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# Department of State

## TELEGRAM

Amembassy DACCA

CONT: 0325

Date: 19 Jan 76

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 TAGS: GDS  
 SUBJECT: PFOR, EAIA, POSS, MILI, DG, US  
 Conversation with General Zia

**ACTION:** Secstate WASHDC

**INFO:** Amembassy ISLAMABAD  
 Amembassy NEW DELHI

**[REDACTED]** DACCA 0325

AMB

DCM

POB

CHRON

**SUMMARY.**

1. General Zia and I were able to have several minutes of private conversation at a dinner Saturday night. Uppermost on his mind, evidently, was a desire for <sup>us to</sup> ~~XXXXX~~ understand that they had registered our ~~XXXXX~~ concern that a really effective attack on Bangladesh's population problem was long over due. He also sprinkled the conversation with suggestions for further American aid; he evinced some confidence about the prospect for continued calm in the country; shrugged off rumors about any imminent top-level changes in the Government; and reflected the usual

**ROUTING**

	Action	Info
DMC		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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DRAFTED BY: AMB:DEBoster:ma      DRAFTING DATE: 1/19/76      TEL. EXT.:      APPROVED BY: AMB:DEBoster

CLEARANCES: DCM: IGCheslaw

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[ apprehension about India but without any sense of  
immediate concern. END SUMMARY. ]

2. Zia opened our conversation by referring to the points Senator McGovern had made to him last week about Bangladesh's urgent population problem and said he wanted us to know that they understood this was their top priority. They realized that they could make no real progress in solving their other problems as long as they made no progress in bringing down the rate of population growth. He said they had now designated Sattar, one of their best and most effective people, as the Secretary in charge of <sup>population</sup> ~~economic~~ matters and expected this program to get moving. They would also assign more and better people to this work, and would also bring in more women. I said I was pleased to hear this as both here and in Washington during my recent consultation I had been hearing more and more expressions of concern about what had been considered, quite frankly, an unsatisfactory record in this area. Questions were being raised about the purpose of the enormous amounts of aid we are putting in to Bangladesh if there were so little to show in the way of checking the population growth.

3. Here and there in the conversation the General returned to suggestions about American assistance. At one point he asked if we could help meet one of their pressing problems in the education area by making it possible for them to build

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recreational facilities at their universities to offer the students some useful channel for their energies when they were not in school, a problem which he thought was a serious one in Bangladesh. He hoped we could help them build a complex of swimming pools, gymnasiums, and other facilities for sport and recreation. When I tried to turn this aside by pointing out that it was one thing for us to go to the Congress for fertilizers, foodgrains and contraceptives, but quite another to suggest that we build swimming pools, the General persisted and asked us to consider providing at least the foreign exchange component with the Bangladesh Government taking care of the local currency needs. I told him Mr. Gardiner, Assistant Administrator in AID for Bangladesh and other countries in this area, was arriving on Sunday and that I would discuss this matter with him. He also mentioned that during the McGovern visit he had discussed with the Senator and Charge Cheslaw the possibility of our providing police training -- he said he would like to send a group of their police to New York City where our methods of combatting crime would be helpful to Bangladesh's police in dealing with miscreants here-- and also our supplying them with light equipment such as rifles and communications gear for their police. I said I knew of this request, which we had conveyed to Washington, but that he would know from our previous conversations that we were

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primarily interested in using our resources to help them in agriculture, rural development, and family planning -- the crucial areas where we could help best. I said in this connection that we were working right now on the question of the further foodgrain deliveries we would make for the rest of the year. We also discussed the recent request (DACCA's 0300) for \$50 million in budget support and I suggested to EMMH General Zia that he should not be optimistic about this possibility. I told him that I understood he had also suggested that we should have a military attache in the Embassy; I said that this matter was under review and that perhaps I would have something more to say about it before long.

4. (With respect to General Zia's request for police training and equipment, British High Commissioner Smallman told me on Sunday that Zia also raised this question with him at the same dinner, pursuing lower level requests which the British had already received from the BDG. Smallman says he told Zia that there might be a possibility of the British doing something about training but discouraged him from thinking that the British would be able to provide any further communications equipment beyond that which they had supplied under an earlier program. He said they were also under pressure from Commodore Khan for naval aid but that he had told the Commodore that any such aid would have to be on a sales basis.)

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5. Zia made the inevitable critical reference to India but did not dwell on the subject or show acute concern about the present state of relations, acknowledging in fact that they were now a little better than they had been. He said it was surprising how much objectionable material about Bangladesh was printed in the Indian press and also surprising how this could happen under the emergency powers there. He referred to the robbing of a Hindu temple (the Indian High Commissioner had mentioned this same case to me earlier in the week) and said the Indians had made a fuss about it. When they had looked into it they had found that the temple had been looted by seven thieves, four of whom were Moslem and three of whom were Hindu, so that it was just a case of ordinary thievery of the kind they were always running into. He said that in fact they had had not one single real incident of communal difficulties since the change in Government. I commented that this was obviously a crucial issue for New Delhi and we had been pleased to see the special concern shown for it here.

6. With respect to his domestic affairs, Zia made the points that he had been trying to bring about more ~~decentralization~~ <sup>decentralization</sup> of government, to encourage the work of private enterprise, and to continue to hold smuggling under more effective control. In answer to my questions, Zia expressed confidence about the outlook for

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continued calm in the country and said that discipline in the armed forces was not a problem at present. When I mentioned that I had heard rumors that important changes might be about to take place at the top, he said these rumors had been circulating for a month now and shrugged them off. (The rumors we have heard in the last few days have it that President Sayem has resigned with an early effective date and that former Chief Justice Siddiqi will become President.)

7. COMMENT. This was, in view of my home leave, my first meeting with Zia since his <sup>emergence</sup> ~~emergence~~ as the man effectively in charge of Bangladesh. I found him as relaxed, soft-spoken, and friendly as ever and showing no signs of strain under his new responsibilities. He looks and acts, if anything, as though he is enjoying <sup>being in charge.</sup> ~~being in charge.~~ His almost naive approach to the possibilities of American aid are a reminder, however, that he has -- quite understandably in view of his youth and background -- some limitations of perspective. I told him that I would like to bring in Assistant AID Administrator Gardiner to see him this week, which he readily agreed to, so we <sup>should have</sup> ~~should have~~ occasion later this week to report further on his views.

BOSTER

*B.B.*

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