a good Muslim was a good rule of life, then why should it not apply to a nation also?

In fact, he may have been at least partially right. But I think he failed to understand that the Islamic state of Pakistan that emerged in 1947 had very Westernized, secular-minded initial leadership whose main concern was to bring about an end to British rule that did not condemn the bulk of South Asia's Muslims to be a permanent minority in a free, united, and Hindu-dominated India -- whatever its claim to secularism. I don't think that Islam was the problem either. South Asia's Islam -- having existed in a multi-cultural Indian environment for centuries -- was not a sufficient basis alone for the development of a sense of nation-hood in modern terms. Pakistan's often fragmented polity continues to have the same problem, exacerbated by its repeated failures to make its democratic institutions work.

*Q: Were we concerned at that time looking around at extreme Muslims or were we keeping our eye on the war?*

HAGERTY: Oh we were, I think we were concerned about extremist Islamicists. Clearly it was in our interest to support the Afghan resistance to the Russians. They were well trained and became battle-hardened, there's no question about it, but many of those veterans had nothing to do but to continue fighting with each other when the war was over. There wasn't any French Foreign Legion to take them in Asia, so some of them gravitated into the Kashmir underground and have been part of what has been going in that anti-Indian insurgency. Others clearly ended up in the Middle East, or returned to Lebanon, so there is this roving band of trained guerrilla fighters who, once an action is over, seek employment in the only thing they know how to do. Look at the IRA; it's virtually the same thing. There are generations of IRA members who know

nothing but this kind of struggle...have no other livelihood. In regard to the Afghan resistance there's a strong element of that, exacerbated by the poverty, wartime devastation, and the lack of a sense of national identity -- larger than clan or ethnic loyalty -- inside Afghanistan.

*Q: What about the Saudi influence there? Was this of interest or concern or not?*

HAGERTY: Well, the Saudi influence was very strong partly because of their money, and they were very close to one of the seven resistance leaders who had a *Wahabi* approach. His name was Sayyaf. The Saudis were clearly seen to favor a more conservative Islamic wing of the resistance as more in tune with their views, although the Saudi monarchy has as little use for terrorists as any monarch does.

*Q: I mean you had this nuclear problem we've had, we're up to that and all over again.*

HAGERTY: It was teetering all along we were there because we pressed, pressed, and pressed, and we believed our information about what they were up to was very good at the time. They knew we knew, but they also knew what the limit of our legislation was, and they just stayed clear of that limit so that we could certify every year that they hadn't assembled a weapon. Those who had to make that annual assessment knew better than I may very well have said to themselves that all they need to do is to assemble the separate pieces, but they had not assembled them and that was what would have triggered the legislation. And the Pakistanis for a time counted on us to not let the Indians do anything to threaten Pakistan. The Indians having tested their own device earlier, and had the Chinese very much in mind at the time. The Indians weren't doing anything aggressive on the nuclear front anyway, preferring to build up their conventional deterrents.

Pakistanis always saw their nuclear deterrent as a counter, not so much India's nuclear program, but to India's vast conventional superiority. The Indian Army is four times the size of the Pakistan Army. The Indian Air Force is five times and the Indian Navy ten times the size of Pakistan's equivalent services, with more modern weapons at every level.

*Q: Were we at all involved with supplying weapons?*

HAGERTY: To Pakistan's armed forces?

*Q: Yes.*

HAGERTY: Yes, but it's interesting. We negotiated two agreements with the Pakistanis; the first was for \$1.8 billion, and the second, \$2.2 billion, if I remember. They were equally divided between security assistance and economic assistance. We sold them forty (40) F-16s, but they were the air defense and ground attack variant, not the bomber variant we had provided to Israel. We sold them anti-tank weapons. And sold them and helped them to get M-48A-5 tanks that had been 'Diseled' and up-gunned to 90 mm guns. At one point in the early negotiations, we recognized that they needed better tanks just on the face of it. Their tanks went back the M-47s we had provided in the '50s. So, we offered M-60s, which was what we were producing at that time. But they did not want to go the M-60 route at that time, partly because in a lot of the areas

in which they would have to move tanks in Pakistan, road and bridge and railway tolerances would not take anything larger than the size of the M-47 and M-48. So the improved M-48 clearly met their immediate needs at the time.

The Iranians helped them, too they had a bunch of Pakistan's M-47s in Iran being up-gunned and re-engined at the time the Shah fell. We didn't have much influence in Iran, but the Pakistanis did, because the Iranians speeded up the process so that the tanks could get back to Pakistan. On tanks, the Pakistanis were clear in the minds what their limits were; our best was not the best for them. Almost all of the equipment we provided was on a purchase basis with U.S. guaranteed credits at less than commercial rates. There have always been in the Congress stronger pro-India voices because India is democratic and all of that, going back to the '50s. But that tended to be muffled because the Pakistanis were supporting a good fight against our main adversary, the Russians.

However, the Congress remained exercised about the nuclear issue, and so we were always walking a tightrope in terms of hoping and doing what we could to ensure that the existing legislation was not amended to reduce our maneuver room. The legislation always gave the President sufficient flexibility to be able to "certify," just as long as the Pakistanis didn't detonate something or put it in our face. When George H. Bush left office, it became the Clinton administration's to deal with, and it was Clinton's decision that finally did impose the legal sanctions our laws required.

*Q: What about, yes, how did you find, at that time you were in the Near East and South Asia Bureau – with busy Arab-Israeli issues, did you find yourself off in a corner or was this a war big enough?*

HAGERTY: I was one of many who argued against a separate South Asia Bureau, and even now I think a separate bureau was a mistake, pushed in part by Congressional committee lobbying, eager for a separate sub-committee chairmanship. But to me, a separate bureau would make sense only if it also included the Central Asian "stans," Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, etc. Without them, the South Asia Bureau is too small to count, even with a population of more than a billion people. In my experience, whenever there were important issues that needed resolution, issues of vital interest in the United States --like the China-India war of 1962 or the India-Pakistan conflict of 1965 or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 -- there wasn't any want of attention from the top of the State Department and the U.S. Government. Each time there was a major problem, someone on the seventh floor would take charge of it. In time, it got too big for NEA to handle, especially with Dick Murphy preoccupied with the Arab-Israeli peace process. So the Afghanistan war found its way regularly to the desk of Mike Armacost, then Under Secretary for Political Affairs and, at times, the *de facto* Afghan Country Director. So, there was never any trouble getting to the seventh floor for action. George Schultz too was very active and was a very important influence on the Pakistan Foreign Minister, with whom he had productive relationship. I sat in on their conversations as a note-taker a dozen times during the time I was PAB Director. They understood each other, and Schultz knew what the issues were, too.

*Q: Well, what were our relations in that area during this time? Did the members of the European Union or Japan play any role at all or this is our game?*

HAGERTY: Well, let's see, I think all of our allies supported what we were doing and would rally with us. There was a lot of support from the Europeans particularly on the refugee side. We got the European allies to step aside on six or eight F-16s for Pakistan that had been slotted for Norway or Denmark and the Netherlands, so that we were able to get those planes quickly into Pakistan Air Force mufti. It suited the interest of the northern Europeans, too, since they weren't quite ready to absorb or pay for them, so it was a marriage of convenience there.

*Q: Did Israel play any role in this?*

HAGERTY: The problem that every American diplomat in that part of the world has to learn is that everything about U.S. relations with Israel is unique. Nothing counts as a precedent if we do it with Israel. It's distinctive, *sui generis*. It sets no precedent for any other U.S. relationship. We do it because of a unique set of circumstances, and that's the way I've always tried to explain it. I think I've been credible with foreign diplomats by explaining it candidly that way.

*Q: Were there any other issues that particularly engaged you?*

HAGERTY: I think not, I think these were the major issues and they just kept pounding, we kept pounding away at them. They kept pounding away at us, but the overall aim was to get the Russians out and in the end we were successful, but actually after I had moved on to my next assignment.

*Q: What about the refugee situation? Was that more or less out of your hands?*

HAGERTY: Well, there is a Refugee Affairs Bureau, but as the Country Director I had to be concerned about what they were doing obviously. They had "action" on a refugee matters, and the U.S. contribution basically financial assistance to the international refugee organizations and NGO's involved. I followed it closely, but I was peripheral to that decision-making.

*Q: By the time you were dealing with Pakistani affairs did the day you had in the vault... was that still ringing, I mean, did you keep that in mind or was that pretty well gone by then?*

HAGERTY: That was fairly well gone, and as a professional, I believe I was dealing with the issues. One of the things we do as professionals, if we're going to be good at it, is to take ourselves out of the act and deal with what we're dealing with. So, I put that aside; I didn't have any hate from it. It's still a sore spot with me, and I still have reminders of it. It keeps coming back, and as I think I mentioned on an earlier tape, when I summarized that half-day in a chapter of a book I realized that I still had a fair amount of anger deep down that I was able to write about, but that didn't really influence my operations.

*Q: How effective did you find the Pakistan embassy in Washington during this time?*

HAGERTY: In a sense, it went from zero to very effective with the change of ambassadors. When I first became Country Director and we wished to convey something that we wanted to ensure the Pakistanis got straight, we dealt through the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad first, then,



followed up by talking to the Pakistan ambassador here -- at the time headed by a retired general. Months later, when Pakistan sent one of their best professional diplomats here, one who had been an ambassador in Moscow, Paris, and Bonn before -- and a long-time friend of mine, besides -- it all changed. He and I had a relationship that was very different, and we could count on the fact that he would convey accurately whatever message we wanted conveyed to his government. We also knew that when he was conveying something to us he was conveying it exactly the way he had been instructed to do it. And of course, we always kept our ambassador in Islamabad informed so that he could follow up as necessary, as is the usual custom.

**A. ELLEN SHIPPY**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Dhaka (1986-1988)**

*Ambassador Shippy was born in Colorado and raised in New Mexico. She was educated at the University of New Mexico and the George Washington School of Law. After a tour with the Peace Corps in El Salvador, Ms. Shippy joined the Foreign Service, where she served first in positions dealing with Latin America and later in with those concerning Asian and African affairs. She served as Political Counselor in Bangladesh, Deputy Chief of Mission in Uganda and she served as Ambassador to Malawi from 1998 to 2000. Ambassador Shippy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

SHIPPY: Joe Melrose recruited me to go out to Dhaka, Bangladesh to be the Political Counselor. Howard Schaffer was Ambassador, and John Brims was his DCM. So that is where I went.

*Q: This is Bangladesh. Wow, you are moving around. Well you are becoming an Indian Ocean expert.*

SHIPPY: That is right, yes.

*Q: You went to Bangladesh from...*

SHIPPY: 1986 to 1988.

*Q: 1986 to 1988. What was the reputation of Bangladesh at that time because I have heard various accounts. Some think it was awful and others, oh, boy, this is a lot of fun, a great place.*

SHIPPY: It doesn't have a good reputation. That is why Joe was beating the bushes to find somebody who was willing to go there. But those who went generally had a very good tour. It's one of those sleeper posts. It is very good for families. There is a great American club there with a restaurant, tennis courts and swimming pool. The Bangladeshis are very nice people, very warm hearted and hospitable. Not everyone assigned there sees that aspect because if you go shopping, for example, clusters of kids will form around you and touch your arm and feel your hair and so forth. But getting to know them on an individual basis, I found them the most

hospitable people I had come into contact with since the Salvadoran campesinos I worked with as a Peace Corps Volunteer. In many countries, you don't get invited to people's homes because they can't match you. They can't match your house in size or amenities. They can't provide the liquor or food or whatever. Bangladeshis, it doesn't matter to them. They would invite you, and if you didn't want to come, you didn't go, and if you went you had a great time in very poor surroundings. I had a friend who was a university professor. He had an apartment on probably the third or fourth floor of a building. There may have been an elevator, but it never worked, so you walked up the stairs in a concrete apartment building. The electricity was generally working, but there was no air conditioning. This is Bangladesh where it is generally very hot. Mosquitoes are a problem and so forth, but his family was welcoming. Bangladeshis make wonderful food. So it is a great place in that aspect.

*Q: During this 1986 to 1988 period, what was the government of Bangladesh like at the time?*

SHIPPY: A former military officer was president, Hussain Muhammad Ershad. I've been in two countries with former military men as President: Eanes in Portugal and Ershad in Bangladesh. We were pushing for elections in Bangladesh. Opposition parties operated there. The Bangladesh National Party was led by Begum Zia, who was the widow of a former president who had been assassinated. She believed that Ershad had a part in her husband's death. Then there was the Awami League run by Sheikh Hasina, who was the daughter of one of the early leaders of the country. Begum Zia's husband had a role in his assassination.

*Q: Sounds like quite a group there.*

SHIPPY: The best story is that the National Democratic Institute had a dinner in San Francisco for women leaders. Some woman, I think an American, was seated, and there was someone on her right and someone on her left. The American begins to make conversation and introduce herself. She turns to one of them and says, "I am so and so, who are you?" The woman says, "I am Sheikh Hasina. The woman on your left, her husband assassinated my father." After that what do you say? Anyway, Bangladesh is an interesting country, and now Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina are taking turns governing the country as Prime Minister. Ershad resigned as president in December 1990. He was convicted and imprisoned for illegal possession of firearms and for corruption, and spent six years in prison. The youth wings of the political parties were used as the shock troops, and there was a fair amount of violence. They used sticks, stones and chains, not guns, so the death toll was not great. There were injuries, but not death. (As opposed to Karachi, where the party youth groups used Kalashnikovs.) The Bangladesh Parliament Building is one of the most impressive buildings I have seen. It is concrete and wood with geometric shapes; it's hard to describe it, but it is a great building. The architect was Louis Khan; he created a spectacular building.

*Q: Well how did you find dealing with the body politic in Bangladesh?*

SHIPPY: What do you mean?

*Q: Well in other words you know, you talk to various leaders. Did they want anything from the United States or did we want anything from them?*

SHIPPY: Oh, everyone always wants money from the United States. By this time we had NDI.

*Q: NDI is what?*

SHIPPY: National Democratic Institute. IRI is the International Republican Institute. Congress gives money to the National Endowment for Democracy, and then that organization passes money out to NDI, IRI, and the elections group. So there is some assistance. We can't give money to the political parties, but we can provide assistance in helping people learn how to campaign; we can train poll monitors and send observer teams. What we wanted from the Bangladeshis were elections, and free and fair elections. We got elections. One of the political officers came back from observing them, and said it was just amazing. At one polling station he visited, one of the polling officials was sitting in a room stamping the ballots one after the other. So, free and fair, we didn't get so much.

*Q: Were there any other issues other than say UN votes or something that we had with Bangladesh?*

SHIPPY: The main issues in Bangladesh are poverty, and social and economic development.

*Q: You know, at our embassy, did we see any "the United States is far away and we are only one country," what do you do with a country of so many people, you know such little area for natural resources?*

SHIPPY: You help them as best you can. You certainly don't write them off. Bangladeshis are very hard working. They have tremendous obstacles; they get flooded out, and they pick themselves up and get started again. If you are in development work, Bangladesh is "the" place to work. The different humanitarian agencies, USAID and the NGOs want to be there working.

*Q: You know we have projects; other people have projects. Do these fold or do they keep going or do you just have to keep adding new ones or how does it work?*

SHIPPY: Basically you keep going. I don't know what our global USAID program is now, and I don't remember what it was when I was there. It takes a long time to get these things started when the country doesn't have natural resources.

*Q: You must have been there during one of the floods weren't you?*

SHIPPY: I was, but not one of the worst ones. The streets in Dhaka flood fairly easily, and as soon as a street was flooded, somebody would get out a boat and start offering taxi service. Villages are often an extended family compound. After one bad flood, we visited one such village out in the countryside. One guy said he had sat in a tree for several days waiting for the water to recede. The women and children had gone to a school, which was the designated gathering point. When we were there, the water was beginning to recede, and they were making their plans about how they were going to replant, where they were going to get the seeds, and so forth. One of the problems, of course, was drinking water. Their well had been contaminated,

and there was stuff floating on top of it. I asked what it was. The village headman said, “Those are pages from the Koran which were put in there to purify the water.” In floods you have an increased number of snake bites. It turns out that in floods, snakes and people both go to the high ground. Bangladeshis are known for their ideas, for their drama, for their poetry, for their music, for their theater. My own theory is that these are things that aren’t lost when the flood waters come, that they can be passed on.

*Q: What about relations. I mean India sort of surrounds, a very peculiar manifestation there.*

SHIPPY: Yes, but it doesn’t completely surround it. Bangladesh has a small border with Myanmar, but India borders most of Bangladesh. Relations with India were not wonderful. There were various long-standing issues with India. One was a water issue about a dam – the Farakka Barrage -- in India that controls the flow of water in a major river in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi farmers need water from that river to grow crops during the dry season. So that was an issue. There were a few Bangladeshi settlements inside India across the border, not terribly far in, but still in. Bangladesh wanted guaranteed routes to these settlements. That issue has been resolved (after my time in Bangladesh). There was an island where the issue was whether it was Bangladeshi or Indian. The issues between Bangladesh and India are not armed conflict. It is nothing like relations between Pakistan and India.

*Q: What about with Bengal? I mean there are Bengalis on both sides. How close were they. Was there by this time division between...*

SHIPPY: There is a real division and a real border. While I was there, the Communist Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, who was born in what is now Bangladesh, made a visit back to his home village and met with his old nanny. He was received with honors and a great deal was made of that whole visit.

*Q: Was there any movement at all trying to bring Bangladesh into India?*

SHIPPY: No.

*Q: On either side?*

SHIPPY: No, Bangladesh is a Moslem country.

*Q: Ah, so that. Are Bengalis in Bengal...*

SHIPPY: They are Hindu.

*Q: Hindu, so that is the real. How about at that time was there any rise in fundamentalism?*

SHIPPY: The Jamaat-i-Islami was a political party in Bangladesh with a minority following. That is the fundamentalist party. I met with the head of that party. Some things have happened since I left Bangladesh. There was a Bangladeshi woman who wrote a book about women’s rights. A fatwa was issued against her. Women’s issues are serious in Bangladesh. There are

some instances of acid throwing and a few instances of wife burning; women are culturally, socially and legally very circumscribed. One time when we had official visitors from Washington to look at family planning, we went into a slum area of Dhaka and visited a family compound there. The woman in the compound, which was not very large, said she never left it. Her husband did the shopping and she stayed in the compound. While I was in Bangladesh, garment factories became a big export enterprise for Bangladesh. The owners of the garment factories decided to hire women because they could pay them less than they would have had to pay men. What happened as a result was that all of these women who had never had an income and probably didn't get out of their house very much, all of a sudden were walking to and from the factory twice a day, out on the street twice a day, and they had an income. I think the long term effect of that will be very significant.

*Q: Did we have any sort of military interest in the area at all?*

SHIPPY: We had a Defense Attache Office there. We had an IMET program. As we do everywhere, we want relations with the military of the country.

*Q: Did the Indian ambassador play much role over there?*

SHIPPY: Yes, and he was generally pretty well informed about what was happening.

*Q: How about did Pakistan have any relations with them?*

SHIPPY: Yes. Pakistan and Bangladesh had relations.

*Q: Any particular problems or just...*

SHIPPY: There is a big issue between Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Biharis. At the time of independence there was a large group of people who had originally come from Bihar, India, at the time of partition. They were Muslim, which is why they left India. They ended up in Bangladesh, but they really wanted to be in what was then West Pakistan. But when West and East Pakistan separated, had their war, and Bangladesh gained its independence, the Biharis were left stranded in Bangladesh, in refugee camps. The issue was how to get them over to what is now Pakistan. That is a major issue that was a problem when I was there, and I believe still is a problem.

*Q: Is it money or was it unwillingness to leave?*

SHIPPY: No. It is Pakistan's unwillingness to accept another large group of non-Pakistanis.

*Q: Well then in 1988 you left there. Whither?*

SHIPPY: Karachi, to be Deputy Principal Officer.

**CHARLES A. MAST**  
**Economic-Commercial Counselor**  
**Dhaka (1987-1990)**

*Charles A. Mast was born in South Dakota in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Calvin College in 1963, he received his master's degree from the University of Maryland in 1967. His career has included positions in Kathmandu, Curacao, Teheran, Tabriz, Ankara, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Dhaka, and Bombay. Mr. Mast was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in February 2001.*

Q: Well, then, you left there in 1987. Whither?

MAST: Bangladesh.

Q: Oh, boy.

MAST: I went to Dhaka to be economic-commercial counselor in 1987.

Q: And you were there from 1987 to -

MAST: 1990.

Q: I would think for you and your family that going from Kuala Lumpur, which is considered one of the nicest spots on earth, to Bangladesh, which I have heard people describe as the armpit of the diplomatic world -

MAST: Well, I've got several things to say about that.

Q: Okay.

MAST: In the first place, you may not believe this, but here I was - you know, I had been in the Foreign Service for 23 years, but I was still quite naive when it came to bidding. I was never very good at manipulating the system, although as I mentioned earlier I did pretty well in order to get the Kuala Lumpur job, but that basically fell in my lap. So I bid, believe it or not, on a job as economic counselor in Seoul, which was a stretch, and there were a couple of economic jobs in NEA that I bid on, economic counselor in Tel Aviv, which was a stretch, and there was another economic job perhaps in Jordan that I also bid on, and I bid on Dhaka. Well, little did I realize until I started working in Personnel, that that was the stupidest thing. *Anybody* who bid on Dhaka who could live and breathe and had any kind of a reputation was *never* going to be considered for *any* other jobs in that bureau, probably in the Department. It was so hard to get people to go to Dhaka.

Q: "We've got one! We've got one!"

MAST: "We've got a ringer here!" But some part of me actually knew that that was going to happen. I had only two years left on my TIC as an FS-1.

*Q: TIC being... You might explain.*

MAST: Yes, time in class. So that unless I was going to be promoted within two years, I only had three years left in the Foreign Service in our up-or-out system. And Dhaka was a 25 percent hardship post. Dhaka was going to give me an opportunity to save some money and to get at least - one of my daughters was in college, and the other one would have been starting in a couple of years - to get them through college. That was one of the reasons why I bid on Dhaka, or I could have bid on another 25 percent hardship post. The second reason was my second daughter had finished her junior year in Kuala Lumpur and wanted to go to a boarding school in France. Dhaka did not have a high school, so that meant that the Department would pay for that. So that was another small reason to bid on Dhaka.

But Dhaka - the other point I was going to make is I was starting to get a glimpse of this because we had talked to the Schaffers, Howie and Teresita Schaffer. I had worked for Tezie in Washington before. Howie was, of course, ambassador in Bangladesh; Teresita was later ambassador to Sri Lanka. They had been visiting the Shoesmiths, and we had them over for dinner, and Teresita - and Howie, of course, but Teresita even more than Howie - had really tried to recruit us. "You'll love Dhaka. This is a great place. It's a sleeper post." You know, etc., etc. And actually, you know, believe it or not, Dhaka *is* a sleeper post. It certainly turned into that for me. I was promoted into the Senior Foreign Service six months after I arrived and served my last two years at post as DCM. Also Tezie Schaffer was South Asia DAS when it was time to move on again and was instrumental in getting me the Consul General job in Bombay.

*Q: Explain what a "sleeper post" is.*

MAST: "Sleeper post" means that it's a post that has the reputation of being the armpit of the world or has the reputation of being a terrible place to serve. But in reality it has high morale, good housing, works together better in terms of a commissary or in terms of making sure that what services you have work properly, and where everyone takes care of one another. We had a very good club in Dhaka. And it was easy to get to know the Bangladeshi middle class who loved to entertain and be entertained.

Now it's true there were floods every fall, and I had to take a rowboat to work, and some of those kind of things, so there were natural obstacles to put up with, but we had excellent housing.

*Q: Okay, why don't you talk about when you went out to Dhaka in 1987? What was it like there? I'm talking about the political and economic side of things.*

MAST: Well, Ershad was the president, and there were two women who opposed him. There was Ershad's party and Madame Zia, whose husband, General Zia, had been a previous president headed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. After General Zia had been assassinated, Ershad had taken over - he was also a general - but he had not been involved in the assassination (or at least we don't think he was involved). But Madame Zia, as so often happens in South Asia, the wife or the daughter (Benazir Bhutto would be another and there are others in Sri Lanka) took over his party. On the other side Sheikh Mujib, who had been the founder of Bangladesh in 1971 had been assassinated in 1974, and his daughter, Sheikh Hasina, headed the Awami League. And so

we had the two women and Ershad. And over the course of the three years we had any number of general strikes. Sometimes the women forced coalitions, but they were very ephemeral, to try to oust Ershad. He was finally ousted, of course, after I left, in the early 1990s, and then Madame Zia took over, and then Sheikh Hasina would call strikes, and then Sheikh Hasina was elected, and then Madame Zia would call strikes. They worked very hard in that country to try to keep some kind of a democracy together, but it's been very difficult. And in a country like that, politics is all, and no one is ever going to compromise, it seems.

*Q: What about the economy?*

MAST: Well, an awful lot of the economy is aid-based. They produced a lot of their own food, obviously, rice particularly, but a lot of vegetables and meat as well, it's a very productive agricultural country. I'd never seen soil, except perhaps in Java, that's as productive as the soil in Bangladesh, because it's from the river delta, basically. We'd have great gardens, for example, temperate during the winter, which was a very nice temperate season, something like our spring, so we would plant temperate vegetables, temperate flowers during the winter months. We would sometimes argue that one could just put a stick in the ground and it would grow.

But there was not much manufacturing. They had had jute, which was a very traditional crop, and they would make twine and rope and jute bags, but basically synthetics were starting to take that market, so there were tens of thousands of people who were really not productively employed in the jute industry. And what was happening then was they were going big into clothing and textiles. By the late eighties, there were as many as 500,000 women employed in the apparel industry. So for the three years I was there, a lot of the management of our economic relationship was how we would negotiate with the Bangladeshis, sometimes in terms of large quotas that they would have in order to try to stabilize imports into the United States of certain types of items.

*Q: The same question I asked about Malaysia - were we concerned about working conditions and that sort of thing in Bangladesh?*

MAST: Yes, to a certain extent, although they were making pretty basic stuff for discount stores. They would make shorts, little tee shirts; they would make a lot of synthetics, certainly not 100 percent cotton. They were in the early stage of manufacturing apparel and exporting to the United States. Later when it boomed we put on rather large quotas. For example, they had much larger annual quotas - millions of dozens of shirts - than Malaysia had, for example, or than Indonesia had.

*Q: What about working conditions?*

MAST: Not good at all. They were very difficult. I visited a lot of textile factories. They would be large warehouses or old office buildings where they'd knock out some walls. One of the big problems was not enough lavatory facilities, so that sometimes they might have 100 or 200 women and just a few holes in the floor, so to speak, for a lavatory. There were also problems with children - not so much child labor but what were the women going to do with their children



during the day? So many times they would take their children who would be underfoot or in a corner. Most of the plants I visited I didn't see that, but that tended to be a problem.

*Q: Were we taking a sort of a stand, or was this a UN thing?*

MAST: Actually, when it started there was very little done, because what happened is this was incredible economic and sociological and cultural progress for these women. I've read lots of books, lots of pamphlets, lots of articles in the Bangladeshi press but also in the international press and among the international observers on what progress this employment was for women. We have to realize that in Bangladesh, the women were so badly exploited, the husband could just walk out on them, marry a younger woman, and leave the first wife with five children. Well, once a woman had a job in a textile factory, do you think any husband would ever walk out on that woman? Absolutely not. She was the breadwinner. Now he might not help that much around the house, and he might not necessarily take care of the children, but she was going to have a husband. She gained considerable status through this employment.

*Q: Were you feeling any pressure from concerned people in the United States? I mean, you might understand it, I might understand it, but this doesn't sell well back to -*

MAST: There wasn't much yet at that time. I don't mean there wasn't any, and for example when a US textile delegation would come out, we would usually have someone from the International Ladies' Garment Workers Association. But I got to know these people, for example, in Malaysia earlier as well as in Bangladesh, and they're pretty sophisticated. They understood the complete difference between these two economies and that what would be considered extremely exploitative in the United States could be considered progress in Bangladesh. They didn't have a toilet at home. Of course, they could go behind the tree, but you didn't have a tree in this tremendous, big building, so it was, in a sense, a setback. But just to have a cash economy for women was quite an improvement.

*Q: What about dealing with the government? You had been used to the pretty sophisticated statistics of Malaysia. How did you find Bangladesh?*

MAST: Bangladesh was much more difficult, of course, although again, you had two or three levels of pretty competent people. But they would have peons running around carrying folders. I understood where the term "red tape" came from when I got to South Asia, because there were these huge folios with red tape wrapped around them. So it was a lot more difficult, and they were always intensely interested in comparative statistics, as to how many thousands of dozens of such and such a kind of shirt had been exported to the United States, because their own statistics were not particularly good. I'm sure they used ours to set the course, to gauge where they were going. But I found a lot of their bureaucrats, particularly at the second or third level (the ministers tend to be politicians, obviously, but then the secretary general would be a career civil servant, and then the deputy secretary general would be the next level), would be quite sophisticated about what was happening.

*Q: Were there a lot of American firms coming to look at what was going on there?*

MAST: No, what happens in the apparel area is the vast majority of all of these kind of textile firms, as we see today as well, are run by Koreans or Taiwanese or Hong Kong folks, though they often had Bangladeshi partners. They are easy to set up. They are very easy to move. They come into a country like Bangladesh which hasn't exported to the United States before. They bring in thousands of sewing machines. They train and hire people. They send out tens of thousands of dozens of shirts. Then they get a quota, and then they see, well, can I work within that quota? How much quota am I going to get from the government? And if they don't get enough, then they move on to Sri Lanka to Uganda or to the next developing country wherever they can set up. And it's very, very mobile. At least I don't think there was any American investment in the apparel area, even though at least 80 percent of their exports were going to the United States.

*Q: How did you deal with the floods? I mean every year you read about a monsoon or typhoon or something going around and thousands killed and all that.*

MAST: Well, one-third of Bangladesh being flooded is normal in the monsoon. In fact, probably - although there is suffering and some death - one could argue it's beneficial because of the way the water brings the silt - sort of like the Nile Valley for centuries or thousands of years. But once it gets more than that, and I think it was the second year I was there, 1988, they had the flood, if not of the century, at least every 50 years or so, and then two-thirds of the country was flooded, including large parts of Dhaka. Most Embassy people were able to stay in their houses. Our house was slightly higher than the surrounding houses. But almost everyone else on our block, in our area, had to leave. And I had a man with a rowboat who was at my house, and he would sleep in the rowboat and take me to higher ground near the American Club and then a Jeep would meet me to take me to the embassy. Or I remember we had to have a special meeting at the ambassador's house, which was several blocks away, and this man took me by rowboat. This was quite an interesting experience.

*Q: Our ambassador there was who?*

MAST: It was Howie Schaffer when I came. But then immediately, really, within a couple of weeks, it was Bill De Pree, Willard De Pree, who had been ambassador in Mozambique before and also had been a senior official in M, in Management.

*Q: What was his method of operation?*

MAST: Well, a lot of our interests in Bangladesh were really humanitarian. We had very few trade or economic interests, as we did in Malaysia. We had very few political interests *per se*. I mean, we had some concern that they work with us in SARC, you know, the South Asia area. Occasionally we would work with them on UN issues. Obviously there were common multilateral interests of this kind. But our interests were primarily humanitarian. We had a large AID program. There were enormous numbers of US NGOs there. There were lots of US missionaries there from all different kinds of church groups, most of whom were also involved in development projects as well as some proselytizing. And so the ambassador did a lot of work with these kinds of people and with the government to try to insure that these sort of things moved to our mutual benefit. And of course, we had a lot of work in civil society, in human

rights, a lot of work in religious rights, things of this kind. So already by 1987 or 1988, part of this was Bill De Pree, part of this was other people in the embassy, part of this was the fact that we were in a country like Bangladesh - many of the issues that have become prevalent only in the last decade, say, were already issues of real concern in diplomacy there.

*Q: What was the role of India at that time?*

MAST: Well, India was interesting. They were seen as the bogeyman by Madame Zia and her party, because they were a strongly Muslim party and they were quite worried about India. Sheikh Hasina, however, remembered that when Bangladesh became independent, the Indians had sent enormous amounts of military help, soldiers in fact, to help her father become the first prime minister of independent Bangladesh, so she always was a friend of India. And she would visit India; her children were educated in India. But she didn't win very many votes in Bangladesh for that, so she had to be quite careful about India.

*Q: India had until very recently a very protectionist policy of fostering its home industry. Did that carry over into Bangladesh?*

MAST: That's a very good question, because you're right. India had a very protectionist attitude, and they were always extremely critical of how other more developed countries treated Indian companies, while the Indian on the other hand, treated Bangladesh fully as badly as many developed countries treated India. They would dump products in Bangladesh, they would refuse to accept Bangladesh exports that might compete with their products, even though Bangladesh had a tenth of the capacity of India. They always played hard ball on water rights. So India was not always a good economic neighbor, one could say.

*Q: What about the population there? Wasn't this a major issue?*

MAST: Yes, it was a country the size of Wisconsin, and it had - now it's probably to 150 million - but at that time it had about 125 or 130 million people. So you can imagine that in an area the size of Wisconsin. The press of population was the main reason for Bangladesh's endemic poverty. Even though there was usually enough food to feed the population, the poor had difficulty in earning enough to buy the minimum calories needed. There was considerable malnutrition. We sometimes said that it was only a minor exaggeration.

*Q: The size of Russia, in population.*

MAST: Yes, close.

*Q: Were you all feeling constraints because of being the Bush Administration, most of this, and Republican administration unhappy about birth control and abortion and that sort of thing?*

MAST: You know, I remember that becoming an intense issue since then, and during Reagan's time, too, and we had a large family planning program in Bangladesh. Maybe because of the kind of organizations that were there, I don't remember that being an issue in Bangladesh.

*Q: Well, were there any major occurrences or incidents or things that happened in this time period that come to mind?*

MAST: Floods and U.S. assistance in flood relief. General strikes or other disturbances which often kept us at home. And we built the new embassy.

*Q: Was it on Pilings or something, or out of the flood zone?*

MAST: Yes, although the embassy was not flooded, the surrounding area was. Bangladesh is so low that one of the main problems, one of the main interactions we started to have with them had to do with global warming because, obviously, if warming is as serious as people say it is, as much as one-third of Bangladesh would be under water. The new embassy was one of the first of the new Inman embassies, so it was very secure, although once you get in you find out that there are still certain problems. Obviously, security itself brings its own problems.

*Q: What about up-country? I look at Bangladesh, and it does get pretty close to the range of the Himalayas and all that? Is there and up-country?*

MAST: No, it's pretty flat all the way. Except near the Burma border in the Chittagong hill region there were foothills or "hillocks" as the Bangladeshis often called them.

Pakistan was the country that had slaughtered a lot of people during their war for independence, but on the other hand, they were also a member of SARC, the association of South Asian countries, and they were a Muslim country, so there was still quite a lot of respect. So you had ambivalence vis a vis Pakistan.

*Q: Well, then you left there in -*

MAST: We left there in 1990.

**WILLARD DE PREE**  
**Ambassador**  
**Bangladesh (1987-1990)**

*Ambassador Willard De Pree was born in Michigan in 1928. He received a B.A. from Harvard University and an M.A. from the University of Michigan in 1952. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1944-1946. His Foreign Service career began in 1956 and included positions in Cairo, Nicosia, Accra and Freetown with ambassadorships to Mozambique and Bangladesh. Ambassador De Pree was interviewed in 1998 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Well, then we come to 1987.*

DE PREE: Yes.

*Q: And then what happened?*

DE PREE: Well, it was time to move on. In 1982 or 83, when I was working as Executive Assistant to the Under Secretary for Management, I had been nominated by the State Department to go to Zimbabwe as ambassador. The nomination was approved by the White House and I was told to get ready to go. I thought it made good sense. I knew Mugabe and the issues. At that time the practice was for President Reagan to call people to invite them to be his ambassador-designate to country A, B or C. In due course, a number of people whose name went over to the White House about the same time as mine, began getting their calls. But I didn't. Initially I didn't worry too much about it, but after a time I began to wonder if something had happened to my nomination.

Then one day I was called in and told that the White House had changed its mind, that I was no longer the President's nominee for Zimbabwe. I thought I was being bumped for a political appointee, but this was not the case. The White House just didn't want De Pree as ambassador to Zimbabwe. State could nominate another career officer and that would be fine. My immediate reaction was, "What in the world have I done to incur the displeasure of the White House? What is behind this?" No one could give me a satisfactory answer. All I was told was that I should just be patient, that in time I would get another mission. The problem was that Zimbabwe was the mission I really wanted. It was the one where I thought I could be most effective.

After failing to get satisfaction from the Department, I finally went to the Hill, to my Congressman, Guy Vander Jagt, who I knew quite well. Guy was a Republican, well-regarded in the White House, and would I thought, find out for me why the White House had changed its mind. Guy did this for me. From what he reported, and I was able to pick up elsewhere, I learned that someone from the intelligence community working in the White House had intervened and persuaded the personnel people in the White House that I was the wrong choice. I don't want to mention names here. I know who it was. I think I mentioned before when we talked about Mozambique that I had a very good relationship with Robert Mugabe. I thought this was a mark in my favor, but it may not have been perceived as such by Bill Casey and the White House figures who were busy battling the "Evil Empire." To some in the Reagan Administration, Mugabe was "untrustworthy". If the Administration entertained thoughts of a covert operation in Zimbabwe -- and I think they did -- then it should have an ambassador in Zimbabwe who would be sympathetic or supportive of what they might have in mind. Given the relationship I had with Mugabe, I would have been perceived as an obstacle. Indeed, I would have been a problem for them. Thus, the White House was right to pull my nomination if they were looking for someone sympathetic to what I was told some people had in mind.

*Q: What you are really saying is that we had an activist CIA at that time and it was seen this new country, Zimbabwe...we saw the Cubans everywhere an all this...they really wanted to have somebody with whom they could work with easier.*

DE PREE: Yes. I certainly would have gone to Zimbabwe thinking that Mugabe was a person with whom we could work to promote our interests as well as the interests of the Zimbabweans. There were some in the Administration who read the situation differently. Of course, I was angry

that the Department didn't really go to bat for me and insist on giving me my day in court. But by the time I discovered the reason why my name had been pulled, someone else had been appointed and in place in Harare.

Well, time passed and while Reagan was still President, I was told that the Department was prepared to submit my name again for an ambassadorial appointment. I was told what posts were coming up. Bangladesh was one. I was asked if I would serve in Bangladesh and I said, "Yes, I would." My nomination went through this time without difficulty.

*Q: Why Bangladesh, isn't it sort of out of your area?*

DE PREE: Yes, it is.

*Q: And it is unflatteringly called a basket case, the armpit of Asia. It is a poor country with no real solution at hand, or at least that is the general feeling. What made you say you would do it?*

DE PREE: I guess I didn't want to stay on much longer on the management side. I had been in Washington for seven years and I wanted another overseas assignment. There weren't many posts coming open at that time. None in Africa in which I was interested. But I agree with you Stu, I had not served in the subcontinent, although I had served in hardship posts with significant Moslem populations...Egypt, Cyprus, Sierra Leone, Mozambique. Also, I had voiced my view to Ron Spiers and others that, in selecting candidates for ambassadors, the Department should look for the best qualified officers. I recommended that when a post came open, we begin the search by asking, "All right, who are the ten best candidates for this post," and start from that point, instead of saying, "All right, who are the people who currently have to be taken care of or are due for an assignment" and then try to match a person to a post. As a matter of fact, for the post of Bangladesh, I was competing at that time with somebody who came out of the south Asian area and who, in my judgment, was better qualified than I was for that post. I told Ron Spiers that when queried about Bangladesh. I said that I was prepared to wait and take my chances on another posting, but Ron told me that there was nothing else coming up, and if I wanted another posting I should take this one. I did.

South Asia was a new area for me. Our major interest in Bangladesh was developmental. As you said, many consider it a basket case. 112 million people live in Bangladesh, in an area the size of Wisconsin, very densely populated, and subject to all types of natural disasters. Politically, it didn't engage the attention of the senior people in the NEA Bureau. As a matter of fact when I went out, Dick Murphy said that he hoped it would stay that way. For the most part, it did. We did have a major flood in 1988, the worst in Bangladesh's living history. Of course, the US government responded promptly, as we always do. But this was largely something USAID handled and the NEA bureau at the desk level. We had one or two political issues. Democracy in Bangladesh was one. Steve Solarz was chairman of the Asian Subcommittee and held annual hearings. Bangladesh was a military government, and we were trying to persuade the government to hold free and fair elections. They didn't come about while I was there. But it wasn't for lack of trying.

But the major issues were developmental. We had a big program, about \$150 million of development aid and humanitarian relief a year. I had a very professional AID staff who wanted to be there because of the challenge. They were good at their job. I was very pleased with the aid effort that we made. I think we got good value for our \$150 million.

*Q: What type of aid were we giving?*

DE PREE: Family planning was one major focus. We were trying to reduce the growth rate. That country doesn't stand much of a chance unless the birth rate goes down.

*Q: How were we going about this? Certainly under the Reagan Administration they were opposed to abortion, etc.*

DE PREE: Yes. At one time, the US assisted the government of Bangladesh in its vasectomy and sterilization program. We had to get out of that largely because of the opposition of Senator Helms. The government of Bangladesh had been giving a woman a little less than \$5 when she came in to be sterilized. The money was intended to provide her with a clean sari once she had the operation and to reimburse her (and her escort) for the cost of transportation to and from the hospital or clinic. Senator Helms and critics thought this payment was an incentive to be sterilized. AID discontinued funding for this particular program rather than jeopardize funding for its other projects. But we continued to assist the Government in other aspects of its family planning effort. One was to help get condoms onto the local market. We had quite a success here, with more than a billion sold under the program. The US wasn't the only donor, but we were crucial to its success.

A second major area of assistance was in rural electrification, helping extend electricity into the villages to open up job opportunities and to improve the lot of the people. This was a very popular program with the Bangladeshis.

The third major area of our development assistance was in fertilizer distribution. We got into this work when USAID explored why crop yield and the use of fertilizer in Bangladesh lagged far behind that in neighboring India. The obstacle we found was the bureaucracy, which controlled fertilizer distribution. Bureaucrats at the fertilizer depots were insisting on under-the-table payments from the farmers. Rather than put up with this corruption and harassment, the farmers simply stopped buying fertilizer. USAID proposed to government that it privatize the sale of fertilizer. Despite strong opposition from the civil servants, the government agreed to let the private sector compete with the government in selling fertilizer. This took political courage, for the public sector unions were strong. Private entrepreneurs were quick to get into the business. With this alternative available, the farmers began to go to the private sector to get their fertilizer. Usage went up as did crop yield and farmer income. It was quite a success story.

Throughout my tour in Bangladesh, the opposition parties kept urging us to withdraw our aid from the government, contending that it was US and other donor aid that was making it possible for a corrupt government to remain in power. "We will never have democracy in Bangladesh until you stop your aid," they said. After about a year in the country, I decided to address this matter head on in a speech I gave to the Dhaka Rotary Club. I reviewed the US aid effort,

program by program. I asked the audience if they wanted us to cut off our support for family planning. "Oh no," they said, "we need your support for Family Planning." "Do you want us to continue our support for rural electrification?" "Oh, yes, this is one of your good programs. We can see the payoff. Keep it up." "Well, what about the fertilizer business?" Then I explained what and why we were active in this field. Here too, the audience thought the program made good sense, and that we should continue. "Well then," I said, "You've just asked me to continue almost everything we're doing." The speech was given prominent play in the Bangladesh media. The opposition didn't much like it at all. The communist press even urged the government to declare me persona non grata. But our large aid effort did get a lot of attention and a lot of praise.

I had some reservations about the opposition. Their rhetoric was good, but I wasn't so sure their performance would be much better than the government in power. One day, one of the leaders of one of the opposition parties came to me with a proposal. He said that he had come up with a formula to get free and fair elections in Bangladesh. The proposal was for me to persuade President Ershad to set a date for country-wide elections, then go on vacation, turn the government over to a caretaker administration and await the results. If Ershad won the election, the opposition would accept the result, and call off their street action. This particular opposition leader had put this proposal in writing. At the bottom of the proposal was the note, "To demonstrate the government's determination to carry through on this program, they should agree that the outcome of this election should be as follows:..." So much for champions of free and fair elections.

Yes, Dhaka was a fascinating assignment.

*Q: How did you deal with the government?*

DE PREE: I had excellent access, as did all my predecessors. Bangladeshis are favorably disposed to the US. We have a large AID presence and they appreciate it. They know we have no ulterior interest in the country. The government in office had come to power through a military takeover. The opposition, whose leaders I would see on a regular basis, were clamoring for elections, but set conditions that the government found unacceptable. I was using the residence to bring government and opposition together in hopes they could resolve their difference, but without success. As time went on, the opposition parties called national strikes (hartals) and took to street violence to force the government's hand.

These hartals created problems for our embassy's operations. Until we built a new embassy, which we occupied in 1989, our embassy was located in the middle of town. Because of the violence associated with the hartals, we closed the embassy to the public on hartal days. We kept a skeleton staff in the mission, the others stayed home, reporting by telephone. USIA's library was burnt down during one of the hartals. In one three month period, the embassy was closed to the public 28 working days.

I think no matter who is in power in Bangladesh, even a government of angels, there will be a strong built-in opposition, because no government in a country as desperately poor as Bangladesh is going to be able to bring about any rapid improvement in the lives of a large percentage of the population. The problems are just too horrendous for that.



But Bangladesh is here to stay, "viable" or not. There is no possibility of it rejoining India. Nor, after the bloodshed of 1971, is it likely to ever reunite with formerly West Pakistan. But bleak as its future may be, life for the Bangladeshis can be better than it has been. US and other donor aid has made a difference. In time, if they can keep the birth rate down, the Bangladeshis may even be able to feed themselves.

*Q: Did you get involved with the role of India there? It looks as a practical matter that Bangladesh should really be amalgamated some how into India or something.*

DE PREE: Yes, India was a major player on the local scene. Many Bangladeshis saw the government of India as the principal enemy, even though at the time Bangladesh took up arms against the West Pakistanis, it was India that came in and enabled the Bangladeshis to become independent. Much of this anti-India feeling is fanned by the Muslim fundamentalists.

*Q: Did you get involved at all with the Indians, the Indian Ambassador?*

DE PREE: Yes. There was no problem dealing with the Indians. I don't think the Indians perceived us as a threat to their interests in the area. Our focus was almost exclusively on development aid and quiet efforts, largely behind the scenes, with government to improve the human rights record and get on with the job of promoting democracy and a market economy.

There was some international media attention on human rights violations in the Chittagong Hill tracts along the border with Burma and India. The government had to bring in troops there to suppress an insurgency. We and others urged the government to exercise better controls over their troops in the area and to permit Amnesty International people to monitor developments. The government did respond to these appeals. The situation in the Hill Tracts had improved by the time I left Bangladesh.

In terms of the encouragement of the private sector, I think the government's record was reasonably good. Privatization of the state-run jute mills had slowed, but the government was moving away from state management of the economy and encouraging the private sector.

*Q: At this time the Soviet Union was beginning to collapse. Were the Soviets or the Chinese playing any particular role there at the time?*

DE PREE: No. China and the Soviet Union both had missions in Bangladesh, but the Western countries were the big donors: the World Bank, the US, the Nordics, the Dutch and others. Bangladesh professed to be non-aligned, but there was a decided pro-West bias. This was particularly true of the military. Bangladesh did send troops to the Persian Gulf during the war against Iraq.

*Q: Iraq came in in 1989 and took over Kuwait.*

DE PREE: Bangladesh openly backed Kuwait.

*Q: Then you left there in 1990?*

DE PREE: Yes, and for the last three years, Stu, I have been working as a Senior Inspector, heading inspection teams. I had three years of that before I retired in September of 1993.

**CHARLES J. MONTRIE**  
**USAID Officer**  
**Dhaka (1988)**

*Charles J. Montrie was born in 1923 and grew up in Michigan. He graduated from The University of Notre Dame in 1941 with a degree in accounting. After completing his duty in the U.S. Navy, he returned to Notre Dame for graduate work in economics and then went on to Yale. In addition to Nigeria, Mr. Montrie served in Israel, Panama, and Bangladesh. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on November 25, 1996.*

*Q: Well subsequent to that did you have other assignments?*

MONTRIE: I came back from there and decided that kind of work was very agreeable, and that I'd like to do some more. I sent my name around to all the consulting firms. That netted me a job with Nathan going to Bangladesh for a month in the end of 1988. That was very interesting too, to get to a place I had worked on so very long before. It was amazing to find there was still a university contract to improve the agricultural university. That had been going on thirty years earlier when I was the desk officer. Now we were still trying to upgrade the agriculture department.

*Q: What was your responsibility?*

MONTRIE: It was just to look at a project proposal. The World Bank was about to give them a loan for export credit. The World Bank team that worked up that project said they should have technical assistance in import licensing and control so as to ease the problems of importing for export. A member of the team was a Korean and he recommended an incredibly involved system which apparently the Koreans were capable of operating, looking at everything that came in and deciding where it was going to go and keeping track of it. Totally beyond Bangladesh at that point, I thought. So I tried to tone this down and make it a little bit more sensible. which was to provide a little availability of technical assistance for these people to get some help and advice. Strangely enough they needed some equipment and vehicles just to operate with. In retrospect they should have been advised to just abolish import controls; it was the only feasible way. That was the point when this was just beginning to be seen as a possible way of running a country, liberalizing trade. I guess while I believed in it; I didn't believe it was politically feasible.

**LOUISE TAYLOR**

**USIA, South Asia Desk Officer  
Washington, DC (1988-1990)**

*Ms. Taylor was born and raised in Illinois and educated at Wellesley College, George Washington University and Boston University. After joining the Foreign Service of USIA, Ms. Taylor served in Washington and abroad in the field of Cultural and Information. Her foreign posts include Moscow, Kabul, Tel Aviv and Rabat. She also served in Washington as USIA Desk Officer for Afghanistan/Pakistan and for South Asia and as Policy Officer for Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States.*

*Q: How about Bangladesh? Here is essentially a poor country, but Bengalis are a very sophisticated people in a way, at least the leadership.*

TAYLOR: Very. When I came back from Kabul in 1980 and after the Soviets invaded and I worked on the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Bangladesh-Iran desk. There were hostages in Iran, the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan, a wild mob had just burned down our embassy in Islamabad and killed 12 people in the process. Bangladesh was the bright spot on my horizon every day. Here it was, the sixth, seventh, eighth poorest country in the world and it was the one place where we could still work, could still do things. It's a much bigger country than most people think it is. Its population is close to 100 million. There is a huge number of educated people. They're very active. They have a lot of energy. It's a country where consistently USIA-type programming has been able to take place with the exceptions of wars and civil uprisings. Mostly, it's been a stable enough place that we have just consistently run a number of our regular traditional programs. We have very good access in Bangladesh. We are well received, we being Americans in general as well as specifically USIA-style programming. So, I would say it's a place where a typical country team list of goals touching on everything from politics to economics is something that can be handled fairly satisfactorily. The Bangladesh government, although there are always personalities involved, as well as the population at large knows about the United States is fairly well disposed to it. Even though the problems of poverty are immense and not solvable by us, a tremendous amount of progress has been made and particularly in my last incarnation a year ago, a lot had been done on the microeconomic level. This was not so much the case from '88-'90. When I revisited Bangladesh in a figurative sense 10-12 years later, the international NGOs and I guess the World Bank and to a lesser extent AID had been able successfully to work with small village groups outside the major urban centers, particularly with women, and had set up microenterprises. By giving small loans, \$800, to a woman with which she could buy a sewing machine and then train other women, all of a sudden you've got 15 women who are able to support their families. That then grows and they all buy sewing machines. This very small level microenterprise approach has been more successful in Bangladesh than any place. I think it's held up by the World Bank as a model. AID is quite proud of it, too. That just is illustrative of what could happen in a place like Bangladesh from '88-'90 when I encountered it for the second time and then for the third time just a year ago.

**TERESITA C. SCHAFFER**

**Deputy Assistant Secretary, NEA  
Washington, DC (1989-1992)**

*Ambassador Schaffer was born in New York and later educated in France. She received her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr College and joined the Foreign Service. Her Foreign Service career took her to Israel, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in September 1998.*

SCHAFFER: Now let me turn to Bangladesh. Having lived there, I was certainly interested in what was going on. There were essentially three issues. Two were hardy perennials: development of a poor country and natural disasters. During my tour as DAS, there was one major set of floods. The third issue concerned the dramatic change in government in Dhaka. In the fall of 1990, there were continuing and escalating demonstrations against President Ershad's government -- Ershad having seized power in 1982 when he was a general. For the first time, the leaders -- both women -- of the two major opposition parties had decided to join forces -- even though they had a personal dislike for each other. Eventually, the demonstrations forced Ershad to resign.

This was followed by a technocratic government which lasted until internationally supervised elections were held. That brought the BNP to power led by Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of a former president. Soon after that, in the 1991 monsoon season, the inevitable happened. The floods, even by Bangladeshi standards, were devastating. Tidal waves swept many out to sea. The Bangladesh ambassador to the U.S. came in to see us and asked for assistance. He had been told that helicopters would be the most helpful assistance that could be provided.

This was my first exposure to the disaster relief system, which is a fascinating process. It is an extraordinary efficient system if the bureaucracy has "adopted" a particular disaster. If the bureaucracy is overloaded -- as it must be most of the time these days -- it will do anything to try to fend off another suitor. So initially I had some rather disagreeable meetings with people with whom I wound up working very closely after they decided to help. They knew they were being disagreeable; it was part of their tactic. Finally, they were instructed to assist. Later, they joked about their initial attitude with members of my staff.

The first major disagreement came because U.S. disaster relief experts didn't think that helicopters would be the most appropriate response to help the Bangladeshis. In addition, helicopters were a very expensive way of delivering assistance. Based on this advice, we in the Department drafted a response to the ambassador stating that other efforts besides the helicopters would be more useful. In the meantime, that ambassador -- one of a handful of envoys from the Third World who had figured out how to work the "system" -- called Millie, the redoubtable assistant to Under Secretary Larry Eagleburger, and insisted on speaking to Eagleburger. The ambassador's plea worked, and my next phone call was from Larry, asking what was going on in Bangladesh.

The upshot was that Larry called someone in DoD -- some one higher than we could reach. It turned out that there just happened to be a helicopter carrier, carrying a full complement of

helicopters and Marines, which was about to leave the Gulf for its base in the Philippines. After much additional scurrying around, this carrier was instructed to head for the Bangladesh shore -- Chittagong harbor.

The work to turn the carrier in the right direction took about a week. Soon thereafter, our recently-arrived- in- Dhaka Ambassador Bill Milam, had all this assistance from the U.S. Marines and their equipment. The operation eventually was named "Operation Sea Angel" -- after a remark made by one of the villagers who said that the Marines had come like "angels out of the sea." I am sure that the Marines were very helpful; I know that their assistance generated tons of good will for the U.S. They not only used the helicopters to provide immediate relief, but stayed on to dispense dehydration powder, tents and plaster of Paris and other sorts of badly needed supplies. It was a very successful operation; it was pure happenstance that the right kind of U.S. ship was available at the right moment. The DoD operation also relieved the disaster relief organization from having to spend large amounts of funds since CINCPAC was instructed to absorb the cost of the relief operation -- or in the parlance of the military, "capture the costs." The Department of State "eats" costs; DoD "captures" them.

We had some tense moments with Bangladesh during the 1989-92 period. The whole region was on edge because of the Gulf War. The governments of the area by and large supported us -- some did it more nervously than others. But in the streets, there seemed to be an overwhelming sentiment in favor of Saddam, particularly once our attacks began and Iraq was subjected to very heavy bombardment. There were serious demonstrations in Pakistan, complicated by the fact that the Chief of Staff was making very unhelpful comments. In Bangladesh, a mob formed, quite uncharacteristically, and whipped through the suburban area where most of the Americans lived; in fact, one day, the mob burst into the American Club, damaging the facility. That brought forth a protest from us and eventually the police provided better protection. But both the Pakistan and Bangladesh had dispatched military contingents to Saudi Arabia as part of the anti-Saddam coalition.

The Bangladesh mob could well have an Iraqi "rent-a-crowd" operation. This is a practice well known in the area; with so many people it is not too difficult to find a sufficient mass that can be bought to demonstrate.

Those parts of the Department's leadership -- principally the Under Secretary for Management -- that were responsible for the protection of U.S. employees and their dependents followed the Bangladesh situation very closely, with frequent updates from the NEA Bureau. Normally, a process of this kind relies heavily on ambassadorial and bureau recommendations ranging from standing pat to voluntary evacuation to mandatory evacuation of parts or of the whole staff. These recommendations are made in a context; in this situation, the context was ever-changing. In some periods, when the leadership wanted to remove everyone as fast as possible, we would encourage ambassadors to submit recommendations which would meet the leadership's objectives. Soon thereafter, the leadership would stake out another objective -- in part because we were abandoning so many posts that it was becoming ridiculous -- not to mention counter-productive.

At one time, we had issued instructions that even in India we would approve voluntary evacuations as a result of some demonstrations. The only two posts in my area -- South Asia -- which were untouched by any version of evacuations were Kathmandu and Colombo. It was about this time that the Bangladesh government decided to send some of its military units to participate in UN peace-keeping missions. It was a very attractive source of foreign exchange for the military; it provided exposure to other world militaries; so it became a policy which suited everyone's interests. It was of course not all a plus; one Bangladeshi military unit was caught in Yugoslavia without blankets as the snow was falling. I am sure that was a very sobering experience for those nineteen year old kids who were undoubtedly very thin and who considered anything under 70 degrees as "cold" weather.

**WILLIAM B. MILAM**  
**Ambassador**  
**Bangladesh (1990-1993)**

*Ambassador William B. Milam was born in Bisbee, Arizona in July 1936 and raised in southern California. He studied at Stanford University from 1956 to 1959. Milam studied Journalism for a couple of years and then switched to Anthropology. He ended up graduating from Stanford with a degree in History. The Foreign Service was Milam's objective but after he graduated his father was very ill and his family was experiencing financial trouble, so he got a job with the State of California. A year later he took the Foreign Service exam and in early January 1962 he began the basic officer course, the A-100. Milam became U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh in August 1990, witnessing the great strides the country made towards democratization. Charles Stuart Kennedy interview Milam on January 29, 2004.*

MILAM: In 1990 I went to Bangladesh as Ambassador. I had been in the EB DAS (Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State) job for 5 years and it was time to move on, professionally and personally. I was nominated for Bangladesh by the D committee, as I understand it with the strong support of Under Secretaries Zoellick and Kimmitt and Deputy Secretary Eagleburger (who also officiate at my swearing-in ceremony). I had gotten to know them all well in my five years on the DAS job in EB. My family met President George H. W. Bush about two hours before Kuwait was invaded by Iraq in August 1990. I was very lucky to have been nominated for my first Ambassador job while he was President.

*Q: ...Before you went out there in your reading, what was the state of our relations in Bangladesh?*

MILAM: I think our interest in Bangladesh was and still is pretty marginal. It is a great country, and it is a great post. Bangladesh among starter posts was pretty high up in terms of its desirability...it is a fairly large post for a, 85 or 90 direct hire Americans including a very large AID mission and a very large AID program-130 million dollars a year. There is a good American

School, and my kids were still in high school, a club, and pretty good amenities for the staff...it was a good family post... and I was there during a very exciting time, for me and for Bangladesh.

When I arrived, there had been eight years of a military autocracy dressed up as a democracy, the leader of which was a former General Ershad. He had overthrown the elected government in a coup in 1982. Bangladesh history...since its birth in 1971 had been one of political instability, marked by periods of serious violence and chaos and periods of military government trying to grow into a stable democracy. Ershad had run the country for eight years trying all that time to find legitimacy by civilianizing his administration. None of this was accepted by the opposition and there had been several periods of severe instability as the opposition tried to unseat Ershad. While he effected a series of economic reforms, Ershad was still very much dependent on the Army's support to stay in power. When I arrived in August 1990 he was coming under a resumption of popular pressure to step down. This all came together in September-October of 1990 with a unified, for the first time, push by the whole opposition to topple him. It worked.

*Q: This is on your watch.*

MILAM: Right at the beginning of my watch.

*Q: Well now, when you arrived there, what was the state of play?*

MILAM: Well he was in charge, and the opposition was sort of forming up at the time.

*Q: ...Were we complete bystanders? Were we pushing at all?*

MILAM: We weren't pushing in the sense that we didn't do anything overtly or covertly to push him out of power. We had always pushed him over the history of our relationship with him to democratize. Because we had a large AID program, the largest of all the donors, he listened, but there wasn't a lot he did. But we certainly were not innocent bystanders in a way that would have helped him; we wanted the country to revert to democracy. Ershad actually tried to use me and the United States to bolster his position. I wouldn't go along.

*Q: ...What about the economy of the country because this is in many ways has been considered at least early on a basket case.*

MILAM: Well Henry Kissinger, at least people quoted Henry Kissinger as saying that it was a basket case after his visit there in the middle 70's at some point, not too long after Bangladesh became a nation. Henry Kissinger, by the way has denied he ever said that. And I actually think it was Under Secretary U. Alexis Johnson who said publicly that Bangladesh was a basket case. But whoever said it, in fact if you look back at the country in the 1970s, it must have been pretty close to a basket case...Ershad had a lot of bad qualities including being dictatorial and also being corrupt, and surrounding himself with corrupt cabinet. But he had tried to follow good economic policies and follow the example of his more popular military predecessor, Ziaur Rahma, by modifying the naïve socialist policy framework that Bangladesh started with. So just to show that nobody is all bad I guess, the economy was in pretty good shape relative to where it started in 1972. It still was a very poor country, extremely poor, but it was doing much better.

*Q: Well when you arrived, how did you find the embassy? Did it have good ties to both the government and the opposition?*

MILAM: Until about a year before I arrived, the embassy was in a very old and dilapidated extremely poor building down in the middle of town - right in the middle of the business area. Every time there was a strike or a demonstration or a flood for that matter, the embassy had to close... after [the] Beirut Embassy bombing, Bobby Inman headed a commission that looked into how to protect our embassies better. The commission recommended that whole bunch of new embassies be built with walls set back at least 100 feet.

...The assistant secretary for management was Bob Lamb. He told me this later. About the time the Inman Commission was presenting its report and Congress was scraping up money to build new embassies, Bob visited Dhaka and was so appalled by the physical premises he put Dacca's name at the head of the list of new Embassies that should be built to Inman spec. This was despite the fact that there was no real security problem in Dhaka. They spent about 35 million dollars building a brand new embassy out of the center of the city. When I got to Dhaka, there was this nice new, bright, shiny, clean wonderful embassy. It really was a nice embassy. And by gosh it wasn't hard to find. I found the staff to be pretty good...in those days they got some really super junior officers. So when I arrived there, there was a brewing political crisis and a super team, which was tuned into different aspects of politics as well as I have seen anywhere. I had a very good DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) who had got there only a day or two before I did. He was an old South Asia hand named Lee Coldren. He basically knew how an embassy should work, and got it working just right.

*Q: Was Bangladesh part, I mean your embassy was there a discernible south Asian cadre that was being developed, and your staff was part of...*

MILAM: Well this was my first experience in South Asia. I had always been interested in south Asia, and I really wanted to go to Bangladesh. The people who were there were generally South Asian, and a few of the junior officers became that too in their careers. Lee Coldren, the officer I chose as DCM was a South Asian hand. I made sure of that.

*Q: How were you received by the government?*

MILAM: The Bangladeshis loved Americans in those days. Not so much anymore. They were very happy that I was there. Ershad because he wanted to use me I think. But I was welcomed by all parties and all of the actors in Bangladesh politics. Except, perhaps, for the few remaining communists.

*Q: Well now when you arrived there, did you want to make it clear where you stood vis a vis democracy, change and so on.*

MILAM: Well I think that was made clear by my predecessors. I just echoed their words. The issue didn't come up right away because the opposition that ran Ershad out of office was only



beginning to form up and hadn't really jelled yet. When I arrived it didn't look to me that there was any real danger to his position for the next year or two. That turned out to be a really inaccurate assessment because by October the opposition had solidified and was pushing on him. In December he had to resign.

*Q: You arrived when?*

MILAM: August. I think I had the same talking points as my predecessors. I was very pleased as I think everybody in the embassy, and most of the government of the U.S. was at the turn of events a few months later.

*Q: When you arrived there, [were] relations between Bangladesh and India an issue or not?*

MILAM: Relations with India are always an issue in either Bangladesh or Pakistan on either side of India. I suppose Nepal and Sri Lanka too because these countries are dealing with the 600 pound gorilla. Each of them deals with it differently, but the answer to your question is they are always an issue. In the case of Bangladesh, there are two strains of thought, two parties really, and these two strains of thought are captured in the two political parties. The Awami League, the party that brought independence to Bangladesh, and was the first independent government of Bangladesh, has always been much more pro India, particularly since it was the Indians who basically delivered independence in 1971 by going to war against Pakistan. The opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) which is the party of Ziaur Rahman, is more suspicious of India. But these are nuances because no Bangladesh government ever gets up in the face of India. They have to deal with the 600 pound gorilla in more subtle ways.

*Q: In a way is the 600 pound gorilla or is there a smaller gorilla being Bengal that is, I mean it is the Indian government as opposed to Bengal.*

MILAM: It is not a Bengali problem. In fact it is interesting that the Awami league was historically also the Pan Bengali party. It tends to define the nation more primordially, more ethnically. Their slogan, Joy Bangla, means long live Bengal. The BNP slogan is Bangladesh Zindabad, long live Bangladesh. The BNP tends to define the nation as Bangladeshi; it is also more Islamic, less secular. So the Indian problem is always there. But that wasn't a major issue when I arrived. When I arrived Ershad had a relationship with India that didn't seem to bother him too much, and the Indians did seem to be concentrating on Pakistan at the time. So in 1990 the Indians were focused west.

*Q: When you arrived there, how effective did you think the government was? Did it deliver where it was supposed to?*

MILAM: No, these are weak governments, and don't deliver on anything that is halfway difficult. Their writ does not extend into all sectors of society. They have to negotiate with opposing power centers rather than just lay down the law. This is life in the third world. The same is true in Pakistan and even in India, although India of course, is moving beyond that very

quickly. Bangladesh is, probably, if you had to rank them from one to ten on the strong or weak government scale, Bangladesh would be pretty far down.

*Q: When you got there, were you given by sort of your reading but also talking to your people who served there, a feeling about the power structure. I mean were there different centers of power?*

MILAM: You know there are always different centers of power. The way these governments work is to make sure they are aligned with the power centers that count. So Ershad had tried to buy off, in one way or another, the army, the big industrialists, the upper economic echelons of society. Ziaur Rahman tried to make sure that he was supported by the mass of people in the rural areas, and he was. But Ershad had not succeeded in buying off enough support. And he wasn't popular as far as I know out in the countryside, which is where the real power resides if you want to make good in your struggle.

*Q: How did things develop when you got there, I mean politically you said they wanted to use you.*

MILAM: The two major opposition parties finally came together to form an alliance against Ershad. The BNP was led by the widow of Ziaur Rahman, the Awami League by the daughter of Sheikh Mujib, who had led Bangladesh to independence. Both of these men were assassinated. In the usual South Asian style, the parties were a family business, and passed the mantle to the next of kin. Both of them being rather opinionated women couldn't stand one another-- couldn't even be in the same room with one another. So Ershad had always managed to divide the two opposition parties in one way or another. He succeeded with that strategy until 1990. When I arrived the two parties were on the verge of coming together, realizing that if they were ever going to ever get rid of Ershad, they had to work together in an alliance. So they did. They didn't even try to hammer out a very extensive program. They had a two point program: get rid of Ershad; free and fair elections afterwards run by an interim, neutral caretaker government. That was all. That was easy to agree on. They didn't have to go into detail on anything else.

*Q: So a real system had not jelled yet, whether it was going to be parliamentary or presidential.*

MILAM: The Awami League favored a parliamentary as it had started with in 1972 although when things got rough, Sheik Mujib switched to a presidential system, so that he could have even more power. It had been presidential since then. Ziaur Rahman adapted the Presidential system to make it more democratic, but his party, the BNP, was a great advocate of the presidential system. The Awami League advocated the parliamentary system even though their great leader had switched to the presidential system. Ershad of course felt much more comfortable in a Presidential system because it allowed his dictatorial tendencies to go more unchecked. With the two point program they agreed to, all the other questions were left to later.

Starting in October the student wings of the both parties started making a mess of the campuses. This spilled over to the streets, and pretty soon people were in the streets. Ershad came under tremendous pressure. And this time I think he knew he was in big trouble because he knew that both parties were not going to be easily divided although he was still hoping to do that. In

November he became desperate. He called the ambassadors of the major donor countries together for a breakfast. Now power breakfasts are not very common in Bangladesh. This was something a little different for me. We were around a small table -- President Ershad, his legal advisor, the British high commissioner, the Canadian high commissioner, the Japanese ambassador, the German Ambassador, and me.

*Q: French?*

MILAM: I don't think the French were there. They were not a major donor. The President told us that because the street demonstrations were getting out of hand, more uncontrollable, he was thinking of declaring a state of emergency. Then his legal advisor held forth for about 20 minutes on the legality of the state of emergency. I don't know why he was telling us this, except that he wanted us to understand it gave the President emergency powers. I think Ershad wanted us to voice no objections to his plan. I was the junior guy there, brand new basically. So I kept my peace for a while to hear what the others said.

A couple of my colleagues said, "Well you have got to do what you have got to do", or something to that effect. I was thinking about this and I said, "You know, I think it is a bad idea. In fact I think it is a very bad idea. I think it is going to go down very badly in Washington. People are going to be killed. Right away you will be getting into human rights problems. The real thing to do is to try to work this out with the opposition." And to my surprise, my Japanese colleague spoke up and said, "Yeah, I think that is right. This is not the right thing to do." That is the story really. We left with no consensus in the diplomatic corps as to whether an emergency was right or wrong. Ershad did declare a state of emergency a day or two later, having not paid very much attention to me or the Japanese, the two largest donors. Probably he thought that the

Japanese are never going to do anything, and the Americans would not make a big fuss either.

*Q: After he declared emergency, I assume you informed Washington of this.*

MILAM: Oh of course. I was a good ambassador, and we were a good embassy. We were doing our job the whole time. We were doing a very good job of reporting, and Washington was right up on the curve. I am just giving you these little vignettes.

*Q: Was there any thought about doing something about our AID program?*

MILAM: Not at this point. Not to my knowledge. Our AID program basically was humanitarian, and humanitarian in a very broad sense. But you don't want to make common people suffer for something the stupid government is doing. So I would probably not have been in favor of any serious moves on the AID program either. But Washington, on our recommendation put out a critical statement after Ershad declared the emergency. But, a few days later the President asked to see me at night at his residence, which was on the military cantonment. So, around 10:00 that night, I went to his house. He wanted me basically to mediate the dispute between him and the parties. He didn't call it mediation, but that is what it would have been. He needed somebody neutral to go and talk to the opposition to encourage them to work out a deal. My response was, negative, I told him he had to make his own deals, that I was not getting involved

in that. Then I went back to the embassy and I called my bosses in Washington to make sure they didn't have another view on this. They didn't, and so we were OK.

*Q: That is a real channel one.*

MILAM: Yeah it was. I stayed out of that one...with anybody going to the opposition from Ershad would have been seen as a support for Ershad, and that we were concerned that he was under fire. That was an impression I did not want to portray that. I would liked, actually, to see him go, but I never said that either. I just let it play out. So later on, they made another try through the foreign minister who called me down to his house in the dark of night again to make the same pitch again. I refused again.

The state of emergency was on during this time, so there was a curfew, so at night the streets were totally empty. You could fly down the streets, which I didn't because I didn't care if anybody saw me. One of my dear friends who was one of the leaders of the opposition told me later, that they knew all about it. They were surveilling me even though I turned him down. Clearly there was a spy on his household staff. The fact that I didn't do anything was also a pretty good indication that I had turned him down. I think one of my predecessors tried to mediate in an earlier crisis and learned what a bad idea that is, and one of my successors tried to mediate between the parties during an election which didn't work out too well either.

*Q: Well during this time, what was happening between the two widow ladies?*

MILAM: They were actually still cooperating with one another. I don't believe they ever got into the same room with one another or actually talked to one another, but their emissaries were under instructions to cooperate. So they basically had a very solid alliance.

During the night it was pretty quiet. I actually went out once with my military attaché and the CIA station chief and we drove all around the city....on the other hand, the days were pretty rough. The opposition had lots of people in the streets, and the government was losing control.

So Ershad decided in early December he needed the army. He sent an envoy who was a serving general officer to the army chief, General Noor Uddin and the Chief of the General Staff, General Salam asking for their help. He wanted the army to deploy on the streets and get things back under control. What they basically replied was that it was Ershad's problem, not the army's and it was not going to shoot Bangladeshis for Ershad. Once they told him that, he knew he was finished. Within a day or two, he worked out with the opposition a constitutional way to resign. (Bangladeshis always find a way to do things by the constitution.) His vice president, Moudud Ahmed resigned. Ershad appointed the opposition's agreed interim President, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, as the vice president. Then Ershad resigned, and the Chief Justice became acting president.

*Q: And he was considered a neutral figure?*

MILAM: Yeah. He was a very good man. I got to know him a little bit just after I arrived.

We had sent him on an exchange program to the United States. He had been here for two or three months, visited the Supreme Court and other courts and around the country. His English wasn't the greatest, but he was a great man. He was very appreciative of the Americans. We paid his expenses for this trip. But of course, in the usual government style, we sent him a check afterwards for extra expenses. I delivered the check soon after I arrived at post...so I got to know him that way.

Then he became acting president, and I swear, I have had very good relations with a lot of presidents over the years, but I think he is the only president I have ever been able to call directly on the telephone and get through immediately. Ershad was arrested a few days later, and with his wife, thrown in jail. There were some things that I didn't approve of. Moudud Ahmed, the vice president who resigned, had to go into hiding. After he went into hiding, his wife and child were in their house when it was invaded by Awami League Goons. They had to take shelter in a shed out back and hide, then they crawl over a wall into their neighbor's house. Their neighbor happened to be an AID officer. He called me the next morning and said he had Moudud's wife and child in his house. I got a van from the Embassy motor pool, put newspaper over the windows, went over to this AID officer's house, and took her and the child to her cousin's house. They were safe and never got harmed.

Anyway, the election campaigning started very soon thereafter for an election which was held in February. This was the second part of the oppositions two- point program-the election. The interim government was there to make sure it was free and fair, and it was. There were a lot of foreign observers including our NDI (National Democratic Institute).

...And in February the election was held. Everybody expected the Awami League to win big, including the Awami League. Strangely enough, the BNP won a plurality of the seats. It only won the popular vote by a slim margin, a percentage or two. But Bangladesh copied the British and has a first past the post system, and the way that works is that even as slim popular majority if it widespread can give a party more seats than the percentages of popular vote would indicate. So the BNP had more seats, but not a majority that would allow it to form a government. It had to figure out a way to get a majority. There were 30 seats that were reserved for women and appointed not elected.

So it agreed with Jamaat-i-Islami, the major Islamic party to elect 28 BNP women and two Jamaati women. So that gave them with 30 seats and made a majority in the parliament. Now the interesting thing then was they had to decide whether they wanted a parliamentary or a presidential system. BNP had a majority but it didn't have enough seats to pass a constitutional amendment. So it needed the Awami League for a constitutional amendment if they wanted to change the system to Parliamentary. Because they had only received a razor thin margin of the popular vote, they realized that if they went to a presidential election they might lose it. Begum Zia would be the presidential candidate, but she might lose the presidential election. In which case all these lucrative sugar plums called cabinet posts would not be theirs. They would go to the other party. Well, just a minute here. Let's get our priorities straight. So they started thinking about this, and concluded that with a majority in parliament, they would be better off with a Parliamentary system. So driven by something that you wouldn't call principle, they formed a parliamentary committee and worked out a political compromise which probably was the first

and last time it has ever been done in Bangladesh. They actually agreed on a constitutional amendment that called for a parliamentary system.

One of the provisions she wanted in the parliamentary compromise was the right for the Prime Minister to appoint at least 10% of the cabinet openings, to technical experts who were not elected to parliament. She wanted this because her favorite advisor, who had been finance minister under her husband, had not been able to carry his district in Sylhet but she wanted him in her cabinet. Thank God she did, because he was the best thing that ever happened to that government. So she got that provision in the constitutional amendment. This all took four or five or six months, during which nothing got done of any substance by the government.

*Q: ...Before we move on, what about the Gulf War? We are talking about the invasion by Iraq of Kuwait and we were gathering up allies and all this sort of thing.*

MILAM: I arrived in August as the buildup to the war was getting underway. The US was building a coalition. President Ershad, to ingratiate himself to the United States, offered some Bangladeshi troops. They departed to great fanfare sometime toward the end of August. So during all of this turmoil I have just described, the Gulf War was heating up, but the actual hostilities as you recall, didn't start until January 1991, by which time the Ershad government had fallen and the interim government had taken over. The interim government was not there to make any big political decisions. What their proclivities were towards the war I don't know, but in fact they made no move to withdraw the troops or anything. On the first Friday after hostilities broke out, a large crowd came out of a mosque which was about two miles or three miles away from the embassy. This mosque had been built by and was financed by the Iraqis. The Imam or

Mullah had whipped up a crowd against the war. I suppose there were a couple of thousand people in this mob, and they had to walk a couple of miles, to get to our section of town. When they arrived at our nice new Inman Embassy they surrounded it but couldn't get over the wall so ended up making threatening noises and throwing their shoes over the fence, a sign of disrespect in the Muslim world... and marched on to the Saudi embassy, which of course was our ally in the war.

The Saudi embassy had the misfortune of being just a regular building, pretty close to the street with lots of windows. So the crowd proceeded to break all the windows. They then marched further down the street and came to the American Club, which obviously was one of their targets. They knew where they were going. I had had the foresight to order the club closed a day or two before that. So the club was closed. The Embassy observed the Islamic weekend, so Friday we were off. Normally the club would have been open, but it was closed. There were only a few guards there. The crowd gathered around the club, climbed the fence which wasn't that hard, beat up a guard. The others I think made off to save their skins, and I don't blame them. The crowd did about \$20,000 worth of damage to one of the offices, the office where the computers were stored. Either they broke computers or just took them and left.

Then I am told, although I did not personally witness this, that the crowd then, or what was left of the crowd headed towards my place, which was very lightly guarded. In retrospect that would have been a big problem because, without my knowing it or even thinking about it, our kids had

invited a number of their friends over on this holiday. Since the club was closed they met at my house. My wife was there watching over them. From the time the crowd left the mosque to the time it got to the club must have been several hours; these are long distances they had to walk. By then the interim government which had been caught by surprise didn't have police at any of these embassies, didn't have any police near the area where my residence was. But by then, by the time the crowd headed towards my house, they had scrambled a contingent of Border Guards a paramilitary unit, kind of a rough and ready outfit, more undisciplined than the army but also a bit more willing to use force. This unit got to the area just in time to stop the crowd heading for my residence, basically with a few canisters of tear gas. The crowds disappeared fast, and headed toward the Iraqi, which was near the French Embassy. My French colleague swore that the crowd gathered at the Iraqi embassy, and while he was watching it through his window, Iraqi officers were out there passing out money to the crowd. Which doesn't surprise me since Bangladesh often works on what you would call the rent-a-crowd principle. So these crowds were fired up, but primarily by the thought of money. Saddam Hussein became, like in many Muslim countries, a kind of a popular hero for a few days in Bangladesh. The only way that you could tell that is that his face was painted on a number of the rickshaws that ply the streets. But as soon as the war went so badly for him, which didn't take very long, those disappeared. And in fact I have a picture somewhere, of a rickshaw with paintings on it of U.S. Marines and the U.S. flag. Saddam had disappeared, and the U.S. had become the hero.

*Q: You were mentioning you wanted to talk about operation angel or something.*

MILAM: Sea Angel. The February election was just over. The government hadn't been in power more than a month or two. In April a gigantic cyclone hit the southeastern coast of Bangladesh. Now they get these about once a decade. These cyclones are enormous, and they are really dangerous. This hit near Chittagong, which is southeast 150 or 200 miles from Dhaka... of course Bangladesh is an extremely low lying country. There are very high winds and enormous amounts of rain in these cyclones, but the really lethal part is the tidal surge. This cyclone along the Chittagong coast pushed a tidal surge 20 feet over the usual tide level...the hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis that live on these little islands right off the coast or on very low land along the coast were at enormous risk. The government announced afterward that 130,000 people died in that cyclone, almost all of them in the tidal surge. Some academic work that was done later estimated that the number was closer to 65,000 to 80, 000. Well 60-80,000 is still a lot of people.

... [The] Bangladeshis picked themselves up and went right back to what they were doing. No complaining, just a very resilient kind of response, which is why you have to admire the average Bangladeshi. Fortunately for us, the Gulf war was over, and the troops and the ships were on their way back to home port. We had this interesting dialogue within the embassy between AID and me. I was basically inspired by the military attaché who I thought knew what he was talking about, and he did actually. AID's response was going to be to spend money the same way they spent money the time before which was to bring in food and temporary shelters, some of which was OK. But I and the military attaché were convinced that wasn't what was needed. In this case, we had tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people stranded out in areas where there was no food, no water, no health, no sanitation facilities and no medical supplies because they had all been washed away. So what we really needed was to get what you call lift capacity,

the capacity to transport goods to stranded people. We had to fight AID all the way on this. And we went to bat with our two agencies in Washington to try to get the U.S. military in to provide the kind of lift that only it can provide. He worked the Pentagon, and I worked the State Department to try to get one of these naval/marine units that was on its way home from the Gulf War to come help. And we got one. It took a promise from State to reimburse DOD (Department of Defense), but a Marine expeditionary unit that was just coming around India on its way to California, was rerouted to Chittagong.

A Marine Major General named Hank Stackpole, assigned to Okinawa, a really fine officer, was put in charge of the entire operation. He arrived as soon as he could get there. The Marines began to arrive from their ships and we had a few other people who came in on other flights and stuff. He put together, working with Bangladeshis a relief operation which was headquartered in Chittagong, not in Dhaka. He established a joint operation in which the Bangladesh Government and military as well as the humanitarian NGOs were an integral part of the planning. It all happened so fast that the new government was caught flat-footed and not sure of how to react. General Stackpole and I spent an afternoon on his first or second day there explaining to a group of suspicious Bangladeshi senior civil servants and military officers the scope and intent of the operation. Some seemed worried about the intentions of the US military, but General Stackpole was the exact opposite of the stereotype US military officer, a soft spoken very persuasive Princeton graduate, and he soon became the most popular man in Bangladesh. He reassured those who seemed suspicious of our honorable intentions and that the marines on shore would not carry weapons. Soon the atmosphere changed to one of smiles and a feeling of welcome relief. After that meeting the General went to work and the operation was a great success, and is celebrated both in Bangladesh and in the US military. It is still held up in the US military as the model of civil/military cooperation in USG rescue operations. General Stackpole's organization plan was a masterpiece. Every day he would meet with the Bangladeshi civil servant responsible for the delivery of food and other needed goods to the Chittagong airport headquarters of the operation, the humanitarian NGOs who we relied on both to tell us where the goods were most needed and to distribute the goods once the US military delivered them, and the marine helicopter dispatchers and naval hover craft dispatchers to plan who would take the relief goods where and when. It was a beautiful thing to behold. In addition to helicopters, the marines had enormously large hovercraft to take tons of food and other goods inland to stranded populations. Among the most important equipment the Marines brought were water purifying machines. You stick a hose in whatever awful water there is, turn on the machine. It sucks it up, cleans it up and puts it out through another hose as pure drinking water.

*Q: Yes, we are talking about something about 12 feet long.*

MILAM: Yes, and they are very heavy, and had to be brought in with helicopters in a sling. They put those around where they were needed both in Chittagong and along the coast and on the islands. The food came basically from Pakistani stocks. There was plenty of food on the island. AID had been wrong about that. They gathered medical supplies from the NGO's and the donors like us, and the other countries. There were a lot of other countries that got involved and donated medical supplies and other things including people. The Japanese sent a team I think with a helicopter that they would deliver things with.



But you may wonder how did it get named “Operation Sea Angel?” Well the story I heard is that Colin Powell Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was shaving one morning before going to work. He was listening to the radio, and a radio reporter interviewing a Bangladeshi who had escaped the tidal surge inundation asked what the man thought of the Americans? The Bangladeshi responded , “They came like angels from the sea.” Powell evidently made up his mind on the spot to give the name Sea Angel to the operation. Sea Angel lasted about a month. After sufficient food, water, and medical supplies were delivered to meet immediate needs, The Marines began also bringing in housing, materials to rebuild victims’ houses, and other things needed to rebuild their lives and work. In any case, Sea Angel brought us much good will and how it was conducted was much to our credit. I think probably it got the U.S. more credit in Bangladesh than anything prior to that time in the country’s 20-year history.

*Q: I am sure it was.*

MILAM: And that it took place with a democratically-elected new government just taking power, still trying to get its feet on the ground , helping with the damage from a cyclone the government was totally unprepared for, and didn’t have the resources to deal with, was immeasurably helpful to my getting off to an very good start in Bangladesh. But it wasn’t the credit we got with the Bangladeshis that was so important. You can’t prove it because it is one of those counter factual questions in history, but I think we may have saved about anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 lives, because those people were scattered about, totally isolated, without food, without water, without medical supplies. A lot of them would have died. That made me proud to be an American.

*Q: You know you mention the number 10,000. I wonder if you would talk about family planning...for the United States [it]has always been a very dicey thing because there are strong fundamentalists who don’t like family planning. Was that a problem with you?*

MILAM: No. It never affected our programs in Bangladesh. Those programs were primarily oriented towards education of women. Not general education...but the education of women as to how you stop having a baby every year or two...and how to use birth control devices to ensure that. By the way we never called it birth control; we called it family planning which I think is one of the ways you get around some of these objections. In the latter stages of my time there, we were moving towards what they called a social marketing, whereby a Bangladeshi organization markets condoms, at some little price, because they don’t want to give them away.

*Q: Well one always finds that unless you charge for something they don’t get used.*

MILAM: Yes, so at some price you find a way to market the condoms, but it is obviously highly subsidized. So we never had a problem with the political anti-family planning folks. The money continued to come in. In fact, almost routinely at the end of every fiscal year, we would get a cable from Washington wanting to give us leftover funds from other posts or programs for family planning...in the case of Bangladesh, the government was absolutely fully on board. It never had the resources and never really had the capability of doing it by itself, but from the late 70’s when Zia Rahman was president of Bangladesh, there had been a political decision that family planning was a vital necessity. Bangladesh couldn’t continue to expand the population at

the rate it was doing. In the middle 70's population growth was probably close to 3% annually. So the government itself was extremely helpful in all the family planning programs that we had.

And I might say we weren't the only organization or government that was involved in family planning. Almost all the bilateral assistance programs had some family planning aspect to them. The World Bank had a family planning program. I don't know about UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), but I suspect it must have. There was very good donor coordination on family planning, and coordination with the government. And among other things, one of the necessary things you have to do in a Muslim country is get the Mullahs out of the way because the natural inclination of a Mullah is to oppose family planning. I don't know how the government did that because it was done many years before I got there, but they somehow told the Mullahs to back off, that they did. I suspect, and was told by unofficial sources, that there was some transfer of resources from the government to the Mullahs. In other words, they bought them off. So it was a very effective program, and the rate of population growth has come continuously down since the late 70's.

When I arrived in 1990 it was still probably 2 ½ percent. But in the last 12 or 15 years it has come down below 2%, according to the Bangladesh government. This probably means that the fertility rate, births per woman per lifetime, is somewhere around two, which is fairly close to the replacement rate. However the infant mortality is still too high. If Bangladesh keeps up this good work, in the next 50 years its population is going to be decreasing again, which is really good news.

*Q: Was Islam much of a factor while you were there?*

MILAM: No, not very much. It is a much bigger factor now. Bangladeshis are not Pakistanis, so for Bangladesh this increasing piety and Islamic self-aggrandizement is coming much later, but it is coming. This probably explains what happened to the two halves of Pakistan when it was a united country. Bengali Muslims were a much more tolerant culture, certainly in terms of religious inclusivity. That may not be because of the culture per se, because in fact in other ways, e.g. politically, they are not very tolerant. That is what leads to all the friction and strife in Bangladesh, and the problems they have in governing in a democratic system in which they are now because they don't tolerate the other person's point of view very well, so there are still enormous amounts of friction and strife.

But religiously they were pretty tolerant in my day...this probably comes more from the kind of Islam that came to Bangladesh. Their Islam was brought by Sufis. The Sufis are a more mystical, more tolerant, and more syncretic kind of Islam. Among other things, Sufism in Bangladesh incorporated the local customs, including shrines to Saints, and local habits including reverence for "Pirs," religious leaders who stand between the ordinary worshiper and God. This was almost feudal in its characteristics, but it is a religious feudalism, in which the Pirs' sway over a large number of people derives from his being an intermediary between the common man and God. The Sufis were also prominent in what is now Pakistan, but their influence has been overwhelmed by a harder edged, less inclusive brand of Islam.

... Islam never was not a factor in Bangladesh ...but there were plenty of other factors that made for a shaky situation. The main problem then and now was the political culture. The main idea of do-called democratic politics in Bangladesh is, if you lose an election, you look for the first opportunity to go into the streets and unseat the government with street demonstrations. It is a zero sum culture writ large. Nobody ever thought of trying to unseat the government with better policies. That just doesn't occur to Bangladeshi politicians. So in any case Islam was never a problem.

There is a historical problem that was not very visible when I was there: during the war of separation some of the Islamic religious parties did not support the idea of an independent Bangladesh. The main one, the Jamaat-i-Islam, a fundamentalist, but not known as an extremist, party is alleged to have had offshoot groups of assassins who murdered many Bengalis in the pro-independence movement. After the war, the JI was cast into the political darkness for quite some time. It came back in the late 70's and 80's the military rulers of that time sought legitimacy by bonding with the Islamists. They made political alliances with Islamist parties. That was true of Ziaur Rahman and Ershad. It was true of Begum Zia, as I mentioned, when she became prime minister after in 1991. Sheik Hasina has sought such alliances when she judged the political situation called for it. In the context of Pakistan, I have labeled these alliances with Islamists "Faustian Bargains," in other words, deals with the devil. I am sure the Islamist parties would resent this label, but in fact these bargains have actually strengthened the Islamist parties, made them more respectable, acceptable. Given the general tenor of the times we are in, I think Islam is becoming much more of a political factor in Bangladesh than it was simply because

Islamism has become more attractive to many Muslims, whether radical or not, all over the Islamic world, and certainly more anti-American. But it was not a factor then, and I hardly remember thinking about it.

*Q: ...one of the great stories of the Foreign Service [was] between our consulate general in Dacca and our embassy in West Pakistan. How were things at that time?*

MILAM: Of course relations with Pakistan were warmer with a BNP or Ershad government than under an Awami League one. Now I have never been in Bangladesh under an Awami League government. All the time that I was there, the relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh were correct without being warm, cooperative, but neither side has much to offer the other. If anything, the Bengalis, had a lot more to offer Pakistan in terms of intellectual principles. They could have offered the Pakistanis, for example, a method to keep the army out of politics...this became untrue in 2007 when the Bangladesh Army intervened and threw a BNP government out. They could offer the Pakistanis a way to make sure the elections are free and fair and the transition is peaceful, because they have been doing it for 15 years...this changed in 2011 when the AL government removed the Caretaker Provision from the constitution. [Bangladesh] could offer them a way to develop faster on the social side because they have done so through extensive use of NGOs. Bangladesh really set the example for Pakistan in terms of women's development, social development, family planning. So there are a lot of things Bangladesh could offer.

Pakistan in terms of just how to run a government or how to run a society... [was] not the slightest bit interested in learning from Bangladesh or from anybody else...even a BNP government had to tread carefully given the history - in many ways still an open festering sore because of Pakistani behavior during the war of separation.

*Q: Did you have any connection with New Delhi, Islamabad?*

MILAM: Well I knew the ambassadors in both places. I had probably had more connection with Delhi because India was really more relevant to Bangladesh, than Pakistan was. I think the only time actions in Islamabad came into play for me was at the opening of hostilities during the Gulf War. In fact the Bureau was pushing me to evacuate the post. I resisted all such thought until that Iraqi mob trashed our club. Then, I called a town meeting to discuss the situation with the entire staff and found that some of the AID families were frightened and wanted to leave. So I finally agreed to declare a voluntary evacuation. Those who wanted to leave could. I think about eight AID families left over the next few days. But the great majority of my staff were dead set against evacuation, feeling that we were safe now that the interim government had its act together. The voluntary evacuation was to ensure those who were frightened wouldn't be spreading fear among the other parts of the embassy. There was no reason to be frightened as the new government had over reacted after it was so surprised by that one mob incident. It put so many guards around American installations you could barely get out and in. I had a whole company of the BDR (Bangladeshi Army and Bangladesh Rifles) in front of my house, complete with tents and all their 73 bivouac equipment. But since we were feeding them, they were happy and the government was happy. Except for Dhaka, and I suppose Malaysia and Indonesia, our embassies in the rest of the Muslim world were being evacuated, including Islamabad. There was enormous pressure on me from the NEA (Near Eastern Affairs) Bureau.

Asia, was a part of the NEA Bureau at the time to take the next step which was to declare mandatory evacuation. I refused to do it. The rest of this is hearsay; I only heard about it, never saw the documents. So I don't know again how true it is. I was told that a memo went from NEA to the seventh floor, to Under Secretary Eagleburger that recommended that, over my objections, a mandatory evacuation be imposed. And I was told that the Diplomatic Security Bureau, bless it's soul, put on a paragraph saying he had the authority to do this, but that it would be unprecedented to overrule a Chief of Mission on this. And Eagleburger didn't. So we avoided mandatory evacuation, and that is always a mess. I have done it twice since then, and I hate it. So the only action Islamabad ever took that bothered us was to evacuate and inspire NEA to try to impose it on us too.

*Q: Clark?*

MILAM: Bill Clark was the Ambassador to India when I came to Dhaka, and his successor was Tom Pickering. Other than Bill's ambition to get an NEA Chiefs of Mission conference, which never happened (because of lack of funds I understood), I had little communication with either.

*Q: On the cultural side, was there an overlap from that Bengali culture....I was wondering whether that influenced, was Bangladesh sort of the poor cousin and things?*

MILAM: Well the Bangladeshis are very proud of their cultural heritage that Bengalis have, and think of themselves as the poets, songwriters, singers, and historians of South Asia. They have the dominant literary heritage of the region. They are very proud of their language. They are proud of the fact that a Bengali, the Hindu polymath Rabindranath Tagore received the Nobel Prize for Literature 1913, I think. Their national anthem is a song that Tagore wrote. And so is India's. So they are very proud of that. We had a very good USIS (Investigations Services) office in Dacca, really first rate, run by an old south Asia hand named Ray Peppers. He had two or three younger officers working for him, and they were really a whale of a team. But they emphasized the literary heritage of the Bengalis in their programs, and used that to get people interested in the literary heritage of America. We brought a stage group on a USIS tour, and they put on *Driving Miss Daisy* which you could do because it wasn't hard to follow the English. The theater was absolutely jam packed every night they were there. Even western music, and of course Bengali music, was very popular. The Bengalis consider themselves the musicians of South Asia. We brought in a classical pianist. He was a sell out where ever he went. We brought in classical guitarists. I mean we just had a great time there culturally. The only thing that 74 didn't go over very well was American films. They were too accustomed to Bollywood films.

*Q: Well what about '90 to '93, things were changing in the way we conducted relations, or maybe they hadn't changed much. I am thinking about communications, Washington, you know, E-mail, internet, phone connections. Was this changing?*

MILAM: No. I guess the communications revolution came to Bangladesh after I left... one of the things that made Bangladesh a remarkable experience for me was this great movement right at the beginning of my tour that overthrew a quasi-military dictator. To me, this was a people's revolution that eventually brought partial democracy. We thought it was full democracy for a while, but clearly it was an electoral democracy without some of the foundations of real democracy. Remember this was late 1990 and early 1991; the Berlin Wall had fallen only a year and a half earlier. The Soviet Union collapsed a few months afterwards. I felt as if I was part of the great revolution that was occurring in the world where these dictatorial, repressive regimes were being thrown out and people were taking control of their own lives.

Now that is more of an abstraction. When you look at the reality, it wasn't quite that clear. You know the political parties were taking control of the country and they weren't necessarily responsible to the people. But it was a heady feeling. I felt really part of a revolution, at least a witness to a revolution. I think that there was a period of time in the early days, right when Ershad fell, and afterwards for three or four months, during the election and the early period of the parliament, when Bangladeshis felt the same way. That is probably what led to that compromise I mentioned earlier on the parliamentary versus the presidential system. They were able to work out a compromise in a democratic fashion through a committee of representatives from every party that they never have been able to do since and were never able to do before. There was just a feeling in the air of let's get on with it. Let's get on with running our own lives.

I will never forget the day after Ershad fell. His resignation was announced fairly late in the evening on an evening. The next day, the entire diplomatic corps was summoned to meet the new interim President. We had to go into the middle of the downtown to the presidential palace. As we get closer to the center of town, suddenly we saw enormous crowds. There must have been

hundreds of thousands of people out on the streets. You know, your first reaction is wait a minute; what am I getting in to. But like the Red Sea for Moses, the crowds parted. We crept along at 10 or 15 miles an hour so as not to hit anybody. The crowds were only a few feet away from my car, even closer at times, and there was an enormous number of people. I think there must have been half a million people in the streets, maybe more, I don't know. We went between this sea of people for a long way. They were all very happy, and they were flashing victory signs and thumbs up and if they recognized the flag. The other thing that struck me about it was I didn't see anybody that looked over 25 years old. They were all young. It made us all feel young.

... participation to a very limited extent, but certainly witness to something that might have been small in terms of the history of the world or even the history of 75 those few years of the world, but important for me to see. I wasn't present when the Berlin Wall came down. I wasn't witness to the implosion of the Soviet Union or any of rise of the Eastern Europe our parents and grandparents knew, an independent Eastern Europe. But I was close hand witness and actually involved to some extent in this peoples' revolution; to the Bangladeshis gaining their freedom, and their respect. So I felt pretty good about that. I still look back on Bangladesh as the best assignment I ever had.

*Q: Well then when did you leave Bangladesh?*

MILAM: In October, 1993.

**DONALD M. BISHOP**  
**Country Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Dhaka, Bangladesh (1994-1997)**

*Donald Bishop was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1945 and grew up in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. He has a BA from Trinity College and an MA from Ohio State University. He joined the United States Information Agency in 1979. His overseas posts include Hong Kong; Seoul and Taegu, Korea; Dhaka, Beijing, Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria; and Kabul, Afghanistan. Mr. Bishop was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.*

BISHOP: I got back into the USIA building in August of 1992, and I left for Bangladesh in March of 1994.

FSO's always look ahead to the next assignment, and the next. I had been an AIO, a BPAO, and an IO and Spokesman. I'd seen enough that I didn't want to be anything but a PAO. I have a strong need for autonomy, so being the boss of a USIA outpost was important to me. I only lobbied for PAO jobs.

One of the benefits of the job as training director is you were in contact with all of the bureaus and with the area directors who were the barons of the USIA assignment system. They all knew me, and I was known in the Personnel Division.

I was walking through the Personnel Division one day, tending something related to junior officer assignments, and Kathleen Rochester told me, “Oh, there’s a new PAOship available.” I asked where. She said “Bangladesh.”

I said, “You can do better than that! Bangladesh! It’s a basket case!”

She suggested, however, that I go see a colleague who had recently been in Dhaka on a TDY. He told me, “The PAO house, it’s got a spiral staircase!” I said, “Hey, I’ll go read the post report.”

The job was exactly what I needed, but it was for an immediate fill because the previous PAO had to leave unexpectedly. They needed someone yesterday. In any case, I took the job and I went out, without the family, ahead of time, in March of 1994. Jemma came out as soon as the school year ended. We were there from 1994 to 1997. Both my wife and I say it was one of our great assignments.

I remember my first day on the job. The Embassy, an Inman embassy, the “Red Fort,” is in a suburb at the edge of town, but USIS was still in a downtown office right on the main traffic circle, near the Purbani Hotel, opposite the Jute Ministry. It was about a 40-minute drive for me to go to the office. It happened that two other Embassy people were with me in the car, one a newcomer also making her first trip, and one woman officer who had been at post for some time. Driving from Gulshan to the downtown, we were getting into what’s a pretty teeming city. Each time our car paused at an intersection, beggars would tap on the window of the car asking for money.

There was one beggar, a man about 30 years old, who regularly worked a crossroads. He had had one leg amputated very high, so he moved on the other leg. In the heat and traffic, all he wore was a loincloth. His physique was almost like Michelangelo’s David, beautifully formed, but missing a leg. As traffic stopped, he hopped on this one leg from car to car. I saw him twice every workday for three years.

As he and other beggars tapped the window of the car, the newcomer in the seat next to me was coming unglued. Some beggars who had lost their hands would tap on the window with the stump, hard to watch. I was being more pokerfaced, even though the overall picture was a little grim. She was ready to open the window to give some money to one of the men on the street. The other, more experienced woman said, “Don’t you dare give him a dime! All the beggars will remember this car with its diplomatic plates. You give the dime today, and tomorrow there’ll be a dozen knocking at the car, and the day after there will be a hundred.”

The poverty, so up close and personal, meant that psychologically you had to establish some barriers. It sounds coldhearted. You needed to find other ways to be helpful. Just giving money to the unfortunate people on the street was not the way. Helping a local church or organization was better, and having confidence that our development and Public Diplomacy programs would in time help create prosperity was another.

Let me take a few moments to describe neighborhood in the southern area of “Gulshan Model Town,” full of nice brick and concrete homes walled off from one another. Most of the buildings had been painted white, but in the heat and humidity the white paint was always flecked with gray mold.

There was a small city park a short distance from our home. On my first walks by the park, I noticed that there was a row of small bamboo and woven mat dwellings along one of the walls. These were what the Bangladeshis called “squatters.” You could see that the occupants had tapped into the city's electricity by running wires from the nearest telephone pole to their row of lean-tos. Over the three years we were in Dhaka, that row of makeshift dwellings expanded. When we left three years later they filled up half the park. This squatter village had electricity, a grid of alleys, a mosque, and its own governance committee which I presume paid bribes to the police and the park authorities not to clear them out or cut the wires to the telephone poles. Such was the pressure of urbanization.

Our quarters, “Shahnaz Villa,” was only a few dozen yards from the shore of Gulshan Lake, a lake that was slowly growing smaller. As the shore extended a few yards more into the water, the government arranged for the new land to be given to favored clients. So again, within a short distance of our home you could see in miniature many of the nation's problems -- urbanization on one hand, corruption on the other.

Every street in Dhaka was crowded with three-wheeled tricycle rickshaws. There were passenger rickshaws and flatbed cargo rickshaws. The first thought that occurred to every foreign newcomer waiting in traffic was “they've got to get rid of these rickshaws!” I remember someone telling that to the DCM, Jim Nach, who responded, “that's how these people get around. What's the alternative, them walking and carrying things on their backs so that we can move faster on the streets in our cars?” A large fraction of the GDP that derived from transportation was provided by rickshaws. Not to mention that pulling a rickshaw was a common niche occupation for rural newcomers to Dhaka while they gained experience with city life and developed the new social ties and skills that could lead to more permanent city employment.

As the months and years passed, I developed more and more respect for the humble rickshaw and the rickshaw pullers. Besides the rickshaws themselves, there was, for instance, a rickshaw spare parts industry, rickshaw repairmen, and a small industry of artists who painted colorful designs on the vehicles. Kathleen and Chris Rochester, the new IO and CAO, went with their children to a rickshaw art center and had a family portrait painted on a rickshaw rear panel, which they took home. They showed me the painting, real folk art, so to speak, now a family heirloom, no doubt. I thought the artist had a real gift for making the Americans look like Bollywood movie stars!

Rickshaws, traffic, dignity in the midst of poverty ... these were some of my early impressions of society.

There was a local holiday a few weeks after I arrived, and I decided to get in a brisk morning walk through our neighborhood. As I left the gate of our house, I could see four men in long white gowns, wearing the close-fitting white Muslim caps, walking in my direction. Each of



them was carrying a long and bloody sword. All the Hollywood stereotypes ran through my mind.

On a second look, they didn't seem to be paying me any attention. Then I remembered it was the Eid holiday, and families often purchased a cow to be slaughtered and divided three ways -- one third for the family, one third for relatives and friends, and one third to the poor. These men went from home to home to properly slaughter the animals. I greeted them as they passed, and they greeted me back. Sure enough, as I continued my walk, I could see blood from animals flowing out from under the gates of local houses -- the car park inside the gate was where an animal would be killed.

Yes, the PAO residence had a spiral staircase and a grand piano too. It was the grandest of our residences during the Foreign Service. The first floor was mostly representational, and we once fit 130 guests at a reception.

When you have a “villa” in Bangladesh, it means you have to have a household staff. We had a cook, a bearer, and a gardener who was also our gatekeeper. This was considered a rather trim household establishment. With flowers, mango trees, and hanging orchids outside, and a mongoose in our yard, this was as close as we ever got to the “old” Foreign Service.

When Jemma negotiated the pay of the staff members, the cook asked, “and that includes tea, bread, and jam, of course, M'am?” These, we discovered, were regular perks for household staff. About nine in the morning the three men sat down in the kitchen for their tea (mixing in large amounts of sugar and condensed milk) with a full loaf of bread and a jar of strawberry preserves. The three of them ate all the bread, and they went through a full jar of jam every few days.

*Q: Stepping up from your neighborhood, could you describe Bangladesh at that time, in terms of ...*

BISHOP: (*groans*) Stu, you always are asking these large questions!

It had the reputation, of course, as the basket case, using that phrase from Henry Kissinger.

Gosh, Bangladesh was poor. The cities were crowded. If you were inclined to think about the threat of “overpopulation,” Dhaka might come to mind.

I had served in three of the Four Tigers – in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. I’d seen their rapid development. In Bangladesh, I saw a country that – alas -- was not going anywhere in terms of its economic development, with all the human unhappiness that results.

The South Koreans had visited Bangladesh in the early 1950s because Korea’s GNP was behind East Pakistan’s. They wanted to learn what they could from East Pakistan’s success. Now, of course, South Korea is wonderfully prosperous and Bangladesh still ranks toward the bottom on the development indicators.

There was a small urban elite, educated, with the older members speaking good English. They were on top, economically, politically, socially. Indeed, the forebears of many of the prominent families had been the Zamindars placed in office by the British under their system of indirect rule.

Then there were the great numbers of people still in the countryside, or who had flocked to the cities where there wasn't enough employment.

A plug for a Fulbrighter here -- the best book ever written on the country is *Bangladesh: Reflections on the Water*. The author, Jim Novak (Michael Novak's brother) came out as a Fulbrighter when I was there. To really know about Bangladesh you have to read Jim Novak's book. Certainly Bangladeshis read and respected it.

Living in our high status neighborhood, comfortable in our home with the garden, Jemma and I could have organized our life around our work at the Embassy, relaxing at the American Club, joining the active social scene among the expats, and enjoying the salons with Dhaka's rich and powerful. We could have comfortably lived in an intellectual bubble too, content with our outsiders' views of what Bangladeshis needed.

Whether it was because I had seen the poor parts of the American south in the time of segregation, or because I had walked through Vietnamese villages, seen the lepers of Korea, visited crowded housing estates in Hong Kong and the Kowloon Walled City, and spent time in the fishing villages on Korea's southwestern coast, I couldn't be content with an isolated life in Gulshan.

As a Catholic I could easily tap into the network of Catholic missionaries like I did in Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The missionaries can be valuable intermediaries, a shortcut to learning about local society.

American missionaries had been there a long time, particularly the Holy Cross Fathers, the same order that runs Notre Dame University in Indiana. After I arrived, I soon got in touch. They run the most famous high school in Bangladesh, Notre Dame College. I was there quite frequently.

When I went into the countryside, I always found out who was the priest in that neck of the woods, and I might check in. Normally, diplomats meet members of a society's elite -- members of Parliament, professors at the university, leading business people, NGO types, editors and publishers, and so on. You're not really out there in the urban slums, getting that kind of feel for things. With the missionaries, my wife and I were not meeting elites. You could join them as they met ordinary people up close and personal in their ordinary circumstances.

We got to be friends with the members of an order of French nuns, the sisters of Charles de Foucauld, "the Blue Sisters." They lived and worked in the most terrible sections of Dhaka, just doing small works of mercy. Visiting them, my wife and I went into corners of the city that I would not have otherwise seen. It gave you a chance to see the circumstances of the very poor in Bangladesh.

*Q: When one thinks of Bengal, you sense that the Bengali culture is very rich. What did you see?*

BISHOP: I was amazed to see that women cooking on open fires under polyethylene lean-tos in the slums sang Tagore songs. Yes, both West and East Bengal are deeply cultured places.

A piano tuner was at our house, and I asked him how many pianos there were in Dhaka. His answer surprised me – “only 200” – even though there were thousands of households that could afford one.

That there are only 200 pianos in the capital told me that Bangladesh’s own cultural traditions were so powerful, had such a hold, an attraction for people, that they never embraced Western music. Compare this to Japan.

*Q: Both India and Pakistan played large historical roles in what became Bangladesh. I imagine both were rivals, in a way, for influence after independence. What did you see in the 1990s?*

BISHOP: Let me widen the frame a little. In Bangladesh, the population was probably 85 percent Muslim. The others were mostly Hindus, with a small Christian community. Bangladesh is largely Muslim, and population trends were slowly increasing the percentage of Muslims in the total population.

I sensed, though, that the Bangladeshis weren’t quite decided whether the defining characteristic of their country was that they were Bengali, which would give them a feeling of closeness with the Hindus in West Bengal, or whether they were Muslim, which would make them feel closer to Pakistan. There was a communal side to this. A “Bengali” identity could unite all the different faith groups in Bangladesh, while a “Muslim” national identity might set in motion some intercommunal stress. In any case, my take was that these two sides in the Bangladeshi mind were not fully resolved.

It was not possible to travel by land from Dhaka to Calcutta except through one very difficult border crossing. There was no direct railroad service, and though trucks lined up on the Indian side, there wasn’t much throughput at the border station. If you wanted to go to Calcutta from Dhaka, or vice versa, you had to fly.

On the northwest side of Bangladesh, if you look at a large scale map, you see that there are a lot of enclaves, more than a hundred little pieces of Bangladesh that are separated from the body of the country, and several dozen little territorial islands of India that are surrounded by Bangladesh. There were frequent quarrels about these enclaves.

The waters of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra flow from India into Bangladesh, and control of the water was the source of many disputes. While I was there the Indians were reducing the flow of water into Bangladesh using a “barrage” a few miles inside India, and there was off again, on again diplomacy that finally resulted in an agreement in 1996 on sharing river waters.

Discussions of language showed some of the sensitivity of Bangladesh’s relations with India. In Spain there’s the Academia Real, which defines what is pure Spanish. And in France there’s the

French Academy, which says that pure French is what we in Paris define it to be. In Dhaka, there's the Bangla Academy, which works diligently to assure that the way Bengali is spoken in Bangladesh is THE true language, free of both English infusions and Hindi corruptions.

That said, there were many cultural and family ties between the Bengalis on both sides of the India-Bangladesh border, and it's interesting to note that Rabindranath Tagore wrote the national anthems of both countries.

As for the formal relations with India, I sensed, but with no real proof, that while I was there the Bangladeshis felt emotionally closer to the Pakistanis than the Indians.

*Q: You know, the Pakistanis had been pretty nasty.*

BISHOP: You're speaking of the Independence War in 1971. Yes, it seems curious. It was India – more specifically, the Indian Army – that tipped the scales in the Independence War so that Bangladesh became independent. Even so, the Muslim side of the Bangladesh mind seemed to have the upper hand.

*Q: Do they have tribal problems there?*

BISHOP: Yes. When you think of India, you think Hindu. Hinduism is the dominant religion in the parts of India we see in *National Geographic* magazine, the big body of India.

There are, though, Indian states that swing north and east of Bangladesh, the “Seven Sisters.” Those are largely tribal. There are Hindus in their populations, but most of the inhabitants are not Hindus. Many have become Christians. Some of the tribals aspire to independence no matter how improbable the odds, and for many years the Indian Army has managed to contain small insurgencies.

On a demographic map, you would see that some of those tribal peoples live across the border in Bangladesh. In the southeast of Bangladesh, the Chittagong Hill Tracts are also populated by tribal peoples, and the Bangladesh Army also confronted unrest that threatened to become an insurgency.

*Q: There are minorities in Burma too. Don't people move across the border from Burma to Bangladesh?*

BISHOP: Yes, in Burma the majority of the people are Burmese, but there are many tribal peoples like the Kachins and Karens in the north. The country is firmly ruled – very firmly ruled – by the uniformed thugs of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), all Burmese.

Living inside Burma, along the border with Bangladesh, are Indo-European Bengali-speaking people who just spilled over the border centuries ago. They're called Rohingyas. If they were on the western side of the border, they would just be Bangladeshis. In Burma, though, they were a minority. They're dumped on by the Burmese, impressed for highway labor, and so on. When

the SLORC gets in a bad mood they harsh on the Rohingyas more, and then many Rohingyas flee across the border into Bangladesh.

I visited the border between Burma and Bangladesh and the refugee camps that housed the Rohingyas. So here's the question. Rohingyas who fled SLORC for probably temporary refuge in Bangladesh -- are they to be recognized as refugees by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), so that the Bangladeshis need to treat them as refugees in international law, or are they merely economic migrants?

The Bangladesh government, and the officers in the refugee camps, would say, "out of our generosity we're providing a temporary haven for these economic migrants who come from Burma for the better life in Bangladesh. We'll return them as quickly as we can."

It's the role of a diplomat to be pokerfaced. We listen to whatever we hear and take it in. But visiting the camps, we were hearing that the Rohingyas were all "economic migrants" from Burma to Bangladesh? This did not add up. Life is no bed of roses in Bangladesh. The Rohingyas must have come for political reasons, because of persecution. Visiting the refugee camps is quite a memory.

*Q: Focusing now on the U.S. Mission, who was the ambassador?*

BISHOP: David Merrill. We had parallel tours for three years, so I worked with only one Chief of Mission. He was one of the few USAID ambassadors. He'd been USAID director in Indonesia, running one of their biggest programs. I think of him highly. Ambassadors need to have rapport with members of their team, but they have to be a little distant too. He balanced this as well as anyone I've worked with. In retrospect, having seen other ambassadors less gifted than he was, I liked the way he ran things. He was an effective organizer.

It was while I was in Dhaka that I first participated in the new Mission Program Plan (MPP) process -- now it's called the Mission Strategy and Resources Plan (MSRP). In my career, Dhaka was where the process worked best. Looking back, it was because of Ambassador Merrill. He took a personal interest in the plan, and he attended many of the planning sessions.

In many Embassies, when the yearly cable requesting the MPP arrives, Ambassadors say, "DCM, make it happen. Everybody get together and give me a plan. I'll read it then." Ambassador Merrill, on the other hand, sat in on many of the key meetings. His presence really made USAID think about how it could use support from Public Affairs. He made the Economic Section think about how it could mesh with the development program. The Political Section thought about all the ramifications and what everybody needed to do to support them. I think of Bangladesh as a place where the mission's strategic plan process worked very well, thanks to Ambassador Merrill.

Ambassador Merrill ran a very good Embassy in terms of its meetings. Meetings? What's all this boring bureaucratic stuff? But a meeting is a very important management tool in an Embassy. Good embassies have good meetings. In Dhaka, we had the regular weekly Country Team meeting, which Ambassador Merrill chaired well. We also had "small" or "tight" Country Team

meetings two or three days a week – POL, ECON, DATT, PAS, USAID, and the RSO. Consular and Management attended as needed. It was a tight group, sitting in a small circle with the Ambassador in his office. When you left the Embassy in the morning, with the cables read, with a fillup in the tight Country Team, you were humming. You were right up close to what was going on in the Mission. That worked better in Bangladesh than any other place I've been.

We had two DCM's during my tour, Jim Nach and Nancy Powell. Jim was a quiet manager, quite excellent and effective. He and I remain the best of friends – he was very good, always steady, a value I prize highly. When Jim finished his tour, Nancy Powell became DCM. Of course, she's now Director General of the Foreign Service, three times an Ambassador, so I was lucky to work for two great DCMs.

Dhaka was an Embassy where we had enough room to get things done. We had a new Embassy building, "the Red Fort," an Inman embassy built to the new at the time security standards. There was plenty of office space. I've never had as much space since. Although the main USIS office was downtown in the heart of Dhaka, I had a small office room in the Red Fort as well. One of the benefits of this room in the Embassy was that I could read every day's classified cables before I rode the 40 minutes to the office. For a Public Affairs program to work well, you really had to be able to read the classified cables every day.

*Q: I might point out here, for any reader who's not familiar with the setup of Embassies, at most Embassies the classified cables are kept in a separate, limited access room. I ran Consular sections, and Consular officers normally wouldn't see them -- not that they couldn't, but they really didn't have time.*

BISHOP: That's right.

*Q: But obviously we would encourage them to go up and read the classified cables, because that's where the meat of the diplomacy business is carried on.*

BISHOP: That's right. And not always reading the classified cables is still a consistent weakness in Public Affairs Sections around the world. Many PAOs, IOs, and CAOs can't find time to read the classified cables because to do so they've got to go to a different building, and go through the cipher locks to a separate room. It sounds like a small burden, but it does in reality makes things more difficult. If a Public Affairs Section is separated from that regular stream of reporting and policy, it becomes unresponsive to our nation's goals. That said, things worked really well in Bangladesh.

Being "read in" was a big plus in my making the Public Affairs Section responsive. If I were in a meeting with Bangladeshi professors or journalists, say, I could offer comments that were exactly relevant to what was on their mind, responsive to today's or this week's political news, international or domestic.

Or, when I read testimonies on South Asia policy given by the Assistant Secretary on Capitol Hill, I could pull out the Bangladesh-specific paragraphs, or the policy-relevant parts of the statement and reformat them into an op-ed. We were humming.

*Q: OK. Public Diplomacy. What were you up to?*

BISHOP: USIS Dhaka was a four officer post – PAO, IO, CAO, and an American Executive Officer. With Barbara McCarthy – and later Elizabeth Cemal – as Executive Officer, I had expert administrative support that allowed me to focus on policy, not paperwork. We had 39 local staff, some FSNs and some PSCs. My local OMS was Farida Kausar, who had been USIA’s FSN of the Year just a few years earlier.

In Dhaka we had a good, model USIS program in the 1990s. The Cold War was now in the past. We were in a poor country. What did USIS contribute?

I had a good-sized staff. Although we were participating in the new MPP process, we were still writing a Country Public Affairs Plan according to the USIA template that identified bilateral communications tensions. Then the idea was you would shape your programs to address those tensions.

Bangladesh was the place where I was most successfully able to implement what I call the three-step process of programming that I’d learned in USICA and taught the JOTs when I was in the Training Division. First, you decide what you want to talk about, what are the issues. Second, you identify who are the audiences that need to be addressed. And third, you decide how you will reach them, with a speech by the ambassador, or a seminar, or with Fulbrighters, or with exchanges, and so on.

*Q: In terms of foreign policy, what did we want to do in Bangladesh?*

BISHOP: Answering that question broadly, among Muslim countries and the members of the Organization of Islamic Conference, Bangladesh seemed like -- and indeed is -- a model “moderate” Islamic country. Perhaps 85 percent of the people were Muslim. There were still many Hindus and a few Christians, and generally the Bangladeshis had worked out their own system of religious accommodation. But it was “moderate” in other ways too.

There was the hope that perhaps Bangladesh could be the first Muslim country to recognize Israel. Bangladesh could be a Muslim nation committed to peacekeeping. There was the hope that Bangladesh, geographically situated on the periphery of the Muslim world, but part of it, would become a partner that would begin pulling the Islamic nations into a closer relationship with the United States and doing things that were helpful in the world.

The Mission also had development goals. The USAID program in Bangladesh was a large one, and we wanted that to go forward. At the Embassy, the Red Fort, fully half the office space belonged to USAID. Public Affairs was a small operation compared to theirs. If my memory is right, the USAID budget for Bangladesh was a little under \$100 million. Probably about 60 percent of the money was allocated for family planning. During the Zia and Ershad periods, the generals had signed Bangladesh on for population programs even though many Bangladeshis had religious misgivings.

The USAID Mission also had many economic programs, to strengthen the stock market, to end government controls on fertilizer, and so on. Whether American goals were altruistic or self-interested, we hoped that the health programs (mostly family planning) and the disaster relief programs and the other projects that USAID was funding, say, banking reform, would continue and would help Bangladesh lift itself out of poverty.

For a PAO, this is a meaty mix of interesting issues.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about Bangladesh politics and society. They've had assassinations, they've had ...*

BISHOP: I was in Bangladesh in the era of the Two Ladies. Khaleda Zia, who was Prime Minister when I arrived, was the widow of General Zia who had been president. She was the leader of the BNP, the Bangladesh National Party.

There was, after a long period of wrangling, an election and Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of the Founder of the Nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won. Her party was her father's Awami League.

I never witnessed them tearing each other's hair out, but the rancor between the Two Ladies was so deep that it affected all of Bangladesh politics. I believe Sheikh Hasina was persuaded that Khaleda Zia's husband was among those who killed her father. Mrs. Zia thought that her husband had met his end because of Sheikh Hasina's machinations. Both may have thought that the U.S. -- by commission or omission -- had been in on the plots.

Elections were due in 1995. It naturally fell to the sitting government and the ruling party to organize the elections. In a unitary system of government, it's always a possibility that a ruling party can rig an election. The Awami League did not trust the BNP government to allow a fair election, so as the election approached there was a long political struggle. Both sides in Bangladesh kept an eye on the U.S. to see if we favored one party or the other.

In the pre-electoral tumult and jockeying in 1995, the Defense Attaché Office staff began to hear rumors that the armed forces might seize power, and a few times the movement of armored vehicles from the cantonments added to the anxieties. Jim Dunn had attended the Bangladesh staff college, and he kept up his warm connections with his classmates in commands all over the country. He and his Operations NCO, Sergeant First Class Kevin Bremer, were keeping Ambassador Merrill up to date on every movement and rumor.

A military coup would have been distinctly unhelpful for Bangladesh's future, not to mention that U.S. law requires the termination of all foreign assistance if an elected government is overthrown. Jim Dunn's well practiced mantra with Army leaders was "I love you like a brother, but I will be the first guy to recommend that we cut off all aid if a coup takes place."

Ambassador Merrill must have credited the rumors enough to ask me to prepare a USIS press release that quoted the provisions of U.S. law that barred assistance after any military takeover.



He told me to prepare it; he looked over the wording; and he told me to hold it for possible future use, if needed.

One day while I was downtown, he called me. I asked him about the press release. I can't remember the exact words of our exchange, but he thought he was telling me to keep it on ice, while I thought he was telling me to release. USIS sent it to the media that afternoon. No doubt when the rather blunt release hit the news rooms and the Foreign and Defense ministries, it raised some eyebrows! I'm a little embarrassed at my misunderstanding the Ambassador's intent, but there weren't any adverse consequences, and the threat of a coup seemed to pass. Whether the release played any role at all is something for the historians to figure out.

Eventually the two sides – the Awami League and the BNP -- agreed on a rather unique solution. Three months before the elections, the ruling party would step down, and the reins of government would be handed over to a “caretaker government” that would organize the elections. The caretaker government had only ten ministers rather than the normal 30-plus. The two parties battled heads in the Parliament, but the caretaker system was enacted, and the 1995 election did result in a change in party, a peaceful transfer of government. Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister. So it was an interesting political environment.

I'm boiling down what must have been the contents of a hundred or two hundred cables from the Embassy to the Department, chronicling every difficult step along the way. I'm skipping the effects of “hartals,” general strikes, on the city. I know this is way too brief a synopsis of some very intense domestic political wrangling and diplomatic reporting. The Embassy was behind the scenes trying to get the Bangladeshis to get through the crisis.

*Q: Well, it sounds like a time when the U.S. had to be very careful – when you have two parties really disliking each other. But we didn't have a dog in that particular fight.*

BISHOP: No.

*Q: But we had to make sure that we weren't dragged in.*

BISHOP: That's right. I suppose that both the BNP and Awami League platforms – they called them “manifestos” there – had some things we liked and some things we didn't like. My take was that the BNP leaned more toward a markets and enterprise economy, while the Awami League carried on more of the socialist vision of its founding. Our U.S. interest was that we wanted the Bangladeshis to have a free and fair election so that people could focus on the issues, not the bitterness of politics.

*Q: Were you able to travel and meet people? How was your access to the leadership class?*

BISHOP: As PAO I got a chance to get to know the country more than many other places. I traveled to the different regions -- there they call their provinces or states “divisions.” I went from Dhaka to Chittagong to the Chittagong Hill Tracts to Cox's Bazar and the border with Burma. I went northwest to Rajshahi, down to the Sundarbans, and the southwest to Jessore. I went by rail from Dhaka to Sylhet, and we drove to India. I feel I really got to know the country.

I looked for audiences to speak to when I traveled. At Bangladesh's universities, large crowds would turn out to hear the American Embassy's Counselor for Public Affairs.

The post had an interesting weakness. In the entire Embassy there was only one officer designated to speak Bangla, Dan Perrone. Except for this one officer, the Embassy did all its business in English. This was, I realize, a factor that distanced us from ordinary people in Bangladesh. When we went out, we had to meet people who spoke English. There are many English speakers around, but on the whole they were members of the educated elite. Also, English teaching had weakened as the Bangladesh education system weakened, so the good English speakers were from the older generation.

We certainly had good access to the elite of Bangladesh society, politics, economics, culture and the arts, and so on. Bangladeshis are very social, and we were regularly invited to their salons. Even junior officers had full dance cards, a full week of invitations to these gatherings of literati and political leaders and so on. You could go to one nearly every day.

When you received an invitation from an editor or a Member of Parliament, it said the time was 7:30. I made the mistake of showing up for my first one at 7:30, and I was the only guest for nearly two hours. There's a plus and a minus to that. You feel awfully awkward, but on the other hand you had the full and undivided attention of the host. So it was great for being able to learn things. I always felt I was in tune on all the issues. Most guests arrived around 9:30. You ate at 10:15 or 10:30, and then it broke up by 11:00. These were great talk fests with the elites, the very elites, the editors, the parliamentarians, the ministers, and so on.

These were, of course, people who benefited from the current social order. Our talking was with those who possessed, not with the dispossessed. And in retrospect I can see how not having much language in the mission inhibited contact.

*Q: What were you doing in the areas of education, exchanges, culture?*

BISHOP: On the Cultural Affairs side, we had all the line exchange programs – Fulbright, International Visitors, speakers. Another FSN of the year for USIA, Selim Shahabuddin, was the senior local employee in the section, and I particularly valued his counsel and advice.

We also hosted some cultural performance programs. We had the Oregon Ballet perform at the National Theatre, and they made a very positive impression with their interpretations of the dances of the Northwest Indians. And golly, we hosted the first overseas performance of Edward Albee's play, *Three Tall Women*, also to a packed house at the National Theatre.

After the performance, we of course declared victory in our cables to Washington. I would say, however, that *Three Tall Women* was too complex a play (three actresses were on stage at one time, portraying the same woman at three different ages – hard to follow, especially if English was not your first language) and too distant in its social outlook from what Bangladeshis were thinking about. I'll never forget the utter silence from the thousand people in the seats when the curtain fell after the last line, "And the final victory is death!" They were so baffled they forgot to applaud for an uncomfortable amount of time.

The Information Unit was one of the best ever. Our translators kept hard at work both ways. They were translating articles and editorials from the local newspapers into English, so we were all right up to date on local policy and public thinking. The local newspapers had an insatiable thirst for our press releases and the op-eds, so the translators were hard at work translating our materials into Bengali. We had an extraordinary record of placements. We had our own print shop, and we were pouring out the materials. On the information side, then, I inherited a well-oiled machine. In the USIA days we talked a lot about placements, the ability to put the Washington File article or the President's or the Secretary's op-ed into the media. We were surely one of the most active and most effective posts, worldwide, in this regard.

*Q: Tell me about the media in Bangladesh.*

BISHOP: They had newspapers, they had radio, they had television -- government television. Radio was very important. There were newspapers of all kinds, a lot of newspapers, but they were pretty thin. I read six newspapers in English at the beginning of every day, but they ran only four to eight pages. Many newspapers were controlled by powerful political figures.

Both the BBC and the Voice of America had Bangla services. One of the interesting side effects was that the Voice of America had generated 600-some Voice of America Fan Clubs. The Clubs were doing service projects in their communities. I often thought that the VOA Fan Clubs showed the reach of the Voice, yes, but the size of the clubs network also showed, on one hand, the poverty of civil society in Bangladesh, and, on the other hand, the desire for civic participation.

It was a positive movement, but at USIS we couldn't deal with so many Clubs. They all wanted Embassy people to join their ceremonies and events, but it was impossible to do much with so many. Eventually the Voice came up with \$200 per month to give to one of our retired FSNs to tend the Clubs.

I can't mention the VOA Fan Clubs without telling a story. A previous PAO had decided that one way to recognize the Clubs and their good work was to have a reception at the Embassy for the president of each club. USIS organized a big representational space in the Red Fort's atrium. It was large enough so that if half of the Club presidents came, there was enough room. They sent out the invitations. All over Bangladesh, young men in small towns and far villages got the Ambassador's invitation. They got on the boats and buses and headed for Dhaka. The reception was for 8 p.m. in the evening, but some of them missed the "p" in p.m. and showed up at 8 a.m. They had to come back later.

There had been a long debate, I heard, about whether there should be any liquor served. This would violate Muslim sensibilities, but it was well known that many Bangladeshis violated the precepts against alcohol. The decision was to serve beer, available unobtrusively in a corner. So our young village boy, President of the VOA Fan Club, showed up at 8 p.m., met the Ambassador in the reception line, felt overwhelmed by the event, and then went over and had his first glass of beer. They weren't "in training." When I arrived in Dhaka, the FSNs were still

talking about the woozy young men wandering around the Embassy atrium. The Embassy and PAS got through the event, but it did not go down on the list of “best practices.”

*Q: How about economic issues?*

BISHOP: You are talking to a Milton Friedman markets-and-enterprise man, a guy who believes that jobs, livelihoods, and trade underlie progress and human happiness. You’re talking to a Leonard Reid man who believes that the economic order of exchange and trade joins the tea producers of Bangladesh with the tea drinkers of London, Abu Dhabi, and Moscow. So we placed hundreds of articles on trade and economic policy in the local media; USIS supported every trade show and exhibit; I ramped up our output of stories on USAID programs; and we had a great relationship with the AmCham.

In the area of economic policy and trade, a lot of our programming was to shift local elite thinking toward markets and enterprise. By the way, it was in Bangladesh that I stopped using the word “capitalism” to describe our economic system. Yes, the Latin root of “capitalism” is “caput,” meaning head, indicating that the key ingredient in a free economy is creative minds. However, “capitalism” was usually a curse word in the common economic discourse in the People’s Republic of Bangladesh – as in “capitalism equals laissez faire, and laissez faire means dog eat dog.” The word “capitalism” had been tainted by decades of socialist and communist propaganda. Rather than fight the inaccurate understanding, I stopped saying “capitalism” – the word carried too much baggage -- and always referred to the “markets and enterprise system.”

Like India after independence, Bangladesh had a preference for socialism and the system of “license raj.” To begin to dent that approach, to challenge the reflexive socialism, was important for future economic development.

Our downtown USIS office was on a large traffic circle across the street from the Jute Ministry. Jute for burlap bags had once been the great export product of Bengal, and when the world’s produce was loaded on freighters in burlap bags, Bengal had been a prosperous place. Jute, however, had been declining for decades.

When you met the Minister of Jute or anyone from the Ministry, they handed you a name card made of jute. They had teams experimenting with new uses for jute, and a kind of fiber cardboard was one idea they had come up with. That’s what they used for their name cards. They were trying to do for jute what George Washington Carver had done for peanuts, I suppose, but they were never very successful.

To prop up the jute farmers, they established a government marketing board that would buy the crop, organize the marketing, and so on. This concept was fifteen or thirty years out of date, but the Jute Ministry went on and on; the control went on and on; and the market regulation and the state purchasing went on and on. Naturally a side effect of these efforts, a happy side effect from the Ministry’s point of view, was that it allowed a large number of civil servants to continue to have jobs. Looking out the window of my office at the Jute Ministry was a constant reminder of how we in USIS had to help change local economic thinking.

*Q: How did those discussions about socialism and capitalism – excuse me, the markets and enterprise system – go?*

BISHOP: The socialist mindset was dominant and powerful. The elites knew that a heavy government role in the economy helped them as a class, since government people came from their ranks. I was amazed that socialist ideas were still alive there, but they were.

Before I left for Bangladesh I had read in the newspapers that Michael Novak of the American Enterprise Institute had won the 1994 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Michael Novak is a Catholic thinker whose great work has been to establish the moral legitimacy of business and enterprise. From the articles about his winning the prize, I learned that he was going to give a share of the money to Notre Dame College in Dhaka. That's what got my attention. Why was Michael Novak interested in Bangladesh?

The reason was that his older brother, Father Richard Novak, had been a Holy Cross missionary to Bangladesh. He had been killed in 1964 in a disturbance called the Prophet's Hair riots. It was because of this family connection to Bangladesh that Michael decided to give Notre Dame College some of his money.

I wrote Michael and suggested that if he came to Bangladesh in connection with the donation, he should give me a week of his time – to do some things together. About a year later, he and his wife Karen did come to Bangladesh, and he remembered my request for a week of his time. We set up "Dialog with Islam" programs and markets and enterprise programs. All his presentations reflected his thinking on the moral legitimacy of capitalism.

This was, perhaps, the best and richest program of my career in the Foreign Service. Part of the reason is that we had time to prepare, and I knew that we needed to do things by the numbers, very thoroughly. For instance, we translated his most important articles into Bangla before his arrival. For instance, whenever he gave an interview to the press, we transcribed the whole interview, translated it into Bangla, and then we later published them all in a book. We didn't just rely on the reporter's summary of the interview that appeared in the newspaper. His visit had a lasting impact.

The solid impact of Michael Novak's program illustrated, to my mind, that it's better to concentrate on a few things, and do them thoroughly, than to scatter Public Diplomacy around on many different issues and programs. Don't do lots of things, do a few things well! In Bangladesh, we had short term Public Diplomacy goals on, say, the elections, but the great long term need was to discredit socialism and license raj. That would have economic effects, development effects, and political effects. The second was to begin easing the assumed tension between Islam and the West. It happened that Michael Novak's visit addressed both.

His visit had a lasting effect on me, too. I mentioned that in Taiwan I had begun to consider myself a neoconservative and member of the "religious right." In May of 1994 the Ramsey Forum had published the first of its declarations, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." I read it in Dhaka in *First Things* and I was so filled with happy and amazed agreement that I rose up out of my chair and did a little dance of excitement. I don't think that's ever happened to me, before

or afterwards. Michael Novak was one of the declaration's signers, and a week with him allowed me to talk things over with one of our nation's great minds.

*Q: Do I remember that child labor in garment factories was an issue while you were in Dhaka?*

BISHOP: You have a good memory. Yes.

Ambassador Merrill was, in many ways, a broken field runner, or a many ball juggler. He had election issues, trade issues, business promotion, development issues, population and family planning issues, energy issues, gas field contracts, and a dozen other matters on his mind at any one time. For most of these issues, he was implementing Washington's policies in energetic ways. I sensed, however, he wanted to leave behind a personal legacy, a focus on one issue where he himself made a real difference. That issue became child labor in Bangladesh's garment factories.

I've mentioned rural poverty, which "pushed" Bangladeshis out of their villages. I've mentioned the "pull" factor -- an expectation of a better life in the cities. I've mentioned the inertia and corruption of the Bangladesh government, and the desire to the elites to maintain their place at the top of society. These frustrated the hopes of the Bangladeshis that flocked to the cities, some living in polyethylene lean-tos just a few blocks from our residence.

One of the few opportunities for work was in new garment factories set up by Korean and Taiwan firms with Bangladeshi partners. Some were only a few blocks from our house. You could see a parade of women walking to their jobs early each morning. In the mid-1990s as in the mid-1890s, work at the looms and with the sewing machines was better performed by women.

There's no doubt many of the factories were sweatshops, and Joseph Riis would have recognized them. There was a fire in one garment factory while I was there, and the women couldn't escape because the doors had been locked -- just like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York in 1911 though the loss of life was smaller.

A labor organizer could easily condemn the garment factories in Dhaka and other cities, but in spite of all the long hours, hardship, and danger, the wages -- perhaps only \$20 per month at the time -- were improving the lives of tens of thousands of women. Life in Dhaka working at the sweatshop was better than life in the village working the fields.

Those alert to the status of women began to notice that the garment ladies were using their small wages to send their sons -- and their daughters -- to school. Moreover, the wife's steady income from the garment factory became an important family income stream, especially if the husband had only been able to find irregular work, or was pulling a rickshaw. Without a word being spoken between husband and wife, without the intervention of an awareness workshop, the balance of power in the family shifted. There were reports of less violence by husbands, for instance.

In the 1990s, as in the 1890s, however, there were children working in the factories too, for all the same reasons -- higher dexterity, lower wages, malleability. This violated international standards and Bangladeshi law too, but all recognized that for some desperate families, the child's income kept the whole family above water.

Actually, the matter of child labor in the garment factories provided an interesting case study in social justice. Rigid enforcement of child labor laws could result in real hardship, as happened after 1992, when the U.S. first banned imports of goods using child labor. At that time, the companies let tens of thousands of children go rather than risk U.S. sanctions. What could they do to earn money? You could see children on the roadsides begging, or breaking bricks at construction sites. You couldn't see that some of the girls may have been forced into prostitution.

A few years later, a survey revealed, more than ten thousand children were still in the factories. Ambassador Merrill wanted to do something to change the equation. Yes, he had the potential "stick" of bringing international opinion, or harsh words in the Human Rights Report, or boycotts of brands, or import bans to bear on offending companies. He understood, however, that the response by the companies would be to turn the children out on the street. He wanted a voluntary effort by the companies that would preserve income for the children's families and allow the children to go to school.

Anyone who examines the subject in a future dissertation will need to read dozens and dozens of cables and conduct some interviews to retrace the Ambassador's personal diplomacy, which combined appeals to sweet reasonableness with some jawboning and threats. The final 1995 agreement that phased out child labor was between the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturing and Export Association, the government, UNICEF, and the International Labor Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

The companies let go the children under the age of 14 but agreed to employ another, adult member of the family. UNICEF paid for schooling, and the children's families received a small stipend, about \$7 per month as I recall, to compensate for lost income. IPEC monitored compliance in the factories. Even though this was an "international" agreement, none of this would have happened without Ambassador Merrill's focus and persistence.

I'd be pleased if PAS could take credit for some of this, but because so much of the agreement was due to the Ambassador's personal diplomacy, out of public view, the Public Affairs role was modest.

*Q: Tell me more about the focus on peacekeeping ...*

BISHOP: The peacekeeping part of the agenda was pretty far advanced by the time I got there, with Bangladesh Army battalions serving in trouble spots all over the world. There was a happy congruence between the world's desperate need for peacekeeping troops and the cash-strapped circumstances of the Bangladesh Army and its soldiers. Officers who earned \$150 per month at home could earn the U.N. minimum rate of \$980 on peacekeeping service. My Army friends told me that officers and men got to keep their \$980 without having to kick back to anyone. The U.N.

money was corruption free. If you were a young officer or an NCO in the Bangladesh Army, the idea of going to the Balkans or Cambodia or other places for a year or two was very attractive.

They had deployed peacekeepers to Iraq, Namibia, Cambodia, Somalia, Mozambique, and Bosnia. Bangladesh sent a unit to Kuwait for Operation Desert Shield, though it did not join Operation Desert Storm.

Deployment of Bangladeshi troops and police to Haiti occurred while I was in Dhaka. Haiti is a long way from Bangladesh, and there was some domestic controversy over the decision. Our DATT worked overtime to arrange the airlift of the Bangladeshi soldiers and police halfway around the world. I asked myself what USIS could do to help sustain the commitment of Bangladesh to the peacekeeping mission in Haiti. Active media coverage would be helpful.

No Bangladesh newspaper or television station was going to be able to send a journalist to Haiti to cover their boys in green. I cabled Washington to ask the Voice of America's Bangla Service to send a reporter to Haiti. They did so, with good effect since VOA had such a large listenership. We were telling the story of the Bangladesh peacekeepers in order to create and sustain support for that mission. It was, I believe, pretty successful. The Bangla Service was thrilled that anybody cared.

With troops in Bosnia, Mozambique, Kuwait, and Haiti, the Foreign Ministry had to spin itself up – to be up to date on happenings in all those countries. In USIS, we took on the task of keeping the Foreign Ministry right up to date on every speech or testimony or report about Haiti or the Balkans.

The focus on peacekeeping led me to realize that the Embassy needed to be much more in tune with military institutions in Bangladesh than was the case. The Defense Attaches in Dhaka, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Dunn, later Lieutenant Colonel Frank Rindone, had the ordinary DATT disposition – that the Embassy's attaches are in charge of relationships with the armed forces. The DAO, however, was one officer and one NCO. They could use help. I had a good relationship with Jim Dunn in particular, and he was happy to have our assistance.

The participation of the Bangladesh Army in peacekeeping and other useful missions prompted Pacific Command to have an active schedule of exercises with the Bangladeshis. Many American military training teams came in and out. Of course that matched my interests, and I always gave them first class public affairs support, which involved me going out and seeing the training, so that I could write the releases in ways that spoke to Bangladesh, something their own PAOs couldn't do.

Also, I started sending out U.S. speakers to the Defense Services Command and Staff College for their seminars and to make presentations to their students. I went and visited each one of their service academies – Military, Naval, Air Force. There my own standing as a former Academy instructor helped out.

Perhaps this is a good place to talk about using Public Diplomacy to support the Defense relationship.



I remember sitting with the Superintendent of the Bangladesh Naval Academy, located where the river meets the sea in Chittagong. It's a two-year academy. He explained to me that all their cadets lived in one dorm with two floors. First year cadets lived on the "gun deck," and second years lived on the "quarterdeck." From the time each cadet first entered the Academy grounds, he could only speak English. No Bangla could be spoken at the Bangladesh Naval Academy. The good English spoken by most Bangladesh officers was one reason they could participate so actively in peacekeeping.

The superintendent told me, "Look, many years ago we understood that the Bangladesh Navy is so small that we're never going to fight a war except with somebody. We asked ourselves, 'What country will we be fighting alongside?' We figured that we ought to prepare to fight in that language. Will we fight in Hindi? Arabic? Russian? Chinese? Or English? It was clear we must fight in English." They made an interesting strategic calculation that then determined their language policy. Once I heard that, I sent them all kinds of English teaching materials.

I was invited out to the Defense College at Mirpur to give a talk on civil-military relations in the U.S., the standard talk. There were about 200 officers in their lecture hall, mostly Bangladeshis but also some from India, Nepal, Pakistan, neighboring countries, some of the Commonwealth nations, and China.

During the Q&A, a Bangladeshi officer on the right side of the hall stood up and said, "If I understand what you've been saying, you believe that officers should disobey illegal orders." I said, "Yes. Officers should disobey illegal orders. It's not done lightly, but if an order is illegal it should be disobeyed." He sat down, without pushing back.

Then a hand went up on the left side of the auditorium, an officer from India. "Oh, Mr. Bishop, that's very interesting because I've often wondered what went on in the mind of the aircrew, your B-29 aircrew that dropped the atomic bomb. That was clearly an inhumane and illegal order. Why had they not refused?"

I'd been set up by these two. It was one of those moments when I earned my pay. I reviewed the strategic situation in the Pacific in the summer of 1945 along with the plans for Operations Olympic and Coronet. I told them about the prospect of perhaps a million more deaths, so that dropping the atomic bomb, by shocking the Japanese political system, had actually saved hundreds of thousands of lives for sure. American and British lives, yes, but Japanese lives too.

My answer caused quite a stir. I could hear the buzz. It happened that the brother of one of my FSNs worked at the Staff College. A week after my talk he told me that they were still talking about my answer. I had told them something none of them ever knew. They had never heard this view.

They had been told about American inhumanity, but they didn't have any real knowledge of the decision to use the atomic bomb. The student officers were still weighing what I had said. The Staff College was ready to invite me back to give a whole series of talks as a result. When the

new Defense Attaché heard that, however, he asserted his ownership of the Staff College. He would not pass on any other request for me to do more lectures.

*Q: Was there a carryover with the Bangladeshi Army from the Indian Army? Going back to colonial times, they always had a very good military reputation.*

BISHOP: Well, the Bengal Lancers of Hollywood fame came from ... Bengal, some from Bangladesh. I noticed that many regiments had a heritage from the Indian Army. Some of the predecessor units had been in the Burma campaign during World War II. On the whole, though, the Bangladeshis didn't seem eager to celebrate this heritage. Different countries have different attitudes about those colonial precursors. I think the countries of Francophone Africa well remember their *tirailleurs* in the First World War, and they're proud of that chapter in their military history. On the other hand, the South Vietnamese, who also fought with the French in many campaigns, did not cherish the memory.

As for Bangladesh, they didn't seem to repudiate their military heritage, but they didn't play it for much. There never seemed to be any reunions or public ceremonies to honor their Burma Star men.

I visited two Commonwealth war cemeteries in Bangladesh, one in Chittagong and one in Cox's Bazar. They were perfectly tended, and all Bangladeshis seemed to agree that domestic strife or riots never ought to touch the Commonwealth cemeteries.

*Q: Were there visits by important people from the administration?*

BISHOP: Dhaka was not a regular stop for high level people. Robin Raphel, the Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian affairs, came a few times, and USIS arranged the media coverage.

Congressman Bill Richardson became interested in the case of a young American woman, Eliadah McCord, who had been convicted of drug smuggling. She had been in prison in Dhaka for several years. Richardson traveled to Bangladesh twice in connection with the case, and he persuaded the government to pardon her. I handled all of the press events connected with his visit. He was a very agreeable individual to work with.

Otherwise, the big event was that the First Lady came to Bangladesh during my tour -- to visit Muhammad Yunus, who pioneered microfinance.

*Q: He's now got trouble. But anyway he won a --*

BISHOP: A great man nonetheless, and yes, he was a Nobel Prize winner. Some years before, he had stopped by Little Rock to see Governor Clinton of Arkansas. Arkansas had its own micro-enterprise fund, and Dr. Yunus became friends with Governor and Mrs. Clinton. When the Clintons went to the White House, Yunus reminded them that his invitation for them to visit Bangladesh was still open. The President couldn't break away, but Mrs. Clinton decided to come, along with Chelsea.

*Q: How did that go?*

BISHOP: It went fabulously!

When the First Lady told the Secretary about wanting to visit her friend Dr. Yunus in Bangladesh, she learned you can't go to Bangladesh without going to Pakistan, and you can't go to Pakistan without going to India. And if you just go to those countries, the Nepalese will feel slighted. The trip got longer!

Naturally, there had to be an advance team for India, and an advance team for Pakistan, and an advance team for Bangladesh. The Administration had to really dig down deep into the reserve of Schedule C young people that do advances. Many were not even State Department employees. They sent the A Team to India, the B Team to Pakistan, and the C Team to Bangladesh.

I was 49, and I had to deal with young staffers in their twenties, probably on their first trip to anywhere, saying "I speak for the President." The President wasn't even coming. But "I speak for the First Lady." I was biting my tongue a lot, saying to myself "who are these children telling us what to do?" We could have managed everything on our own, and reduced the blood pressure and bile quotient all around. After dealing with these kids for several weeks, about three days ahead of the visit, they finally sent ...

*Q: They sent adults.*

BISHOP: They sent an adult, a prominent New Hampshire Democrat, but he was a retired Marine officer. Finally everything was organized, and all the quarreling stopped. Even now the memory of those young members of the Advance teams still rankles. I'm proud of what we did for the First Lady on the visit, which in the end was all positive, but I can't let go of my negative feelings about the way the Clinton White House ran advances.

*Q: Well, the young staff on these trips usually had been very important for ringing doorbells and campaigning. They go on these trips, and they get puffed up, and get ideas, and then later on they're sort of shunted off to one side, except those that have proved themselves to be effective. Most don't.*

BISHOP: I can tell you've been around this track, too.

During her visit to Bangladesh, there were things to do in Dhaka, of course, meeting the Prime Minister, being the guest at a big banquet, and so on. Focusing on U.S. help for Bangladesh's development, USAID scoured the map for a good village that would show off not only our programs, but Dr. Yunus's Grameen Bank programs as well, since that was whom she had come so far to see.

The security team vetoed a village to the northeast of Dhaka proposed by USAID. A village north of Jessore recommended by Dr. Yunus fit all the criteria. A little unusually, it was a Hindu village.

Making the movement such a long distance seemed problematic, but out of the blue, or perhaps the “wild blue,” an Air Force C-130 was to be in Bangladesh for a PACOM exercise, so it was available to fly the First Lady from Dhaka to Jessore. When I first heard this, I thought to myself that the First Lady wasn’t going to ride in a C-130 with all the noise and the grime, but she did so readily. From the airfield at Jessore we motorcaded about forty minutes to the selected village.

The first time I had visited the village with the pre-pre-Advance, I realized we were really in the middle of nowhere. It was a real hardscrabble village. We got to see the women gathering for one of the weekly meetings to talk about their Grameen Bank loans. We went over to another village, even more hardscrabble than the first, and the women of the village sang to us a cappella under the hot baking sun. It was very moving, and we knew the First Lady was going to get a real, close look at the difficulties and poverty of rural life.

But every time I went down – again for the pre-Advance, then for the Advance, and finally with the Lead – we saw some new roofs on the houses. They built a shaded shelter for the ladies in the micro-finance circle. At the poorer village they built a stage for the ladies to get them out of the sun, and rigged up a generator and microphones for the performance. Things were getting better and better in the villages on each trip as the visit approached. The Bangladeshis wanted to put a better face on things, but each time things seemed a little less authentic.

On the final visit before the First Lady’s arrival, we discovered that Dr. Yunus had built a semi-circular bamboo structure with woven reed walls and a thatched roof in the middle of what had been a bean field. In the shaded new structure were examples of all the Grameen Bank microenterprises, allowing the First Lady and Chelsea to walk with Dr. Yunus from enterprise to enterprise – ladies making handicrafts for sale, ladies making bricks, ladies milking a cow, and so on. It was quite an efficient way of showing what the Grameen Bank was doing, but you could tell the “show” was overwhelming the opportunity for a genuine look at village life.

Handling the media during the actual trip to the village, we cut openings in the woven walls of the school and Dr. Yunus’s bamboo mall to allow the cameras to get close-ups of the First Lady, Chelsea, and Dr. Yunus talking with the women. The photos, the video, and the coverage were all first class, terrific. It was, moreover, a lot of fun going out to see this village – even how it was dressed up for things.

I might add that during each of our earlier visits, we had noticed that more and more local villagers were coming to the village to get a close look at us. On the day of the actual visit, the Army deployed a battalion of men in a large circle just out of sight of the village – blocking all the local visitors.

*Q: Mrs. Clinton – now she’s Secretary of State. At the time, as First Lady, she really was very good at this sort of thing, wasn’t she?*

BISHOP: Yes, really good.

*Q: She knew her brief and --*

BISHOP: It was a model visit, and she was a model VIP.

Chelsea was a good visitor too. During the numerous planning meetings, we kept hearing different things about Chelsea. It wasn't fixed that she would simply join her mother at every event, which is what we wanted, if only for economy of effort in scheduling and movements. We heard, "Maybe Chelsea'll want to see the night life of Dhaka while she's here." *What?* This caused more than a little commotion at the Embassy, and somebody had to waste a day trying to figure out if Chelsea should go see the jazz quartet or the discos of Dhaka. This was a stupid waste of time, but it's the sort of stuff you do when a visit is headed your way.

In the end, she stuck with Mom, went along everywhere, asked intelligent questions, and made a great impression, both for being filial daughter and for being very attentive and interested in Bangladesh. The two of them together -- it was really positive.

*Q: You were in Bangladesh during the 1966 Presidential campaign, Clinton versus Dole.*

BISHOP: Yes, and we did all the normal things – an election night reception and an inaugural address dinner too.

Of course, following the unwritten rule, none of us in the Embassy revealed our personal choices for the election. Gathering at the Embassy for the returns with local contacts, I did the usual when it was known that President Clinton was re-elected. I walked up to the microphone and said "We've just witnessed a great victory," pause, "for democracy."

Because Bangladesh was headed for elections too, we were aiming for the demonstration effect. One of the characteristics of elections in Bangladesh was that unsuccessful candidates never accepted the results. Rather they ranted and raved that the election was stolen, the election of their opponent was chicanery, it was dishonesty, it was double dealing, there was a black hand, it was illegitimate. After our own election, I recall we put together a videotape of acceptance and concession speeches, to show how American candidates acted when the results became known. I recall one Member of Parliament telling me that he had never known that American candidates accepted defeat when it came.

*Q: I see you have a list of topics to mention. Please continue.*

BISHOP: One of the great institutions in Dhaka is the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research Bangladesh (ICDDR-B), also called the Cholera Hospital. It was one of the legacies of SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, and cholera's still a problem in Bangladesh.

The ICDDR-B was the institution that had developed the oral rehydration packets. In the packet was a kind of dried molasses with salts, to be mixed with water and given to a person with cholera. Cholera kills a person by expelling the body's fluids. Simply drinking water won't make up for the loss of fluids because your body can't process water through the stomach fast enough to keep the whole body hydrated. Mix the water with salt and molasses and a few more

sophisticated mineral salts contained in the packets, however, and a person can keep hydrated and survive a bout of cholera.

ICDDR-B was an amazing institution. Your senses were assaulted when you entered. Not only did you have the disease with all its strong odors, and the perspiration of hundreds of poor Bangladeshis, but all this was combined with the smell of disinfectant. Walking in, you were hit by the scenes of illness, but it was the physical smells of the place that overwhelmed you.

At the same time, though, when you walked in you had this enormous feeling of confidence because you were walking in to an institution which had all the benefit of western medical organization and good triage of patients. The hospital saved lives because it had ... system. At the gate, nurses quickly divided the incoming patients into groups. Babies were immediately sent to one group of nurses to begin immediate rehydration, spooning the salts mixed with water into little mouths. Bangladeshis of different ages and sexes would move through this intake step, with nurses and doctors judging how severe the cases were. One person might wait for an hour; another would be taken care of right away.

Walking through the wards, especially seeing the babies, always tugged the heart. In the wards there would be dozens and dozens and dozens of people. In the course of a season, the disease would spike in different weeks. People would walk great distances to bring in their family members. Sometimes there were enough beds, and sometimes there weren't.

To handle patient overflows, they had a large area next to the main building with only a tin roof. If they needed to, they could immediately set up more cots for the patients whose cases were a little less severe. My first visit to ICDDR-B happened to occur on one of the days when there were too many patients to be handled inside. I walked through the building and passed through the rear door that led to this overflow area. It was long rows of cots with the patients, but with family members and nurses walking up and down the rows making sure whether anyone needed immediate attention. I was momentarily overwhelmed because it was so similar to the scene in "Gone with the Wind" when Scarlett O'Hara goes out into the railroad yard --

*Q: Yes, in Atlanta --*

BISHOP: In Atlanta in the movie, with Sherman's army just over the horizon.

Handling a catastrophe that big was a normal day at ICDDR-B. Whatever money we spend on the Cholera Hospital is worth every cent.

Next topic: It was in Bangladesh that I had a couple of what I call Cold War moments. This is just a few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as you recall.

The first time, I was arranging public affairs coverage of a large medical training exercise in Jessore involving the U.S. Air Force. Someone said, "get in the helicopter" so we could fly over to another exercise area. It was an Mi-8, a former Soviet helicopter. I'd studied the images of enemy helicopters in the Air Force, and this was one. So hard had been the loss of the Cold War for the old Soviet Union, and now Russia, that they had to sell their helicopters to Bangladesh.

So as I got in the helicopter I said to myself, “this is something to savor.” This was a Cold War moment.

Cold War moment number two: One day I was driving through Dhanmondi, and I passed the Russian Cultural Center, the former Soviet Cultural Center. During the Cold War, no American diplomat could visit a Soviet Cultural Center. I said to myself, hey, the Cold War’s over, now’s the time for me to visit the Russian Cultural Center! My driver turned the car around and we pulled up to the gate of a rather large four-story building.

As I stepped through the gate into the outer courtyard, the guard was asleep. There was nobody else to be seen. They didn’t seem very mindful of security.

I walked through the doors, and arrows pointed me to the first floor exhibit area. This public floor was totally empty of people. They had a permanent exhibit on the Soviet trawlers that had cleared the mines in Chittagong Harbor after the Independence War. In the main hall, the “exhibit” was the 8x10 glossies sent out from Moscow for that month, pinned on the bulletin boards. The Chairman greets the delegation from Syria. Dancers appear at the Bolshoi. Combines harvest a bumper crop. That was the exhibit – that was all they could do.

So far I hadn’t met anyone. On the second floor, in the Library, the sleeping librarian jumped to his feet in startled amazement that, first, anybody had visited and, then, it was the USIS Director. I took a quick look at the collection and found the collected works of Marx and Lenin, along with some translations of Russian literature. It was not a very contemporary collection.

The Librarian then insisted that I meet the Center’s senior FSN. The librarian took us up the stairs to the third floor, where all the Russians had their offices. None of them were in. Each office had a steel accordion gate with a lock on the bottom. In their own building, the Russians felt the need for steel office gates! I ran through the possibilities. Either (1) they didn’t trust their FSNs, or (2) they were actually KGB even though their name card said “cultural affairs.”

Finally, we reached the fourth floor. The senior FSN was having tea with a buddy from a ministry. He was totally flummoxed by the arrival of an American. We spoke for a few minutes, but as I left he asked, “Do you have any openings at the American Cultural Center?” This was so rich with irony.

Next on the list: An issue that took a higher place on the U.S. global issues agenda in the mid-1990s was woman and child trafficking. Naturally many Bangladeshis were caught up, driven there fundamentally by poverty. There were Bangladeshi boys taken to the Middle East to be jockeys in camel races. There were girls moved in the sex trade -- some to nearby India, some to the Middle East. The Embassy and international organizations began to trace and document the trade. There were also women moved into the sex trade in Bangladesh itself, and there were ugly brothels in downtown Dhaka.

As I said, trafficking was just coming up on the radar as an issue, and the donors and NGOs didn’t yet have large programs. This is the kind of moment when U.S. Public Diplomacy can make a real difference.

So before speaking of addressing trafficking in Dhaka in 1997, some philosophy.

If the agenda is social change, or dealing with deeply rooted social problems, my view is that years of work will be required. Years to define the problem. Years to create awareness. Years to garner funds or to win the attention of development gatekeepers. Years for assessments and benchmarking. Seminars and workshops. Drafts of legislation. Carrots and sticks for the local government by the donors. Fending off those who profit from lack of reform. Research and studies. Pilot projects. Funding NGOs over the long run. And so on.

Public Diplomacy is too light to do this. I know that Under Secretaries and directors of Public Diplomacy programs at universities and think tanks envision Public Diplomacy as able to deliver social change, but they're wrong. Public Diplomacy programs can play a supporting role, but Public Diplomacy's resources are too small to make a long-term impact. Because the resources are scattered over too many programs and too many goals, there's never enough critical mass to make a decisive difference in any one area. Thinking that a few Fulbrighters, a few Visitors, or a few speakers can make a real dent is a form of Public Diplomacy ... hubris.

I can of course describe this in a military way. Think of the Civil War. Battles were won by masses of infantry helped by their supporting arms.

In social change, only USAID has the money and experience to work over the long term. They are the infantry. That doesn't mean there's no role for Public Diplomacy, it just means that Public Diplomacy people have to understand what we can do and what we can't.

Public Diplomacy with its light funding, its light arms, are rather the scouts and skirmishers that move ahead of the infantry. They report on the shape of the battlefield. Their fire can slow advancing enemy formations coming our way. But scouts and skirmishers only "prepare" or "soften" or "shape" the battlefield, and no infantry, no victory. Or no social change. Public Diplomacy is too light, as in "light infantry," to effect change on its own.

I editorialize that such understanding has been scant among Under Secretaries of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, who seem to have an unquenchable thirst for vignettes that prove how Public Diplomacy is tackling and solving the world's problems. Or, to be more cynical, how my Public Diplomacy is tackling and solving the world's problems by taking my advice, following my lead, and implementing programs I have directed.

So, to 1997. What I liked about the issue of women and child trafficking in Bangladesh is that it fell to PAS to scout and skirmish on a new issue while we waited for the infantry to arrive. This is something that Public Diplomacy can do.

We combed through the media for opinions so that we could begin to establish the kind of public appeals we would need to make an effective case among Bangladeshis. We identified the journalists and the local leaders who were focused on the issue -- pro and con. We learned a little about the flow of bribes and corruption that fended away law enforcement from the brothels.



We asked for a U.S. Speaker on trafficking to come to Dhaka. The Speaker would help raise awareness, yes, but in the course of planning for the program we would identify the people and the organizations who might later play a role in addressing the problem. Meeting people, we could identify candidates for exchange programs. Around the program we could issue press releases and op-eds that brought more awareness into public conversations. We had enough resources for a few post programs that could begin to raise the profile of the issue while buying time for USAID to develop sizable projects in its own “by the numbers” way.

This is what we were doing on woman and child trafficking in the first half of 1997. By this time, I had lost the IO, CAO, Executive Officer, and one fourth of the local staff. In a few moments I hope we can discuss this reduction in staff -- as part of the peace dividend – as a management issue. But for now, replacing all of those trimmed from the staff was a new officer as Assistant PAO, Bob Kerr, in his first assignment. He became quite energized on the issue, and it was he who worked on bringing the speaker from Washington. The speaker program was to play an important role as we unfolded the initial moves by the Embassy in this new field.

Bob thought that the coming speaker program needed more punch. He proposed to take our USIS video camera into a red light district during the day, record conditions, and interview women. This was certainly bolder than the usual preparation for a speaker program, but “no guts, no glory,” and I gave him the go-ahead. One of the last things I did in my last few days in Dhaka was to look over his videotape.

As I say, the speaker program itself occurred a little while after I left. But I heard something quite extraordinary from Bob. A few days before the program, the Police entered the red light district that he had filmed, made some arrests, and “freed” the women, putting them in the hands of a local NGO. My guess is that they did this for show, to disarm any finger-pointing that might come their way as a result of our program. My guess is that the police action may not have permanently “freed” some of the women, who lacked the skills for other employment, and who would still be “stained” by their time in the sex trade. They might soon be back in the red light district. Still, it was a gratifying moment, to know that one of our programs had broken some specific women free and given them a new chance in life. Bob's initiative had a fine result.

*Q: All right, today is Washington's birthday, February 22, 2011 with Donald Bishop. I have a question here. As you got into this, because it has pertinence to much later on. How much did the study of Islam prepare you and your officers? Tell us about the Islam factor in Bangladesh.*

BISHOP: In my study of Bangladesh before I went out I sensed that Islam was a large social factor. I had studied Islam in graduate school, so I was primed to be sensitive to the Islamic dimension of Bangladesh when I got there. This is worth a longer, a much longer, discussion.

Let me frame things first. The Foreign Service characteristically tended – though maybe it's changing a little bit -- not to think about the religious dimensions of a society. And FSO's tended to think that because we keep “church” and “state” separate in the United States, it would be illegitimate of us overseas to be particularly interested in the religious dimension of society.

*Q: And also I'd say the people we recruit for the Foreign Service are not particularly religious.*

BISHOP: Well ... yes.

*Q: They may be religious, but not, say, a fundamentalist Christian.*

BISHOP: That sounds right to me.

You've gathered from previous conversations that I think of myself as a religious person, of course Catholic. I think that made me a little more sensitive to the religious dimension of foreign societies. Having a religious sensibility is important in dealing with societies that are very religious, and Bangladesh is a pretty religious place.

The historians and sociologists say that Islam in Bangladesh is a bit syncretic. Islam had come rather late to Bangladesh, in the 1300s, I believe, and one of its attractions was that once Bengalis became Muslim they set aside caste. Even if their material circumstances didn't change much when they became Muslim, they felt the internal liberation that came from being a member of an equal brotherhood of believers, at least equal in faith or equal in Allah's eyes.

I can't count myself as a deep, deep student of Islam, although I had more book learning than most, but I was sensitive to it. And I was primed to notice the Islamic side of the country when we looked at Bangladesh as a partner of the United States, and the Bangladeshis as a people who might have different opinions of the United States and its programs based on their own cultural and historical background. I was anxious to find the religious dimension of that.

When I got to Dhaka and wrote the Country Public Affairs Plan in my first year, I had to identify the "communication tensions." Among them, I wrote that Bangladesh was Islamic, and that inevitably there'd be some lack of understanding that derived from their religious background. This might be overcome, I wrote, with more dialogue and more getting out and meeting Muslims and more demonstrating the commonality of human concerns that we might have.

Back in the day, Country Public Affairs Plans usually ended up listing four or five goals for a USIS program – areas to focus on. Usually, most plans focused on democracy, economics, and global issues. The last goal was always a throwaway about understanding American society. This last goal gave you room to do anything you wanted to in the area of culture. When I wrote the plan in Dhaka, however, I put "Dialog with Islam" as goal number four. Ambassador Merrill was really taken with it, and so it went in to Washington that way.

When my Country Public Affairs Plan got to Washington, I learned, it raised eyebrows. I don't know what the posts in the heart of the Middle East, the Arab Muslim world, had been doing all these years, but I was the first person to actually write out "Dialog with Islam" in a Country Public Affairs Plan – to say that we should be engaged with Islamic publics and we should be talking about some religious issues in order to create bonds of mutual understanding and trust.

There were some different reactions from Washington and from my colleagues at other posts in the area. One was that the United States is a country, and Islam is a religion. How can a country talk to a religion? These are two different realms of life, and the twain doesn't meet, I heard.

Another was – we talk to our friends. We reward our friends. We give them grants and make them IVs. Our friends are the secular leaders of society, or those Muslims with a liberal and cosmopolitan view of things. We don't reward those like the "fundamentalists" who are hostile to us.

Then the question became -- where in the USIA bureaucracy would a Country Plan program on religion fit? What office would provide the program support? We had programmers for economic reform, and we had programmers for GATT and trade negotiations, and we had people who did democracy and human rights and legislatures and so on. But no one in the USIA bureaucracy had a portfolio for religion. Once again, this reflected a kind of vulgar separationism. It was a "blind spot," if you will, in USIA's organizational and conceptual structure, blind to religion.

Anyway, I kept at it and talked to people. Finally, they reasoned out that USIA had a section in the Bureau of Programs that dealt with "American Society." American Society has many dimensions – an ethnic dimension, a racial dimension, and economic dimension, geographic dimensions, and so on. So OK, they could consider religion to be one more dimension of American society. In the Bureau of Programs, therefore, one person could get religion too, and that person could handle the odd requests from Bangladesh.

I mention here that "American Studies" can indeed provide a useful way for people in other countries to consider their own social arrangements. One year, when we hosted the annual American Studies conference in Dhaka, we made "Religion in the United States" the theme. It was a good academic focus, and the conversations at the conference helped Bangladeshis think through religious issues in their own society.

*Q: Were your FSN's Muslim?*

The entire staff was Muslim except for one or two Hindus and one Catholic. That meant I had Muslim senior FSNs to advise me. I suppose "Dialog with Islam" was my American "bright idea," but the great thing about bicultural Embassy staffs is that you have rapport, you have frankness, you exchange ideas. If you're listening as well as proposing, they can provide good advice – what to do, what not to do, how to take the germ of an idea and make it better.

My FSNs rather liked the idea of "Dialog with Islam," and we enjoyed a fine collaboration. I think that the staff were all rather excited by the possibility because we had never had much contact with Muslim leaders. The FSNs had their ordinary faith-based reasons to want to go forward.

*Q: Again, pointing out to someone who's looking at this, sometimes you find that we have embassies where we've recruited people sort of like us, and often the religious dimension isn't there. Or else the FSNs might all be Protestant or Catholic, and you get a disconnect at the top level. But you didn't ...*

BISHOP: Yes, every post is different. If I had been in Calcutta and wanted to talk to Muslims, I would have to work through a largely Hindu staff. Saudi Arabia is another case. I gather there aren't many Saudis that work at the Embassy in Riyadh. In Dhaka, however, everything lined up right. The FSNs were good to go.

*Q: So, the religious leaders, mullahs? Were you able to make contact at a significant level and have a dialogue?*

BISHOP: Remember that "Dialog with Islam" was only one of our goals. Remember that this is before there were social networks. Remember that we were just at the beginning of something new. We got to know many Muslim leaders, especially in Dhaka, but I'm not sure our reach extended very far into Islamic institutions and communities elsewhere. That's the kind of thing that takes some years to develop.

I thought we did pretty well. We met the university professors who either teaching Islamic subjects, or those who were serious Muslims. There were, for example, physics professors who had interesting ideas to test some Koranic passages against the physical universe. There are some passages in the Koran – my memory is not quite precise after all these years – about time stopping briefly, and they were interested in exploring these. They posed experimental questions. I've since learned that some of the world's scientists, hearing this, scoffed. My take was – let the questions that originate in faith unfold, and let Muslim scholars use their science and the experimental method to test them. The questions honored faith. The use of the scientific method honored knowledge. Let them see where the knowledge leads. What's the down side here?

We met the people from the leading mosques in Dhaka. We met Red Crescent. I told my staff that I wanted also to meet some Muslim leaders who were out of the mainstream. I met people from Jamaat-e-Islami, the religious political party, non-establishment mosque leaders, and, what can I say, Muslim evangelicals who worked among the poor. It was a very interesting mix. We didn't get as far along, however, as meeting countryside people or those from neighborhood mosques.

Of course we began the tried and true way, talking about Islam among the faiths in the United States. I remember at one roundtable at USIS, one of the religious leaders was showing signs of agitation, and he said, "You know what the problem with you Americans is?" I kind of jumped back in my chair. He said, "You have nude beaches in Denmark!"

Whoa! And everybody else in the group laughed about nude beaches in Denmark being America's fault. Thinking of his response, I realized he was eliding us with the whole West, and Europe. I said to myself, it's time to be diplomatic, even though I wanted to say, "hey, when you were in school, did you sleep through geography class?" The other participants let him know why they were laughing, gave him some gentle ribbing. He smiled too.

I remember at the same conference I mentioned that I often read a phrase used in the Arab world, "Jews and Crusaders," to mean Israel and the United States, or Jews and Christians. I told the participants that this seemed to be a backdoor way of criticizing the United States, linking us to Islam's historic grievances. I pointed out that the Crusades ran from the 1000s to the 1200s, and

this was long before anyone even knew that the American continent existed. We Americans weren't around during the Crusades. I said "there can be a lot of criticism of the United States, but let's just knock one off the list, that we're Crusaders." They nodded, they got it. Crusaders – that's off your back, they told me. So here and there we could chip away at things like that. That's what dialogue is about.

And I found that the most radical of the Muslim political leaders, what they wanted was to talk, they wanted to be noticed. No one from the Embassy had ever done so. What they wanted was to have a chance to meet somebody who had a basic sympathy for their alignment in life, their values in life, their hopes for a religious and moral society, their worries and apprehensions about social change, and what they had heard about the United States. They wanted to meet someone who would just talk all this through.

Perhaps I could mention here that, watching and listening to different American members of the Embassy when they met Muslim contacts, I noticed that the more religious individuals in the Embassy were better in a good dialog with serious Muslims, which is also saying, I suppose, that the Americans with former secular convictions were less effective. They were perhaps, to use a different metaphor, "tone deaf" when it came to discussing faith in general and religious issues in particular -- just when we needed to hear the tones in a conversation, to establish some interpersonal ties and rapport that would lead to better reporting, and to voice American policy in a way that hits the tone that is right for our Muslim interlocutors.

There's no particular way to actualize this observation, since we get FSOs of all backgrounds and give them portfolios, and their orientation toward faith has no role in an assignment. But it was my observation.

*Q: Were there any issues that particularly agitated or concerned these Muslim contacts? I mean such as -- during this time we were doing Northern Watch and Southern Watch.*

BISHOP: The no-fly zone and so on. Those things may have been on a long list, but they didn't seem to be prominent, and I don't recall discussing them.

There had been Bangladeshi mujahideen in Afghanistan. And some Bangladeshis were in Chechnya. I met the head of the Mujahideen veterans, who headed up a society to care for their widows and orphans.

On the whole, I thought that the concerns of most of our Muslim interlocutors were domestic. The Islamic political party, Jamaat, held a few seats in Parliament, and whether it would increase its representation was much on people's minds. The secular parties, the BNP and the Awami League, did not want Jamaat to win more seats.

All of our Muslim contacts, I would say, hoped to make Bangladesh a more Islamic place. The most conservative members of that party hoped to implement Shariah. I sensed that the politically active Imams were focused on these domestic issues rather than international causes. If I recall correctly, Jamaat actually lost seats in the 1996 elections, so concern about Jamaat's influence receded as a concern for the Embassy.

*Q: Could you say something about natural disasters in Bangladesh? You must have seen some.*

BISHOP: Actually, there had been a huge flood just before we got there, and there was one after we left. But during our three years there, Dhaka was not hit.

There's a lot that could be said about this. USAID spent some of its money quite well, developing Bangladesh's capacity for dealing with disasters. Driving through the countryside you would see concrete structures built on stilts, about twenty feet above the ground. They provided storage for radios and relief supplies and oral rehydration packets. If an area was flooded, people could get what they needed at a local tower until the waters went down and the Army and doctors could reach them. These towers diminished the impact of a flood or tropical storm. USAID had set up a disaster reporting system, and although tropic storms took lives every time, over the years the numbers were diminishing as the emergency preparedness improved. All of this is a major USAID success story.

There's always room for one more story. It's about our DCM Jim Nach and his wife Thuy, as they were transferring from Washington for Dhaka. As usual, two moving companies arrived at their home, one to move things into storage, and one to box up the items they would send to Bangladesh. The movers, though, mixed things up. They put the items to be shipped into the warehouse at Hagerstown, and they shipped to Dhaka all the things the Nachs intended to store.

The mistake wasn't discovered until the Nachs unpacked their shipment in Dhaka and realized the error. The department -- in a rare exception to policy -- authorized the shipment of their items, mistakenly stored in Hagerstown, to Dhaka. Their items were placed in a shipping container, and the ship entered the Bay of Bengal just as a tropical storm raged. The winds ripped many containers off the ship, and their container went to the bottom of the Bay of Bengal! Their piano swimming with the fishes! This of course sentenced Jim and Thuy to the agony of the claim, not to mention that he and his wife had to do without quite a number of needed household items.

*Q: You've mentioned the role of FSNs in your programs. Sometimes we Americans talk about "our" programs and "our" initiatives, but many can't go very far without relying on our Foreign Service Nationals.*

BISHOP: Yes, I certainly agree.

Because of how stressed the post had been under the previous PAO, I was particularly interested in demonstrating my care for FSNs, and to develop good rapport. They were members of an FSN Association, and one of the USIS Cultural Affairs Assistants was an officer of the Association. He often spoke with me about what the Association hoped to gain in its coming talks with the Management Section. When he ran ideas by me, I'd say, that sounds like a "maybe," or "that one will need Department approval," or "if you ask me, that won't go very far."

Similarly, I put a lot of effort into Special Immigration Visas. You know that FSNs can be considered for an SIV after fifteen years of "exceptional" service. I volunteered for the SIV

Committee that would review applications and make recommendations to the Ambassador. For any applicant from USIS, I did my damndest to get the Committee to approve. That meant a lot of preparation, some politicking with other members, and then some persuasive talk in those committee meetings.

I was appalled by some of the things I heard in the Committee meetings. The first thing you notice about applications is that those for a Section Chief's secretary are always approved. The Section Chief knows the person and becomes the advocate at the meeting. On the other hand, an application from a bricklayer in GSO is likely to be disapproved because the Section Chief sitting on the Committee doesn't know that FSN personally.

I had seen this before in the Air Force. The major's clerk-typist always got a Commendation Medal, but the airman turning wrenches on the flight line, enduring the heat and the cold, assuring that the aircraft will fly, was never considered for a medal because there were too many sergeants in between. I always gave the Committee members that example so that they would be ... American! To understand that everybody who had worked for us had done something valuable, and we shouldn't be so worried about rank and standing when we reviewed applications.

We were seeing applications from FSNs with 15, 20, or 25 years of service at the Embassy. If they received the SIV (Special Immigrant Visa), it allowed their spouse and their children under the age of 21 to immigrate too. An SIV, then, was not just a ticket for them, but for their family. To be able to take a 14-year old child from Bangladesh and put her in a public school in the United States would open up a whole new life that might even include Harvard. Every SIV application, then, bore all the hopes of the family and the children. Think of all the emotion packed into a little application file by the bricklayer or the distribution clerk with seven children. I was shocked to hear members of the Committee say, "I know him and he doesn't deserve a visa." Or, "What kind of job will he get?" as if by refusing a visa they were saving him from failure in the U.S.

Perhaps I had had the benefit of seeing so many Korean immigrants in the U.S. Immigrants now usually have classmates and relatives already there, ready to help them in the U.S. The idea that we Americans knew better bothered me.

In any case, it was soon clear to the FSNs that I was their champion to get SIVs. That gave me standing among the FSNs in the whole Embassy. Developing that kind of rapport pays off in programs.

Alas, some applicants falsified applications, usually changing the birth dates of children who were past 21. They persuaded the FSNs in HR to overlook the original birth dates. When Ambassador Merrill learned this, he came down particularly hard. He fired some FSNs, and he refused the SIV applications of others. The Embassy's personnel system had gotten rotten that way. For my trouble, I was burned when a USIS FSN submitted fake birth records for his sons. Otherwise, I'm pleased to think that some FSNs received visas because of my advocacy on their behalf.

*Q: Many USIS posts had to cut staff in the 1990s. What was the situation in Dhaka?*

BISHOP: When I got to Bangladesh in 1994 I had 39 local employees working at USIS. This was, however, the mid-1990s, and you'll recall that much of the "peace dividend" was to come from reducing Public Diplomacy – to "pension off" USIA to use Pat Buchanan's phrase. That was just one of his policy positions that disqualified him for the Presidency.

One day I received a call from NEA Area Director Kenton Keith telling me that I must reduce the staff by five by the end of the fiscal year. That's a tough task, with a lot of things to weigh. Who was close to retirement anyway? Who did I really want to be rid of? Men or women? It was my prerogative to decide who would be dismissed and who would not, and after some thinking things over, and talking with the American officers, I settled on five to be let go.

Before I had announced any of this, I got another call. The Area Director said, "Don, it's six." I had to let go one more person, and I went ahead and figured out who that should be. So far there has been no cable, no official communication of this staff reduction. It was all being done by telephone.

In another call to Washington, I let the area office know I had settled on which six employees to let go. I was told, much to my astonishment, "no, no, when we said six, we meant six more – the first five and then six more. You have to let go eleven." This was more than one fourth of the staff.

This was hard, one of the hardest things I ever did in the Foreign Service – let go eleven people. It was a disaster for each one. Even if they could find new jobs, they were looking at substantial salary cuts and no benefits in the local economy. The older employees had no real prospects at all.

I really wrestled with this. I could distribute the separation dates over time, as long as they were all out of the Embassy by the end of the fiscal year. For one employee, I allowed him to stay a few months longer so that he had one more year's service to add to his severance or pension. For another, I delayed as long as possible so that he finished with 15 years and 3 days of service, enough to qualify him to apply for a Special Immigrant Visa. And so on.

Most were grateful, but I recall one or two employees -- very senior, with generous retirement benefits even though they had to leave a few years before they intended to retire -- who became quite bitter, and felt they had to infect other FSNs with their bitterness to get even for the injustice done them. No good deed goes unpunished, I suppose.

Another part of the contraction of USIS Dhaka was the decision, made in Washington, that we give up our Library. We eventually gave all the books to the Dhaka University library, ending a valued American presence that had lasted several decades.

The same austerity that forced me to let go eleven FSNs led USIA to reduce the number of Americans at the post. When I arrived we had a PAO, CAO, IO, and Executive Officer, but the new Area Office algorithm determined Dhaka should only have one officer. My brain short



circuited, wondering how one officer was going to do the work of four, especially when we had so many good things going. The reductions would take effect by not replacing my officers as they departed.

The Deputy Area Director, Steve Dachi, made a trip to several small posts that were facing reductions. In his hip pocket, he had one loose American position that he could give to the post that could use an additional American most effectively. It came down to Dhaka or Colombo, and after his visit he allowed Dhaka to remain a two-officer post, PAO and DPAO. When our Executive Officer, Elizabeth Cemal, left Dhaka, she was not replaced. When Kathleen and Chris Rochester, IO and CAO respectively, departed, a new APAO arrived, Bob Kerr.

*Q: Bangladesh gave you a good look at what we might call the development enterprise. Do you have any other comments to offer?*

BISHOP: Here's one small memory that I thought told a larger tale. I recall being quite surprised at one Country Team meeting. In Dhaka, the Ambassador sat at the head of the table, and it was customary for the USAID Director to sit on his left. Ambassador Merrill had come from USAID, so he knew their programs and management from the inside. As usual at a Country Team meeting, each member was asked if he or she had anything for the group.

Over the months I learned that the USAID Director's comments were pretty much the same. On odd-numbered weeks he would say "we're waiting for our figures from Washington," meaning USAID in Dhaka was waiting to learn how much money Washington was going to give for this and that program, and in which quarter. On even-numbered weeks he would say, "Oh, we've just received figures from Washington, and we're working through them." That was the sum of what we heard at Country Team meetings about USAID programs. With his detailed knowledge of USAID procedures, and from reviews of programs with the USAID Director, that was all the Ambassador needed to know, perhaps, but nobody else knew what was going on. Was there new money for economics, or new money for banking reform, or new money for disease control, or for disaster relief, or for family planning? The rest of us on the Country Team had no idea.

One day, however, the Director got more talkative. He said that USAID had decided that American officers working on family planning should really go out and see how things were working in the field. He said he and his colleagues had just finished a week of traveling throughout the country, meeting family planning workers and acceptors. It was most informative and valuable, he said, now we understand.

My translation of his report was that it meant they had never done this before. Their usual procedure was to give USAID money to the family planning implementing partners in Dhaka. They talked to the elites who ran the organizations, but they had not gone out and seen programs at work. Regardless of my views on family planning programs, I thought this showed that USAID Missions could be too far distant from their effects. Their role was more about pushing out money than in understanding development as it was experienced by the poor. This was another way that the Embassy was too tied in with the elites. I was learning more from the missionaries than I was from USAID.

In Bangladesh I began to be more conscious that I looked at societies -- our society, foreign societies -- differently than other FSOs. My upbringing with its focus on morals, my study of economics with Lawrence Towle pointing to moral effects, my professional exposure to culture and ideas in my previous overseas assignments, all played a role.

The word “development” elicits from us an *economic* response. Say “development” and you begin to think about *economic* interventions -- roads, banking reform, changing the shape of the demographic profile, micro-loans, and so on.

You don’t think long about development, though, without grasping that sound economic policies need parallel “good governance.” That second word, “governance,” suggests *politics*, and more interventions, this time *political*: strengthen the parliament, the independent media, transparency, civil service reform, and so on.

When we talk about developing the Third World, then, our frame of mind is that people are first *economic men*, and then *political men*. This is economic and political determinism, and I don't think it's too far a reach to say that the intellectual impact of Marxism -- and socialism and Communism -- had had a large effect in shaping this kind of determinism, even in the free societies.

From when I was young, I’ve sensed that this is quite insufficient. Yes, there is a political and an economic dimension to every individual and to every society. Yes, they are important. But there is another dimension, or perhaps more facets on the diamond that is man. This third dimension needs several words to describe: cultural, spiritual, ethical, moral, traditional, religious.

When it comes to “development,” we always focus on economics, and we make some tentative interventions in politics, but as Americans we are not good at focusing on this third cluster of elements. We haven’t thought much about it, especially because some Americans have a reflexive tendency to cite “separation of church and state” as an obstacle.

If we put millions or billions of dollars into economic and political interventions, we do another injustice -- shifting the target nation's priorities to match ours. What might happen if we funded a developing nation's cultural institutions as generously as we fund the armed forces? We might have different outcomes. Ignoring an important side of the human personality, our development assistance does not address all of mankind's needs. We'll need to pick up on this when we get to Afghanistan.

*Q: I recall from our session that covered your time as a Congressional Fellow, you had developed misgivings over population programs. Some of USAID’s largest family planning programs were in Bangladesh.*

BISHOP: Yes, and the last thing on my list to discuss is the moral crisis I faced in Bangladesh. Yes, when I had worked on Capitol Hill for Christopher Smith of New Jersey, co-chair of the Pro-Life Caucus in the House of Representatives, he had asked me to really study population programs. In all my reading, I had been more and more convinced that the entire premises of our U.S. programs -- called “family planning” but still at their heart population control -- did not rest

on sound foundations. You'll recall I talked about three challenges to family planning and population programs.

I had, then, many misgivings about population programs when I got to Bangladesh. As I recall, about two-thirds of USAID's money was going toward family planning. Over three years, programs went on, but there was never any opportunity at the Embassy, never any setting, where there was a chance to discuss the rightness or wrongness of family planning, whether this was or wasn't a good use of our taxpayers' money. The country team meetings didn't provide any opportunity. USAID existed in its own world with its own funding. The Ambassador had managed population programs during his years with USAID. My USAID colleagues were all of a single mind about family planning, believing that the reduction of population growth would be the greatest intervention that could take Bangladesh out of poverty.

When I read the newspapers each morning, I was alert for articles on family planning, and you'd notice things. USAID and the other family planning donors would brag that no place in Bangladesh was more than 100 yards, or a short distance from, a vendor that would provide condoms. Indeed you would see condom packets on sale at any roadside shop selling snacks and colas. The condoms were imported, provided by the donors. They were "socially marketed" condoms so the price at the outlet was well below the cost of manufacturing. You weren't within 100 yards of an oral rehydration packet. You weren't within 100 yards of penicillin. Yet we had thrown all this money into family planning.

Our programs had also distorted the entire medical profession and the nation's public health posture by giving jobs to people in family planning, but not to people who were, say, general practitioners. I doubt that the Bangladeshi medical community would, on its own, have placed family planning so high in their health priorities. I could go on.

Parenthetically, the phrase "social marketing" was one of many small deceptions. It gave the impression that profit-making private businesses were selling condoms to eager customers. The only "market" in "social marketing" was that the condoms were available in markets. The so-called company was a subsidized subsidiary of the donors. Their "sales" had no relationship to profit or loss.

What was the result of subsidizing condoms? It made the cost of condoms lower in Bangladesh than in India. The result could be easily predicted. Railroad cars full of condoms would disappear over the border. Of course it couldn't be proven because no one would investigate, but in a corrupt country like Bangladesh, family planning officials who had the custody of the imported condom inventories – and other kinds of contraceptives as well – could make a profit by selling some of the supplies in an area with a higher market price – meaning across the border in India.

I attended a large family planning rally with Ambassador Merrill, held in an indoor stadium. I remember a few thousand family planning workers were there. The women working for different implementing partners wore different color saris. They were sitting together, and there were blocks of women in green, women in purple, women in pale red, women in pink, and so on. It wouldn't be far off to say the different family planning "platoons" or "battalions" wore different

uniforms. The idea that these family planning workers were “employees” of the various family planning “NGOs” seemed a stretch. Every NGO was funded by a government or international organization. The only thing “non-government” about these so-called “NGOs” was that the employees’ pay envelopes weren’t given to them directly by Embassies.

All of this made me uneasy.

Abortion rates were climbing in Bangladesh, and there was another low deceit going on. Abortion was illegal in Bangladesh, but the incidence of abortion was rising as family planning rates increased. This was “when contraception fails, abortion must be the backup” at work. This reality was obscured by calling an early term abortion an “MR,” for “menstrual regulation.” Everybody in the family planning and medical world knows that an MR is an abortion. But by calling it an “MR,” they sidestepped Bangladesh’s own ban on abortion.

One evening Bangladesh’s Attorney General was at dinner in our house. In a quiet moment away from the others, I asked him why abortion rates were rising. This had not been a problem years ago, I said. What’s the score?

He seemed to be surprised that I was asking a question about something everyone knew. His reply was direct. “Abortions are rising due to the increased acceptance of family planning.” It was very clear to him that more family planning led to increased rates of abortion. He was confirming one of the major pro-Life criticisms of family planning programs.

Then, one day I read a cable from Washington, a confidential cable. It was signed by the Secretary as usual, but it was from Tim Wirth’s office, “Global Issues.” It talked about family planning and the administration’s goals. Of course I couldn’t keep a copy or write out the paragraph because of the classification, but the cable indicated that the United States intended to establish access to abortion as a global human right.

When we come into the Foreign Service – it was the same for you as it was for me – the orals panel asks the three questions. Will you do any kind of work, even if it’s outside your career track? Will you go anywhere? Will you support American policies even if you personally disagree with them? If you don’t say “yes” to each of the three questions, you don’t go any farther in the process.

I said yes. You said yes. And only once or twice in my career, 31 years, did I ever have serious misgivings. Over the years there were plenty of times when I thought a policy was wrongheaded, but no one had asked for my opinion. I never found any of our policies to be evil. Moreover, the Constitutional order was intact. We had laws, we had Congress, we had the President, we had checks and balances, we had separation of powers, we had oversight, we had hearings, we had elections, and our goals in the world, our foreign policies, if you will, take shape with the democratic, the constitutional, give and take. And no one had elected me. Rather my work, our work in the Foreign Service, was to implement the foreign policy of the United States that had been fully debated and openly announced. So I had not been much troubled by decisions that ran up against my personal preferences.

But this one hit me square -- to establish access to abortion as a universal human right. This was wrong, this was evil, so wrong that my hand was shaking as I held the cable.

I walked directly down to the DCM's office. I told Jim Nach, "if this happens, I will first write a dissent cable, and then I will be forced to resign. I will never do this."

The cable announced the administration's intent, but nothing had happened yet. When I told Jim this, he said, "I understand," but he also said "let's wait until you're asked to do it, or we're asked to do it." I agreed this sounded all right, since I was saying "no" to one sentence in one cable.

This was one time in my career I was tempted to leak a cable, I was so outraged. The cable did become public, but it wasn't because of me. The leak -- the news that the Clinton administration intended to establish abortion as a global human right -- created quite a stir, at least in the Washington Times, and among pro-Life people. The Vice President felt the need to calm things down, and he met the press to say no, the administration had no intent to do this. In fact, he lied. The language of the cable was quite clear. The Vice President denied the administration's own desired policy.

The issue, then, never went anywhere, so great was the reaction. And I did not have to act on my convictions. I dodged a bullet on my grave moral crisis.

Soon afterwards, a team of inspectors was at post, and I thought I should mention the issue. Ambassador Dan O'Donohue was the lead inspector.

*Q: Who I've interviewed.*

BISHOP: I told him about my moral dilemma, but that I had taken the DCM's advice to wait for something specific to come our way. I had not sent a dissent cable. Ambassador Donohue had been on the Policy Planning staff when this had come up, and he told me that a dissent cable might have led the Department and the administration to think more clearly about the implications of that Tim Wirth routine cable.

So -- when I think about Bangladesh I have all these great feelings. I love the country. I'd go back in a minute. It was great public affairs work. It was a well-run Embassy. But then I think about all the millions we're spending on family planning there, misallocation of money, and I think about my brush with a proposed American foreign policy issue that would have been grievously wrong. And so there's always this little pang in my heart.

*Q: Over the years I've heard about Bangladesh's reputation as a basket case, and the reluctance of Foreign Service people to go there. When they do go, however, they warm right up to the country and its people. This seems to have happened to you.*

BISHOP: Yes. We had gone out on a two-year tour, but within a few months we asked to stay the extra year. It was a fine assignment. What a fine country. What a fine people.

*Q: Were Bangladeshis as disputatious as the Indians?*

BISHOP: They might have been a notch under the Indians, but only a notch. They were certainly verbal.

*Q: Americans tend to lecture ...*

BISHOP: Oh, yes.

*Q: and Indians lecture other people --*

BISHOP: Are you implying that Americans are *preachy*?

*Q: (laughs)*

BISHOP: Golly! Oh my, no! Certainly none of us here!

*Q: There's a clash here between Indian and American --*

BISHOP: It's styles of discourse, in a way.

*Q: Yeah. I was wondering whether you had that --*

BISHOP: Well, yes. When it came time for the Q&A after a presentation, the "questions" from Bangladeshis tended to be speeches, followed by "what's your opinion?"

So, to answer your original question, there's talkativeness and disputatiousness. When we held a program at USIS, the speaker would make his or her remarks, and then there would be a break – "tea and biscuits." Then we sat down again for the Q&A. Since everyone had some sugar inside, the Q&As might go on for an hour and a half.

I recall another early example of Bangladeshi prolixity. Just a few days after I arrived, I got an invitation to go to the opening session of the annual SAARC conclave of journalists. SAARC is the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation, an international organization that brings together the South Asian countries -- India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, and Bangladesh.

President Khaleda Zia was due to speak as the Chief Guest. I sent my RSVP, "yes," thinking I would have a chance to meet journalists and hear the President speak. I went to the event blind. Nobody had clued me in that the Bangladeshis, like the Indians and Pakistanis and Nigerians, run programs in a fixed order. There are opening remarks by the Master of Ceremonies, then the Address of Welcome, the Address by the Special Guest and perhaps another by an Honored Guest, and only then the Chief Guest. After those most important remarks there's a Vote of Thanks before the ceremony ends. So you have all these warm-up speeches, the address of welcome, and then you finally have *the* address.

I sat in my seat and listened to each of the speakers voice their 10-15 minutes of pabulum and generalities, on and on, talk and talk and talk and more talk and talk. Finally, an hour and a half after the opening, Khaleda Zia was taken to her special chair and seated with great ceremony by her Air Force aide. She then said her 15 minutes of pabulum. When the Vote of Thanks concluded – this was at least two hours after the ceremony began -- I said to myself, “This is *finally* over. And I’m not coming to one of these again.” My mind was numb.

As I began to move to the aisle to leave, the Pakistan Cultural Counselor – we had been sitting together – said, “Oh, Donald, is this your first time?”

“Yes.”

He said, “Well, I guess you’re learning that we South Asians have many virtues, but brevity is not one.”

Once you get used to it, it’s fun.

*Q: Before we close out this session, can you tell us what your wife was doing?*

BISHOP: Before we had gone out to Dhaka, she was able to take the long Consular Course at FSI, anticipating work in the Consular Section. There was no opening for a year, but eventually she was hired on as a Consular Associate.

These were the days when Consular Associates could do just about anything. Her main work was on the visa line, interviewing candidates and deciding whether to issue or deny. She became known as “Window Number 2” to the applicants. More specifically, the local visa agents who helped prepare applications and coach the applicants for their interviews called her “the Chinese lady at Window Number 2.”

The inspectors praised her for judging cases on their merits -- or perhaps more often on their lack of merit. But the Foreign Ministry called in Nancy Powell one day to protest the high refusal rate by “the Chinese lady at Window Number 2.” Whenever the Ministry person said “the Chinese lady,” Nancy said “you mean the American lady.” Let’s say that in our book, Nancy is one of the greats.

With a little more experience, Consular Section chief David Dreher put her on all kinds of tasks. In the early years of the Diversity Visa, the program was full of holes, and Jemma interviewed many of the “winners,” or those impersonating “winners,” or those “winners” that showed up for the interview with more children than they had listed on their application, or those “winners” presenting fake education credentials because a high school diploma was a condition of issuance.

This led her into fraud work, and she became a member of the foreign missions’ anti-fraud working group. Women from Brooklyn were coming to Bangladesh on vacation, where they were swept away by, fell in love with, local farmers from one of the char islands in the delta. The new husbands came to the Embassy to get immigration visas. This eventually became a federal

case when some stateside investigation confirmed the suspicions. There was a dishonest Brooklyn lawyer arranging the travel by the American women to meet the Bangladeshi farmers.

For me, this was broadening. My generation of USIA officers had never worked in a consular section, so I learned a lot about consular work over the dinner table.

*Q: OK. Well, I guess it's a good place to stop.*

BISHOP: OK.

**DONALD A. CAMP**  
**Pakistan / Afghanistan / Bangladesh Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1995-1998)**

*Donald Camp was born in New York in 1948. He received his BA from Carleton College and an ND from University of Chicago. He joined the Foreign Service in 1974. His overseas assignments include Colombo, Bridgetown, Beijing, Chengdu, and Kathmandu. His sister, Beatrice Camp, is also a Foreign Service Officer. Mr. Camp was interviewed by David Reuther in 2012.*

*Q: Now, out of that assignment you come back to Washington. How did you get the assignment in the South Asia Bureau on the Pakistan-Bangladesh-Afghanistan Desk?*

CAMP: Well, the State Department made me a China hand, and I'm very happy for that, but I'd come into the Foreign Service intending to make a career around South Asia. And so I was eager to go back and use some of what I'd learned in a management position in the South Asia Bureau. The job there as the Deputy Director of the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Bangladesh Desk was a new part of the region for me. But I wanted to reestablish South Asian credentials.

*Q: Let's look at the organization of the South Asia Bureau and then the Desk. Who is the Assistant Secretary and who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary that would have been responsible for your area?*

CAMP: The Assistant Secretary was Robin Raphel and the only Deputy Assistant Secretary was Gib Lanpher. Robin was an area specialist who'd served in Islamabad and Delhi. Gib was new to the region, but an old friend. He'd been my CDO (Career Development Officer) when I came into the Foreign Service, and had assigned me to Chinese language. SA was a very small bureau, recently established, just getting its feet wet. It had two Regional Offices: India/Nepal/Sri Lanka/Bhutan/Maldives, and Pakistan/Afghanistan/Bangladesh. They had six officers each. The bureau had a Regional Affairs Office that was about the same size. So it was a tiny bureau and frankly not very influential in the building. It was a new upstart that had just been pulled out of NEA a few years earlier by congressional mandate.

*Q: Now, when you're Deputy Director did you have a desk portfolio or were you exclusively a*



*manager?*

CAMP: The Director at the time was Lee Coldren. Lee was an expert in the region. He asked me to be the backup for all of the Desk Officers. We had two people for Pakistan, one for Afghanistan, one for Bangladesh. So I had to know all the countries, but I was supervising the Desk Officers and managing the office. Let me say a little bit about our priorities at the time. Afghanistan at this point was in a fair amount of turmoil. We were coming to the end game of the Soviet invasion. We had the special envoy to the Afghan mujahedeen Peter Tomsen. Our Afghan Desk Officers were not normal desk officers; we didn't have a mission in Kabul and the officers had to work with both SA and with Tomsen's independent office. They worked closely with our consulate in Peshawar, which had been our main window on Afghanistan after our embassy had closed.

Pakistan was still in the policy deep freeze dating to our sanctioning them under the Pressler Amendment when we could no longer certify that they were not building a nuclear weapon. We had to cut off assistance and our valuable relationship with the military establishment. So we had a very limited relationship with them.

And Bangladesh never got the attention it deserved. It's one of the largest country in the world. But in South Asia, we had India, we had Pakistan, we had Afghanistan, so we had other priorities. Bangladesh was a country that was developing quietly on its own and we had a good relationship with them, centered around our assistance program.

*Q: Tell us a little more about the Pakistan deep freeze.*

CAMP: We'd had a very close relationship with the Pakistani military, which for years had been what was called the iron frame of Pakistan. We had an active IMET (International Military Education and Training) program, we had an active sales program. That all ended after 1989. So we had no contact with the Pakistani military for 12 years and we're paying for that now, I think.

*Q: No contact means the other guy's stereotypes really begin to take a hold on his mind.*

CAMP: Yes. And the US had benefited for years from a positive image in Pakistan. Their senior military had all had at least some professional training in the US. Pervez Musharraf, the Chief of Army Staff who became President, went to our Command and General Staff College earlier. But he also went to China for training. And in the decade of the '90s officers went to China rather than the United States. There was still a British program, so some would go to Sandhurst. But Pakistan was not getting any of the training we'd provided through IMET.

*Q: You would have worked with the embassies here in Washington. How did the Pakistan Embassy look to you? Did they understand what their problem was?*

CAMP: Pakistan has always had pretty good missions here, very professional. Often a political ambassador, but very savvy. In that era, we had a woman by the name of Maliha Lodhi, who was a former journalist, very well plugged in in Islamabad and very effective at cultivating official Washington, including the State Department. She did as good a job as she could, but she was

facing a relationship that was really dead in the water because of the Pressler Amendment. One of the interesting problems created by the Pressler Amendment, which Maliha Lodhi and we helped resolve in the mid-'90s, was the sale of F-16s to Pakistan. Pakistan had been paying on a regular basis for F-16s, which were being built down in Fort Worth, and when the Pressler Amendment hit we told them, "Sorry, you're not going to get these planes, at least during the duration of the Pressler Amendment."

And they said, "But we've already paid (hundreds of millions of dollars). Can we have our money back?"

"No, I'm sorry, that was paid to Lockheed -- we have no way of getting that back for you."

So Pakistan was stuck. No planes, no money. During the sanctions period, they kept paying Lockheed regularly in the expectation that they would eventually get those planes. And then we also hit them with storage fees, because they were being stored at the aviation boneyard in the Arizona desert. So Pakistan felt really put upon. They really, really wanted those F-16s. But by the mid-'90s they came to realize that they were not going to get those planes, so they wanted their money. And we had no way to provide that money. We didn't have assistance programs that we could have used because of the Pressler Amendment. So we had to develop a very sort of creative way, that was not totally satisfactory from the point of view of Pakistan. As I recall, we used one of the few forms of assistance that was available to us, which was PL-480 money, and we provided wheat and other items and waived the payment. And therefore, they eventually got much of their money back from their payments from their F-16s. It was not a satisfactory situation, but we were doing our best. Ambassador Lodhi was doing her best to find a way to work this through Congress to get money back to the rather straitened Pakistani Treasury.

*Q: And how would you characterize the Bangladesh Embassy?*

CAMP: Bangladesh did not have as strong an embassy as the Pakistanis. I don't think they had as well developed a diplomatic corps. We didn't have many big bilateral issues. The issues that loomed large then included an AFL-CIO challenge to Bangladeshi labor laws. Bangladesh was just beginning its garment industry which was a big employer. But they had exclusive economic zones in which labor rights were severely restricted. So the AFL-CIO brought a case against them to cut off their GSP (Generalized System of Preferences) privileges. And Bangladesh had to make the case that they were providing full labor rights to workers in the export control zones. The other thing that we worked on with moderate success (and it wasn't in our ability to fix it) was the shaky India-Bangladesh relationship. At the time, India was in desperate need of energy. We were interested in helping Bangladesh develop. And Bangladesh had enormous reserves of natural gas. So we asked the U.S. Geological Service to do a survey of Bangladesh's natural gas reserves with the goal of demonstrating to the Bangladesh government that they could take care of their own needs and also sell to India, which they were hesitant to do. The survey showed, just as we hoped, that the reserves were enough to satisfy Bangladesh's needs for many years as well as provide a surplus for India. But because of political problems, the long term deals were not made and the gases just sit in the ground in Bangladesh. We were also unsuccessful at getting the Bangladeshis to allow cargo transit rights from Chittagong Port up to the far north-eastern provinces of India. There was too much distrust at that point between Dhaka and Delhi. I'm not

sure why we were carrying Delhi's water on these two issues (energy and transit rights) except that on both Bangladesh stood to benefit economically. Unfortunately, Dhaka's destructive politics of personality between the two political leaders Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, meant that the government was not going to do the right thing.

*Q: The Pakistanis had elections in 1996 and Benazir Bhutto lost that election.*

CAMP: Pakistan has had a long tradition of alternating between military rule and civilian rule. There was a period of about eight years in the 1990s when Pakistan had a modicum of civilian rule and could not make a go of it for a variety of reasons, including poor performance by the two political leaders. Benazir was the most prominent politician. Despite her popularity abroad, she was not a very popular or successful Prime Minister. She had a major problem with her husband, Asif Zardari, who was famously known as Mr. Ten Percent because of the corruption in that period. He was later President of Pakistan as a legacy of Benazir's assassination. So it was not a very positive era for Pakistani democracy. Nawaz Sharif, of the Pakistan Muslim League, elected in 1996 also made a botch of it, in particular by trying to consolidate all state power in his own hands. He was so hated by the Pakistani elite that even some of the most dedicated of democrats were calling for the military to step in. And he was overthrown by General Pervez Musharraf in 1998.

*Q: In the same time frame, the Taliban is expanding its influence in Afghanistan assisted by the Pakistani ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). Did that slowly come to your attention at the Desk?*

CAMP: It certainly did. In the period 1995 to '98, the Taliban was on a roll, expanding from its Pashtun base in the south to Herat and Kabul and then they marched north and basically occupied most of the country, except for the area that the Northern Alliance had always controlled. My boss, Robin Raphel, has since been attacked unfairly for being too willing to deal with the Taliban. In the late 1990s, the Taliban were becoming the de facto government of Afghanistan. We never recognized them. Only three countries did -- Pakistan, UAE (United Arab Emirates), and Saudi Arabia. But we made the decision that if they were going to be in charge we needed to at least talk to them. I was sent out on one such trip in 1997, I believe, starting in Peshawar. I picked up the Consul General in Peshawar, Brad Hanson. He was the Afghan expert. I was the policy guy/novice from Washington. We went to Kandahar, and Kabul, and Mazar-i-Sharif and Sheberghan in the north. It was quite an interesting trip.

The purpose of the visit was to reiterate our message to the Taliban: "Give up Osama bin Laden, his presence in Afghanistan is unacceptable. He is under your protection. That is our major issue with you." And implicitly, "We can do business with you, Taliban, but you've got to give up bin Laden to us." In the retrospect, I think this was the right message. But of course we never succeeded. The message was subsequently sharpened by people more senior than I to "Give up bin Laden; whatever bin Laden does while he is your guest in Afghanistan you will be held responsible for." It was very pointed and unfortunately, very prescient.

So Brad and I ventured to Kandahar, which was the spiritual heart of the Taliban. The most senior meeting we had was with the Central Bank Chief there. They were very polite in response to my message and they used the same language they used with everyone else: "The Pashtuns

have a tradition of hospitality; he will not do anything to harm you, but he is a guest in our land. We could not ask him to leave.” It was totally unsatisfactory, but that was the message.

We went up to Kabul where I delivered the same message at the Taliban Foreign Ministry. And then I went over to our embassy, which had been empty for years, but which was still guarded by a minimal Afghan staff that had stuck with us. Brad Hanson from Peshawar brought along their salary to disburse. It was very difficult to pay by any other means than direct cash transfer, so he would come up periodically. It was very emotional to meet these people who had stayed on through all the tough years as our embassy’s locally-employed staff. After our embassy reopened, after 9/11, one of the employees was named Foreign Service National of the year and flown to Washington to receive recognition.

After Kabul, we flew north on a plane operated by the resident UN mission, which was the only means of transportation within Afghanistan in those days. They had a few fixed-wing planes and flew on a scheduled basis between their operations in the major cities of Afghanistan. We flew from Kabul to Mazar-i-Sharif over the magnificent Hindu Kush and then rented a car to drive through northern Afghanistan to Sheberghan, which was the redoubt of one of the warlords, Dostum, who’s an Afghan of Uzbek ethnicity. That visit was to check in on one of the few remaining non-Taliban leaders in Afghanistan. He was very much the tough warlord. He’d been a communist during the times of the Soviet invasion. He changed his stripes as quickly as anyone, but he was the leader of the Uzbek community. He had a weird palace up in Sheberghan that someone compared to a red velvet brothel. The interior decoration left something to be desired. But we were received warmly and stayed in his guesthouse and had an audience and a feast with General Dostum. He told us of his intention of keeping the Taliban out of his area of NW Afghanistan but at that point he couldn’t provide any help or leverage in getting the Taliban to give up Bin Laden.

The Taliban, I’ll say for the historical record, at least back in the ‘90s had no interest in picking a fight with us. They were domestically oriented, they were terrible on human rights, they were terrible toward women, but they just wanted to take care of Afghanistan and forget about the rest of the world. Their sin -- and it was a major one -- was harboring bin Laden and not realizing or not accepting what he was up to.

*Q: One of the neighbors nearby is Iran. How is the Desk looking at Iranian influence over Afghanistan, Pakistan?*

CAMP: I tend to think that we also go through cycles in U.S. foreign policy on how do we deal with Iran. They’ve been in the deep freeze since 1979, obviously. But we accepted at the time, as we were dealing with the Taliban, that Iran had a legitimate interest in the future of Afghanistan. And we tended to talk to them through other channels, primarily the Swiss, about Afghanistan. There was an attempt to create a structure to deal with Afghanistan at the time. It was called the “Six Plus Two,” which was the six border countries of Afghanistan, plus the United States and Russia. And so we sat down with Iran in that Six Plus Two forum. And in fact, the Iranians, for sectarian reasons because the Taliban were strong Sunnis, had very little incentive to work with the Taliban in the first place. So we were in the same place on the Taliban in those days. Things changed later. But in those days it was the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

*Q: Now, getting back to Pakistan, one of the things that was evolving was the rise of fundamentalism. Pakistan had basically been a fairly secular educated and structured society. Did you see that during your period?*

CAMP: Yes, although to a more limited extent than has occurred since. President Zia-ul-Haq had introduced Islam in a major way into the army. Where the army had previously been proudly secular, it now was becoming more fundamentalist. The officer ranks still in those days came from the westernized elite of Pakistan and was not particularly fundamentalist. That has changed as the society changed. The Islamist parties in Pakistan in those days could turn out a demonstration at a moment's notice and bring people out on the streets. But they never got more than 10% of the vote in elections. In the mid-'90s, we were aware that fundamentalism was a growing issue, but it had not become the problem that it did subsequently. What one did see, and it was rather discouraging as an American diplomat, was a change from the days when America enjoyed a very positive image in Pakistan. Famously, the trucks would have F-16s and other symbols of U.S.-Pakistan friendship painted on them. But our cutting off of aid during the '65 Indo-Pakistani war and later our denial of the F-16s created the sense that America, as a Pakistani would say, is a fair-weather friend. That distrust has grown over the years.

*Q: Were we concerned at all by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Agency and its activities?*

CAMP: The CIA had had a longstanding relationship with ISI dating back to the Jihad against the Soviets. In the mid-90s, there was still some unwillingness -- even in the face of the intelligence -- to believe the worst about the ISI. Certainly everything they were doing in Kashmir at the time was a serious problem, and we were quick to jump on it when we could find out about it. Our main concern with ISI was their activities in Kashmir and their attempt to stir up trouble there.

*Q: Now, you just mentioned one of the great issues in South Asia is Kashmir. You're watching from the Pakistan side of it. How does the U.S. look at Kashmir and the Pakistani and Indian claims?*

CAMP: We are really careful about how we approach the Kashmir question, and we've had basically the same policy for years. The mantra is that Kashmir is an issue that needs to be resolved between India and Pakistan, taking into account the interests of the people of Kashmir.

*Q: We don't do borders.*

CAMP: We don't do borders (*laughs*). But we have periodically over the years, starting way back in the '50s, attempted to help in a hopefully productive, and sometimes ham-fisted way, to get India and Pakistan to resolve this because it's the source of so much of the problem of South Asia. The fact that India and Pakistan have this border dispute is so poisonous that it has held back Pakistani development over the years, it's kept India and Pakistan from developing a productive trade relationship, and a productive bilateral relationship of all kinds. India would prefer that we butt out, although they've been nicer about it in recent years. Pakistan has always

thought it was in their interest to enlist our support to help with bigger India to try to find a settlement that they -- that would redound to their benefit. But we've pretty much had the same policy status quo since 1947.

*Q: Now, there was some point in which the conflict went from national armies facing off to private terrorists being encouraged to do nasty things back and forth. Where was that process in the time that you were on the desk to '98?*

CAMP: At that point the ISI was quite active in training irregulars, in encouraging intrusions across the line of control, and causing problems on the Indian side of the Line of Control. We would often tell the Pakistanis that this was unacceptable and dangerous and deleterious to their interests as well regional security interests. But they were having none of it. This was part of their national plan. We always thought that it risked a serious crisis with India. Toward the end of my stint on the Pakistan Desk, this became even more of a crisis because both India and Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in May of 1998. We're going to get to that, a whole different story. But at that point it became a potential nuclear conflict.

*Q: As you say, let's get into that a little bit later. But in the summer of '97, the South Asia Bureau turns over in the Front Office. Robin Raphael leaves, Rick Inderfurth comes in. Did the management style or policy emphasis change with that?*

CAMP: Assistant Secretaries of the South Asia Bureau always try quite properly to avoid being seen as a partisan of any country other than the United States. Unfortunately, countries make their own decisions as to what they think the perceived biases of these people are. And Robin Raphael quite unfairly, despite having served in Delhi as Political Counselor, was perceived by the Indians as something of a partisan to Pakistan. The perception dated to a statement that she once made about the status of Kashmir that was blown up out of proportion. But Rick Inderfurth came in with a clean slate, without that kind of perception. He came in without a lot of South Asian experience. He was a political appointee and a good one. But he had to learn South Asia on the job.

*Q: One thing I want to explore, you were saying earlier that you didn't think South Asia as a bureau had a lot of clout in the department. What does that mean?*

CAMP: I would put it in terms of resources, first and foremost. We were shortchanged in people, we were shortchanged in funding. There were crises in the Middle East, there were crises in Africa. We didn't get the help we needed. There were two full-time India desk officers. I'd come from East Asia where the China desk was 15 people or so. So resources were out of whack and it took us a long time. 9/11 made a big difference. But before then we were very limited in assistance funding, management funding, personnel, et cetera.

*Q: The next major event while you're on the Pakistani Desk is that on May 11, 1998 India conducts a nuclear test. At the same time, you have this Kashmir tension. So that must have really riled the waters.*

CAMP: It was a great shock. And before we get to the geo-strategic and regional implications,

it's worth saying that we were caught flat-footed about India's intentions. And we shouldn't have been. The Congress Party had lost an election a few months earlier to the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). And part of the BJP's manifesto had been pursuing India's nuclear weapon program. But, because India had not tested a nuclear device since 1974, our intelligence agencies and the rest of us didn't take it as seriously as we should have. On May 11, 1998, I was sitting in the morning staff meeting chaired by Assistant Secretary Inderfurth. At about 8:45, the Staff Assistant came in and said, "Sorry to interrupt, but CNN is reporting that India has just exploded a nuclear device."

Rick Inderfurth said, "Get our Ambassador in Delhi on the phone." That was Dick Celeste. And he had just come from a meeting at the Foreign Ministry where this had been explained to him, that India had taken this step and the rationale behind it. The CIA was caught flat-footed, the embassy was caught flat-footed. The Indians had been very good at keeping the secret. They carried out tests on May 11<sup>th</sup> and more on May 13<sup>th</sup>. The consequences for India-U.S. relations were immediate. US law requires a cutoff of all U.S. assistance when a nation undertakes a nuclear test. The other thing that the American foreign policy machinery immediately put into force was an effort to prevent yet another horse coming out of the barn, and that is Pakistan, which everybody knew had nuclear capability but had never demonstrated it. Strobe Talbott was the Deputy Secretary of State at the time and had taken special responsibility for the South Asia portion of the world and it was decided that he would immediately travel to Islamabad to try to convince the Pakistanis not to respond. The first problem was to get an invitation from Pakistan for this trip. They did not particularly want to see Strobe Talbott because they knew exactly what he was going to say to them and knew that he would put on whatever American pressure could be brought to bear. Strobe was a man of action. We did not have the full go-ahead from Islamabad, but we assumed it would be forthcoming. So Strobe, accompanied by Inderfurth, Bruce Riedel from the NSC and myself from the Pakistan Desk, set out for Tampa, where General Tony Zinni, who was then the Commander of CENTCOM, had arranged a plane to get us out to Pakistan as fast as the U.S. military could. When we reached Tampa, we realized we couldn't get any further without an invitation from the government of Pakistan.

Rick got on the phone to our ambassador in Islamabad and to the Foreign Ministry, but to no avail. Finally, Zinni called the Chief of Army Staff, Jehangir Karamat and said, "We need to come. Make this possible, make this happen." I think it was the military connection that did it. Karamat gave his OK and so therefore did Nawaz Sharif, who was the Prime Minister at the time. We took off in Tony Zinni's personal plane which was as I recall, a rather aging 707 military variant, but it had a very important capability. It could be refueled in flight. So we flew nonstop from Tampa to Islamabad with two in-flight refuelings, which were amazing to behold. The military's capabilities are tremendous. We landed in Islamabad with a schedule of high-level appointments to try and convince the Pakistanis to hold off testing a nuclear weapon. This was a long shot from the beginning. Strobe Talbott has written of this visit ("Engaging India") and I can't add much to that. The Foreign Ministry was dismissive, Karamat was politely dismissive, and Prime Minister Sharif was conflicted and probably worried more about his army (which controlled the nuclear stockpile) than the Americans. The Pakistanis made pretty clear to us that they were not the slightest bit interested in making a deal. They didn't say they were going to test but we were not surprised when they did so on May 26<sup>th</sup>. So Pakistan was now also the target of our sanctions. Their aid had already been cutoff, but we had other tools as well. We had

something called the “Entity List” which was a list of companies who were effectively denied access to any exports on the Commerce Department’s export control list. We had innumerable committee meetings in subsequent weeks to establish companies in India and Pakistan that had sufficient connection to the defense establishment that we needed to place them on this list. The goal was punitive as much as a lever to encourage them to reverse their nuclear weapons program.

Looking at the nuclear tests in retrospect, Pakistan was inevitably going to respond once India tested. And in a sense, India made a mistake with those tests in May 1998. Because for the first time, they created an equality that hadn’t existed between the countries. India had always had an overwhelming superiority in conventional munitions. That played itself out in the 1965 and 1971 wars. When it became a nuclear standoff, frankly you’ve got mutually assured destruction. And you had an equality between India and Pakistan and I think it affected the way those two countries have looked at each other and interacted ever since. They’re more cautious, because Pakistan now has the means, if they should ever, heaven forbid, exercise it, to destroy the major cities of India. So pre-1998, they were the weaker power. Now in many ways they’re militarily equal.

**STEPHEN EISENBRAUN**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Dhaka (1996-1998)**

*Mr. Eisenbraun was born in central Iowa in 1947 and graduated from the University of Northern Iowa and SAIS. He served in Dhaka, Lahore, Freetown and Mombasa. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

EISENBRAUN: In the summer of '96 I went out to Bangladesh as the political counselor, back to where I had started in the Foreign Service. I had been the junior political officer in 1976 and now I went as the senior political officer in 1996, a 20-year gap.

*Q: You were there from '96 to when?*

EISENBRAUN: '96 to '98.

*Q: What was the situation in Bangladesh when you got out there?*

EISENBRAUN: It was fascinating. Politically, I had paid attention to what Bangladesh had been going through in those 20 years, but I was not prepared for all the changes I found. If anyone listening to this or reading it wants to go back and look at what I said about 1975 and the assassination of the first president of Bangladesh, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, that's relevant to 1996 because, after his political party, the Awami League, had been discredited in the 1970s, it had a rebirth, and Mujib’s daughter had just been elected to lead the government as Prime Minister. The daughter, Sheikh Hasina, had just defeated Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of General Zia



who had created his own party, the Bangladesh National Party, which I was fortunate to observe in 1978 and have recounted in these memoirs.

As I've said, after Sheikh Mujib's assassination in 1975, the Awami League had been discredited, and it was hardly a factor in Bangladesh politics for years. The only member of the family to escape the assassination in 1975 was Sheikh Hasina; she had been out of the country or she would have been dead too. When I arrived in July of 1996, she had just been elected prime minister in an open, free and fair election, according to international observers. I arrived maybe ten days or so after she had taken power. It was a peaceful transfer of power, which was in itself a remarkable thing in Bangladesh's unstable political history.

For all of her adult life, Sheikh Hasina has believed that the United States either had a hand in the assassination of her father or had known about the coming assassination and had done nothing to warn him. So she held a strong grudge against the United States. I went through this history from my perspective in an earlier tape, and as I recounted, I knew that we had warned Sheikh Mujib that his assassination was imminent and he had brushed us off. We had played no role, of course, in the assassination. When I got to Bangladesh in '96, all of that bureaucratic history had been lost to the embassy and to the desk. The people who dealt with the issues in 1975 had either retired or died, and those working on the issues in 1996 were, naturally, just reacting to what they were presented with at the moment.

The Ambassador at the time, David Merrill, an AID official in his past assignments, was a very vigorous, active, skillful and personable individual who liked Bangladeshis and who got quite involved in their political concerns. Merrill wanted to know the historical background once he discovered I knew something about it, and that background came to the fore once Sheikh Hasina settled in, because she went after the killers of her father, some of whom were in the US.

All those responsible for the murders had gone scott free. They had come from the army, were mid-level officers, and most had after dismissal from the army had been sent off on diplomatic assignments in order to get them out of the country. Twenty years later a few were living back in Dhaka, the capital, prosperous and happy, while a few were suspected of living in the United States.

Sheikh Hasina made no bones about it; all these people were going to be brought to justice. And that meant coming to the United States and having to work with us to get these people extradited. But we had no extradition treaty with Bangladesh. She couldn't believe that if she identified who these people were we couldn't just pluck them out and send them back for justice. But it wasn't that simple. In fact, it involved a lot of not only legalities but human rights concerns as well because the Bangladesh legal system and penal system was pretty rough and there was the issue of whether they would be mistreated in custody. Mistreated is a rather bland term—we feared they would be tortured, both as revenge and for confessions. It didn't help her cause that she arrested a few of those living in Dhaka, and we heard that they were abused in custody. It didn't take too many months for Sheikh Hasina to wise up and improve the treatment of those accused, but the damage had been done politically.

Ambassador Merrill was fully with Sheikh Hasina in her quest. He sat with me one evening and said, now just imagine if we've figured out that Lee Harvey Oswald had worked with others in the Kennedy assassination, and we learned that they were living openly in Bangladesh. Wouldn't we expect the Bangladesh Government to cooperate fully in our efforts to get them back to the States for a trial? When the issue first came up, he dedicated himself to getting them back. I don't think any of them from the States have been sent back to Bangladesh to this day, however.

This was a time, 1996, when the investment banks in America and elsewhere were looking at emerging markets around the world as the next big thing, and they came, along with other American companies, to explore the Bangladesh market. The textile industry that had developed entirely in the years of my absence served as a model. The Koreans had had the foresight to invest in Bangladeshi workers, mainly women, to assemble garments for export. The Koreans had created what became a multi-billion dollar industry.

There was also a considerable volume of natural gas discovered in Bangladesh in my absence. While there had been some minor development in my earlier tenure, it was discovered that Bangladesh was floating on a sea of gas, the same fields that run through Thailand and Malaysia, and they were ready for development. Foreign—and US—companies were in country investigating when I arrived. They all wanted to develop the gas for export, especially to India, but the government was unwilling to go that route. Nevertheless, the government had divided the country into blocks and invited international companies to bid for development rights.

Bangladesh was an emerging democracy, there was perhaps the possibility of investments of one kind or another, and American companies were coming to look. It was a pretty interesting era. The country's infrastructure was falling apart and they needed power plants badly; if they could be gas-fired, all the better, and there was a huge market over in India. The sky seemed to be the limit. The most vigorous of the proponents of Bangladeshi exports of gas to India was Frank Wisner, the American Ambassador in New Delhi, and a Foreign Service Officer who had served in Bangladesh in 1972-74 as political counselor. David Merrell worked with Wisner to encourage this prospect, but the message fell on deaf ears in Dhaka. I think that Wisner created so much fuss over this issue that the Bangladeshis simply dug in their heels more firmly.

I went out as political consular, but they decided that they would merge political and economic reporting and so I became the political-economic counselor. There was no foreign commercial service in Dhaka, so it turned out that most of my work had to do with commercial matters, particularly dealing with oil and gas companies.

*Q: How responsive was this new Bangladesh government to foreign capital coming in?*

EISENBRAUN: They weren't very responsive. While the Bangladeshis are enormously friendly and hospitable people and would meet the representatives for talk and tea, nothing would happen. Proposals would be made and then languish in various ministries. This is the traditional Bangladesh way of doing things. There was complicated bureaucracy, much corruption, and little vision of what could help the country.

The embassy did everything it could. In fact, the embassy became a business consultant to all these companies because the Ambassador and the DCM knew the major players in the government and the private sector. We made quite an effort to understand the decision-making process within the government, and advised the American companies accordingly.

The first week I was there, Congressman Bill Richardson came on one of his visits. His purpose was to free an American girl who had been detained a year or two earlier on possession of drugs found or suspected, I don't remember which, when she was in country. There were extenuating circumstances I cannot recall, but they were sufficiently compelling to bring Richardson out on a humanitarian mission, which was one of his specialties while he was in Congress.

Once it was clear the American was to be released, Ambassador Merrill took Richardson to meet the Prime Minister. I accompanied. Merrell started the meeting by introducing me to the Prime Minister, saying, Eisenbraun speaks Bengali. Well, he hadn't heard me speak a word of Bengali and was taking my word for it. Luckily, I had gone out to FSI and had a little refresher in the weeks preceding my arrival, but my Bengali was no more than social chitchat after twenty years of nonuse. In Bengali, the prime minister said to me, oh, how is it that you know Bengali? And I replied in Bengali, because I lived here 20 years ago when I was also posted at the American embassy. Oh, she continued, have you come with your family? I replied, yes, my wife is here with me, plus two of my three children. Anyone who's taken the FSI language program will recognize this dialogue, standard stuff in lesson one. It went on. She asked, how do you find Bangladesh? Do you like it here? Oh, I like it very much, it's very beautiful. And do you see anything different? Oh yes, there are many more people and the big buildings and the wide streets. I could knock this off as if I were a native speaker, because I knew my accent was pretty good. I was at the end of my easy ability to show off, however, and fortunately, Sheikh Hasina ended her dialogue by saying, we're glad you're here.

All this time, Bill Richardson, Merrill and the Foreign Minister were twiddling their thumbs. Afterwards, Richardson volunteered to me that it sounded good, at least. This exchange paid off at the Foreign Ministry later, because it was referred to favorably in the next two years by some of the other officials in attendance that day.

*Q: During your time there, were you able to say look, I was around at the time of the assassination and I happen to know there wasn't an American hand involved?*

EISENBRAUN: The occasion didn't present itself often, but I did recount the story to the number two at the foreign ministry, the state minister, and we subsequently became pretty good friends, but not because of that story. In fact, though, where my experience really helped was with the opposition, the BNP.

If people check the earlier portion of this account, they will find my story of the birth of the BNP in 1978. You may recall I had been involved in clandestine meetings down in the old city when General Zia at that time planned to establish a political party. He brought these disparate elements together from the left and the right; the mullahs on one side and the leftists on the other, to advise him. I was being briefed about the secret meetings by an elderly politician who later became the senior minister in Zia's first cabinet.

I was sitting at the Ambassador's dinner table in my first weeks, and I was seated next to the main opposition whip in the parliament, Khandakar Delwar Hossain, a senior member of the BNP. He was an older man I thought would appreciate the story, so I related it to him. Delwar Hossain sat there quietly and just listened. I probably monopolized him for 20 or 30 minutes. When I got done, he just said, that's the way it was. You're right. He didn't correct me on anything. He added, I can't believe you know that history.

He must have told other people because eventually I had what seemed an easy entrée to almost everyone in the BNP, with the exception of the former finance minister. For some reason, I never had any relationship with him. Otherwise, everybody was accessible and friendly.

Q: Well, the BNP was-

EISENBRAUN: The major opposition party.

Q: Well, what did this do to your relationship with, what was it called, the Awami League?

EISENBRAUN: Awami League. It didn't seem to make any difference for 18 months or so, but in the last six months it caused problems. In the spring of 1998, there was a violent incident in the port city of Chittagong in which two prominent members of the BNP were accused of murder because one or more people died in an anti-government demonstration. There was reason to believe that the charges were trumped up by the government. Whatever the case was, the two individuals, Morshed Khan and Salauddin Qadar Choudhury, went into hiding for a few days. While hiding out, they called me several times on cell phones, both at home and at the office, to keep me posted. I listened to their stories, wondering why they were using their phones, especially when it was suspected that the American phones would have been routinely tapped. Now, I think I have figured it out: they wanted the government to know that the Americans were in the picture.

I reported this all to the Ambassador, now John Holzman, and to Washington. A few days later, the Ambassador was called to see the foreign secretary without have been told a reason.

The foreign secretary told the Ambassador that the purpose of the meeting was to complain about the political counselor, Eisenbraun, for getting too close with some members of the opposition, the BNP. They wanted me to stand down. As he related to me later, the Ambassador replied that I had associations with BNP leaders on his orders because that's what the embassy does; it tries to befriend all political figures in the country. He also pointed out that I had a close working relationship with his very own State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abul Hasan "Kaiser" Chowdhury. According to Holzman, that was the end of the meeting. He told to carry on as before.

In the meantime, both politicians came out of hiding, got good lawyers, and nothing has ever come of those two cases. Today, Morshed Khan is Foreign Minister.

It was true that I had developed a good friendship and a mutually useful working relationship with Kaiser Chowdhury, the number two at the Foreign Ministry. In a gesture of kindness one time, he arranged that I be invited to a function when Prime Minister Gujral of India and Prime Minister Nawaz Shariff of Pakistan were in Dhaka for a regional summit. Kaiser did this without any prompt from me because he knew I had been friendly with Shariff in my Lahore days, when he was a businessman and had not yet entered politics.

In my first year, that is, the fall of 1996, one of the first new American investments in the emerging gas sector took place. Halliburton, Dick Cheney's company, got the contract to build an underwater gas pipeline from the Bay of Bengal to the mainland. Cheney himself came out to Dhaka in the autumn to try to persuade the Prime Minister to sign off on the deal, as it seemed stalled. Nothing happened as an immediate result of his visit.

In the weeks afterward, Ambassador Merrill was talking with the special assistant to the prime minister, and this fellow, quite a skilled operator himself with a close relationship with Sheikh Hasina, said the Halliburton papers had all lower-level clearances from the various ministries, but he was holding the file and was uncertain whether to put it in front of the PM. Merrill said, do it, now or never. This is important, it will help Bangladesh, there is no downside. Merrill told me this personally. The file went in to the PM, who signed it. Halliburton got its deal because of a savvy and well-connected American Ambassador.

Dick Cheney came out to Bangladesh in his corporate jet twice; as I remember. So did a lot of other major American businessmen, including the Vice Chairman of Chevron. We took care of them all, but none so much as Cheney. The DCM held weekly Cheney-watch meetings in the fall to make sure every detail was in place for his visit, including an elegant, expensively catered dinner at the Ambassador's residence. No detail was left to chance.

If it hadn't been for David Merrell, Halliburton's contract may never have been signed. That's not the end of the story.

David Merrell was soon thereafter offered a job with Halliburton, and he took it. He was up for retirement, so he decided to accept the Halliburton offer to be in charge of business development for Southeast Asia, including Bangladesh. He assured us that he had worked closely with L (the legal affairs bureau) to make certain that everything was done in accordance with the Department's ethics requirements.

*Q: Well now, was it your impression that this special treatment for Halliburton was because it had to do with Dick Cheney?*

EISENBRAUN: Yes. I expect the embassy front office would say it was because it was a high profile American contract and they would have done the same thing for any businessman. I believe that they would have, but all the other trimmings, that is, the expensive dinner, the high-priced wine, the catering, getting the clearances for the plane, the weekly meetings; all that was because it was Dick Cheney. It didn't happen when other high ranking corporate officials flew in on their private planes.

Let's move on. The Ambassador left Dhaka about the first of June, 1997, and then the DCM moved on too. It's very unusual in the Foreign Service to have both people in the front office leave at the same time. I went back to the States on R & R also in June. When I returned to Dhaka, a new fellow had come to post as DCM/Chargé d'Affaires, Ted Nist, a nice guy with an open mind and a desire to do things right. Ted was Chargé until the latter part of September, when the new Ambassador, John Holzman, arrived. Nist was new to South Asia. He was as fresh as could be to the intrigues of Bangladesh, but he didn't stay that way for long.

I worked closely with Ted as we grappled with an issue that consumed us suddenly, the natural gas bidding process. The most lucrative of the blocs was coming up for decision-making on the part of the government about who should get the contract to explore for gas. Chevron and Texaco were in the bidding, as was Shell and a small Irish company, Tullow. I knew that Chevron had a bid in for perhaps a half billion dollars to explore for gas, and they were reasonably confident that once the gas was being extracted, they could build a gas-fired electric power plant, and who knows what afterward.

Ron Wahid, an American who ran a consulting firm in Washington, represented Chevron and its bidding process for block nine. Ron introduced himself to me and briefed me on the bidding process, which he knew a lot about, partly because he was well-connected as a result of having grown up in Bangladesh before immigrating to the States as a teenager. Ron was unusual also in that he worked so closely with Chevron's top management. He said, I have information from my own sources in the government that the prime minister is about to make decisions on this most lucrative contract, and it's not likely to be in favor of the Americans; it's going to go to this small Irish company, Tullow, or some combination with Tullow and Shell. And we've got to do something about this, he said, because Chevron has the capital and the technology to do this well, and on paper, our bid is the best. But we're going to be frozen out because of what looks like improper business practices on the part of one of the other competitors.

I briefed Ted on this information and said we need to report this to Washington and make certain State and Commerce both know this, as well as Holzman, preparing to come out to Bangladesh. I knew, however, that we needed to have more specific information on the charges of impropriety. Wahid returned to the embassy a day or two later with some further precise information supporting his conviction that, indeed, decisions were going to be made because of money passing under the table or on some basis other than the merits of the bids. We sent this back to Washington, and I recommended to Ted that we have to show the flag all over town, and go all out to support the American bids on this gas block. We must slow down this decision-making process and get it focused on the merits of the bids.

*Q: This is tape ten, side one with Steve Eisenbraun. Yes.*

EISENBRAUN: So we decided to do everything conceivable to raise the American profile, which is a difficult thing when you don't have an Ambassador in place. We wanted to make sure that everyone in the Bangladesh government up to the prime minister knew that we are advocating on behalf of American interests, which were Chevron and Texaco. I knew also that we had to energize Washington to help us.

We began a campaign. Ted and I went around to the energy minister and his powerful energy secretary, we called on the commerce minister and the officials in Petrobangla, the government oil and gas office, and everyone else we could think of that might be a part of the decision-making process, short of the prime minister herself. We didn't get into the prime minister, but we got to those around her in her secretariat. We sent back urgent messages to Washington that we had to have a letter to the prime minister from a high-ranking official, and Stu Eisenstadt as undersecretary for economic affairs came back with a letter close to the sample we had drafted. A letter from the Secretary of Commerce followed, and I think we got Bill Richardson involved too.

We pulled every string and every rabbit out of every hat we could possibly find to bring pressure to bear on the prime minister and her government that the decision making had to be transparent and had to be according to the best bids on the table. That's all we said, look closely at the financial details of the American bids. According to the figures, Chevron had the best offer with the latest technology behind it. Shell stepped up its efforts to lobby as well, we heard.

We succeeded in stopping the decision-making process. We learned that the prime minister deferred the decision for the time being. That met our immediate objectives, because we wanted to buy enough time for the new Ambassador to get to post and pursue this with all the resources he could bring to bear. Holzman back in Washington, by the way, was following this very closely, though he wasn't in a position yet to make decisions.

It was the work of four of us in the mission, Ted Nist as Chargé, Tim Forsyth and Les Vigerie in the econ/commercial section, and me. We worked long hours, and because we had all this support from Washington, it was very gratifying. I would say this was one of my most rewarding and enjoyable experiences working abroad in the Foreign Service.

The day that John Holzman arrived at post, it looked as though the decision was about to be made on the bidding, and it would not be for the Americans. Literally, we took Holzman from the airport to his residence and we spent about two hours briefing him on developments since he had left Washington a week or so earlier. We said we needed to get his credentials presented as fast as possible so that he could work on this issue, if he agreed, of course. First of all, we had to have his blessing on what we were doing. Holzman was on board a hundred percent. Within a week, he was fully up to speed and giving us instructions. And as soon as he had presented his credentials, he was working the issue too from his unique advantage as Ambassador.

Once again, we kept things from an adverse decision. It wasn't too many weeks later that Shell Oil sent somebody very important out to Bangladesh and requested a meeting with the Ambassador. I was in the meeting, as were most of the others who had worked this issue. The Shell man said, Mr. Ambassador, your embassy has gone overboard. You have advocated too harshly on behalf of American interests. There have been implications that the decisions might be influenced by matters other than the technical and financial merits of the case. We resent this. The American Ambassador replied no way. I'm here to advocate on behalf of American business interests, that's my job. That's why I'm here. I'm sorry you feel that we have gone overboard, but in fact, we're doing everything properly and we are not, in fact, making any accusations of

improper business practices; we want only a transparent decision-making process on the merits of the bids, and we will continue to do this as vigorously as we can.

Holzman was right in that we were careful never to make any accusations of foul play. We had kept our message strictly on target; that is, we wanted decisions made so that the best company got the contract, and we thought that would come down in our favor.

We thought a decision was imminent on block nine in the fall of 1997. It wasn't. I left in the summer of '98 and no decision had been made. A positive decision came through a couple of years later, and Chevron got the rights to explore.

In the spring of 1998, Bill Richardson, then Ambassador at the UN, came out again to Bangladesh. Although I was his control officer and spent a fair amount of time with him and attended most of his meetings, I do not remember the purpose of his visit. It may have been a goodwill stop, as he liked Bangladesh, and they liked him. With good reason: he was about their only high-level advocate in Washington. He was also one of the most laid back, friendly American officials I had ever come in contact with. As you know, he later went on to become Secretary of Energy in the Clinton Administration, and he's now governor of New Mexico. I mention his visit because while he was there, he handed out a Group Superior Honor Award to the Embassy for its work advocating on behalf of American business interests, specifically in the natural gas area.

In that time of busy commercial matters in the fall of 1997, we put together a group of senior Bangladesh business leaders to go to Singapore to meet with American businessmen resident there. The purpose was to encourage American trade with Bangladesh, and in organizing this endeavor, we got excellent help and cooperation from the American Chambers of Commerce in Dhaka and in Singapore, as well as from the American Embassy in Singapore, which allowed us to use their conference facilities. I asked an old friend from the 1970s, Anwar "Manju" Hossain, Minister of Communications, to head the group as the Bangladesh Government representative. It was a useful and enjoyable trip to Singapore, and I know that at least two American businessmen returned later to Dhaka to explore leads developed in the visit. Ironically, it was Manju who perhaps benefited most, as he was able to develop a lead to buy 50 buses for the streets of Dhaka. In appreciation, he took Lorraine and me for an elegant dinner at the Raffles Hotel.

Who could have predicted in the 1970s when I first met Manju that his then-unborn daughter, Anushay, would become best friends with my then-unborn daughter, Annie, as a result of my second posting in Dhaka? In her adjustment to life in Dhaka and her appreciation of the culture of Bangladesh, Annie gives Anushay and her family great credit for opening their home to her and for being so gracious to her, even in the years since we have been away from Bangladesh.

*Q: That is a very nice comment, illustrating the value of follow-on assignments to a country. Well, were there any political developments in this period, or was your work mostly economic?*

EISENBRAUN: In February, the annual human rights reports were published in Washington, and the Ambassador Holzman decided it would be worthwhile to make a big deal of the Bangladesh report locally. It was not a flattering report, as there were many serious abuses going



on, such as the mistreatment of prisoners, threats on the lives of journalists, and the trafficking of women and children. When Holzman suggested to me an embassy press conference, I thought that was a bit forward and said so, but then I allowed that if we used the USIS facility, it might be acceptable. No, he said, I want to do it at the Dhaka press club, on their turf. I said that that might be a rather unpleasant occasion for him, considering the negative report. He said, no, I want you to lead the press conference.

So, quite reluctantly, I went to the Dhaka press club, accompanied by the PAO, John Kincannon, and Henry Jardine, the first-tour political officer who had done all the research for the report. I thought it best not to embarrass the government with any detail about the human rights conditions in Bangladesh. Instead, we planned to keep the topic on the process of how the reports were prepared. Surprisingly, the assembled journalists cooperated in this stance, and the press conference wasn't so unpleasant, and nothing critical was said about Bangladesh specifically. However, excerpts from the report were published in the newspapers the next day. Then a public howl went up about the audacity of the Americans to say such critical things about their country, and I think even the prime minister said some unflattering things about us.

I day or two later, the foreign secretary called the Ambassador in, and I accompanied. Without any opening pleasantries, he read from a prepared text, criticizing the US for such a critical report and castigating us for our ungraciousness in announcing it at the press club. As he went along, I had a sinking feeling that he was leading up to saying that I was no longer welcome in the country. He did not do that, however. In closing out this episode, I think the foreign secretary was right that we should not have used their press club for such an occasion. That's why we have USIS facilities.

About this time, the Ambassador asked that I take the lead with the foreign ministry in negotiating a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) agreement, working with the embassy's Defense Attaché, who would do the same at the Defense Ministry. There were a lot of exercises that our military did with the Bangladesh army, training exercises generally, and disaster preparedness exercises specifically, because typhoons would roar in off the Bay of Bengal and swamp the southern part of the country, leaving thousands homeless on an almost annual basis. The Bangladeshi military became pretty darned good in disaster relief, by the way.

A status of forces agreement lays out what the legalities of how American soldiers and sailors would be handled in the local courts should they be accused of wrongdoing, such as rape of local citizens, robbery or whatever. How were the accused soldiers going to be taken care of while in custody, and would their cases be handled in American courts back home, or would they be handled in Bangladeshi courts. Such a treaty is standard procedure with most countries that we conduct joint military exercises with. In fact, without such a treaty, our military has to reach ad hoc agreements, using pretty much the same language as in the proposed treaty, for each and every joint exercise, and this had been going on with Bangladesh for years. That was an unsatisfactory and inefficient way of doing business, and the Defense Department in Washington thought it was past time to have a permanent treaty in place.

The Bangladesh army was in favor of this, but not the political leaders. They decided that this was a good topic to use to stand up to the Americans, so they deliberately distorted the issue,

making public remarks that the Americans wanted to station troops in the country. My efforts at the foreign ministry got nowhere, although we had numerous frustrating meetings. I guess the Ambassador concluded that this was one fight he couldn't win, because I do not remember his taking it to a higher level, and it died.

*End of reader*