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Note about a Meeting of Foreign Minister Otto Winzer with the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi

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Summary:

Minutes of a meeting between East German Foreign Minister Otto Winzer and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The two begin by discussing the national liberation of Bangladesh, which both countries express mutual support for. They then discuss India-Pakistan hostility, and blame Western countries for trying to keep the two states separate, and express hope for peace between India and Pakistan. Winzer then pushes for Indira Gandhi to normalize relations with East Germany. Gandhi gives a non-committal response, and the report concludes by speculating that Indira Gandhi has not yet decided to normalize relations, noting that some of her advisors will wait on the opinions of the FRG before moving on GDR.

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GDR General Consulate in India
New Delhi, 12 January 1972

Note

about a Meeting of Foreign Minister Otto Winzer with
the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi,
on 12 January 1972

The meeting took place in the official residence of the Indian prime minister and lasted for 50 minutes.

Participants on the Indian side were:

Venkateshwaran - Head of Eastern Europe Department in the Indian Foreign Ministry
Malhotra - Personal Secretary of the Prime Minister

On the GDR side participated:

Dr. Radde - Ambassador
Comrade Fischer - Ambassador
Comrade Nötzel - Interpreter

At the beginning, Foreign Minister Winzer thanked Ms. Gandhi for the opportunity to hold this meeting and the hospitality he received. He conveyed greetings from the chairman of the GDR's Council of Ministers, Willi Stoph. Comrade O. Winzer congratulated Indira Gandhi on the success of Indian policy. The latter was a decisive support for the national liberation struggle of the people of Bangladesh. The GDR is viewing this as a success for the policy of peace and progress pursued by all the progressive forces in the world. This creates necessary conditions to establish permanent peace on the Indian subcontinent.

The government of the GDR has actively supported the national liberation struggle of Bangladesh and Indian policy from the beginning, both politically and materially. Its solidarity also included the demand for the release of [Bengali nationalist politician and head of the Awami League] Sheik Mujibur Rahman. The GDR acted this way in accordance with the basic principles of its foreign policy.

A logical consequence of this policy was the international recognition of Bangladesh pronounced by the GDR foreign minister in the name of the chairman of the GDR's Council of Ministers and chairman of the GDR State Council. The GDR is willing to establish diplomatic relations with Bangladesh. After India and Bhutan, the GDR was the third state that diplomatically recognized Bangladesh. Thus a process was initiated which will further lead to recognition by other states.

In the next days I will fly to Dacca, where I will reiterate again that the GDR is interested in a close cooperation with the sovereign independent republic [of Bangladesh].

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi cordially welcomed the foreign minister of the GDR. The GDR has demonstrated major friendship towards India. Relations had already developed well in previous times, but the friendship became particularly evident during the past year. She expressed her happiness over the fact that the GDR recognized Bangladesh. This will further open the path for other states to recognize Bangladesh.

The current situation offers preconditions for the beginning of a more stable development on the Indian subcontinent. The Western countries have always attempted to keep India and Pakistan separate. Actually, there exists no real [Indian] hostility towards Pakistan, despite the battles fought during and after the separation. There are many identical problems for both Indian and Pakistan, which could be solved much easier if both countries would cooperate instead of fighting against each other. Pakistan was used against India by the Western powers. Pakistan itself attempted to stir up unrest in India and used in particular the problems in border territories left behind by England. During its rule over India, the English did not allow anybody to enter the border territories except American and English missionaries. After independence, there were changes in those territories, which also led to dissatisfaction among local populations. This dissatisfaction was used by Pakistan to stir up unrest. They armed disgruntled elements, trained guerilla groups, and more in this manner. We still managed this problem in a democratic manner. Now we very much hope Pakistan will become ready to establish peaceful relations with India. The liberation of Bangladesh was an important step in this direction.

[...]

[Minister Winzer said,] the minister president of the GDR has tasked me with asking you [Prime Minister Indira Gandhi] when India will normalize its relations with the GDR since there are no arguments left that could be applied against such a step.

Indira Gandhi replied that the minister obviously knew how busy the Indian government was in recent weeks and months. Just now the time had arrived for the government to deal with this question on the table in a thorough fashion. She wanted to reassure the minister that India harbored the friendliest feelings towards the GDR. When the minister asked whether there were any reservations or arguments left against the establishment of diplomatic relations, the prime minister said no. We have to decide on the appropriate time for this step, and this has not yet been discussed [by the Indian government].

Minister Winzer asked Ms. Gandhi to give him an answer after his return from Dacca. He emphasized again that the GDR expected nothing else than the respect for its full sovereignty. The GDR has waited until now, but it believes the time has come for full diplomatic relations between the GDR and India to be established right now.

Indira Gandhi asked when the minister will return from Dacca. Then she deliberated when there would be a chance for her to talk with her colleagues during this time. She thought that many of them are traveling in individual states due to the elections. Thus it might not be possible to convene the cabinet. Yet she will try and inform the GDR General Consulate when a decision has been made. The hint by the minister that a majority of all Indian parliamentary deputies had voted in favor of recognizing the GDR was apparently somewhat embarrassing to the prime minister. Yet she agreed that the atmosphere for the GDR has become more favorable after the recognition of Bangladesh.

Apparently Indira Gandhi has not yet decided when she will make a decision. The consultations she mentioned refer less to the cabinet but to some of her closest advisers. If she arrives at a decision with the help of these advisers, the acceptance by the cabinet will be just a formality. It looks as if, among her closest advisers, there are still those with opinions to listen to the requests of the FRG and accordingly opt for waiting before the establishment of diplomatic relations with the GDR.

The meeting was conducted in an open atmosphere. Minister Winzer thanked Ms. Gandhi for the conversation, and Indira Gandhi asked the Minister to convey cordial greetings to the people and government of the GDR.