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## Taking Dhaka did not figure in Manekshaw's plans: General Jacob

In CNBC's 'India Tonight' programme broadcast on April 30, Karan Thapar presented an interview with Lieutenant-General J.F.R. Jacob, who was Chief of Staff of the Indian Army's Eastern Command during the Bangladesh campaign of 1971, and who was after his retirement Governor of Goa and Governor of Punjab, in the context of the Government's decision to give Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw back pay for the period since his retirement from service over 36 years ago. There is a particular focus here on his role, as well as General Jacob's role, in the Bangladesh campaign. This is an edited but substantially intact version of the transcript provided by CNBC:

**Karan Thapar:** Recently the Government gave Field Marshal Manekshaw a cheque for Rs. 1.6 crore in lieu of the salary he should have received as Field Marshal but didn't get over the last 36 years. You have worked very closely with him. In 1971 when he was made Field Marshal, was he treated fairly or shabbily?

**General Jacob:** I think the Government was less than generous. He went out on a pension of Rs. 1,300 — that was Rs. 100 more than [that of] the Chief [of the Army Staff]. And no perks whatsoever, no car, nothing.

**Karan:** You met him a few days after his retirement. You called on him at the MES Inspection Bungalow. How did you find him?

**Gen. Jacob:** I found him sitting there dejected and looking very lonely. I asked him what the problem was, and he told me he had

just returned after meeting Mrs. Gandhi and that he had asked to be made Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, which she declined. Instead she offered him the high commissionership in one of the Commonwealth countries, and he was very upset.

**Karan:** He was upset at being refused the Deputy Chairmanship. Did he explain why he wanted the Deputy Chairmanship?

**Gen. Jacob:** No, he didn't explain it. But I pre-assume that he thought he would be able to do it. It's an important job.

**Karan:** And it was the job he had set his heart on.

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes.

**Karan:** In fact, when Manekshaw visited Calcutta after retirement — by then you were the Army Commander in Calcutta — he didn't even have a car and you put one at his disposal. But Jagjivan Ram, Defence Minister, ticked you off for that.

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, he did. He said, why [are] you giving him a car he is not authorised [to use] as a Field Marshal? So I told him, look I am not giving him a car because he is Field Marshal; this is a courtesy I extend to all ex-Army Commanders of the Eastern Command.

**Karan:** But the Defence Minister of the day didn't like the idea?

**Gen. Jacob:** No.

**Karan:** Your association with Manekshaw goes back to 1950 when he was a Brigadier and DMO [Director of Military Operations] and you were a Major attached to General Staff in Delhi. He used to consult you a lot in those days, didn't he?

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, I used to go fairly often to his house. He was generous and hospitable to me and he used to discuss matters with me. You see, Sam unfortunately had a very short experience of war. He was wounded in the early stages of war; unfortunately he was not able to command a battalion, so he used to call me in

for discussions.

**Karan:** So in a sense he had a short experience of war and he never commanded a battalion in his entire career.

**Gen. Jacob:** That's correct.

**Karan:** Which meant those were little bits of disadvantages for him as a DMO. In contrast, you had done full five years in the Second World War, he needed your advice.

**Gen. Jacob:** Well, I don't know [if] he needed [it] or not, but he used to ask for it.

**Karan:** In an interview in 1999, Manekshaw told me that he won a Military Cross almost at the beginning of the Second World War; a certain General Cowan took the unusual step of pinning the medal on him on the battlefield itself.

**Gen. Jacob:** Well, I don't know about that: no one wears medals at war. But Sam deserved it: he was courageous and got an active gallantry [award]. But the question of anyone pinning on a medal... no one wears medals in war. I think it is Sam's over-exuberance.

**Karan:** That's a bit of an exaggeration.

**Gen. Jacob:** Well, call that...

**Karan:** You next served with Manekshaw in 1961. He was at that time the Commandant of the Staff College at Wellington and you were a member of the teaching staff. At the time Manekshaw was accused of anti-national activities and a court of inquiry was appointed to investigate the matter. And you were asked to give evidence. Is that right?

**Gen. Jacob:** That's correct, I was rung up by General Kaul, offered anything if I gave evidence. I refused to give evidence. It's not my wont and my character to give evidence against my boss. I refused.

**Karan:** But were you, in refusing to give evidence, protecting

Manekshaw?

**Gen. Jacob:** I consider that is not done for me to give evidence against my boss. Had I done so, it would have caused difficulties for Manekshaw.

**Karan:** Had you given evidence, you could have caused difficulties for Manekshaw?

**Gen. Jacob:** I said it could have caused.

**Karan:** In other words, you are saying had you given evidence, had you spoken about things you knew of — instead of being exonerated as Manekshaw was, he could have been found guilty?

**Gen. Jacob:** I don't think so. All I can say is, he might have created some problem.

**Karan:** At the time, if I recall correctly, the speculation was that Manekshaw had the habit of talking loosely. People say that he would go around referring to Indians dismissively as natives and that in public frequently, sitting at Wellington Club, he would criticise politicians like V.K. Krishna Menon, or General Kaul. If I recall correctly, you were honorary secretary of the Wellington Club. Was there some credibility to these stories?

**Gen. Jacob:** I can't comment on that.

**Karan:** You can't comment?

**Gen. Jacob:** No.

**Karan:** But you won't deny them either.

**Gen. Jacob:** I won't comment.

**Karan:** That's very significant. You won't comment, but you won't deny them.

Let's come to the 1971 war, for which Manekshaw is best known. At that time you were Chief of Staff, Eastern Command. It is widely

believed that Manekshaw stood up to pressure from politicians and as a result military action was delayed from April 1971 to December. But that's not the real truth, is it?

**Gen. Jacob:** Well, put [it] this way, he did ring me three times in early April to move to Bangladesh. I refused, I gave him reasons.

**Karan:** He rang you three times wanting the Army to move to Bangladesh?

**Gen. Jacob:** I gave him reasons why we couldn't move.

**Karan:** I will soon ask you what your reasons were, but he wasn't happy with your refusal?

**Gen. Jacob:** No.

**Karan:** He got irritated?

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes.

**Karan:** Now, you refused to move in. What exactly were the reasons you gave Manekshaw?

**Gen. Jacob:** I told him, look, we are mountain divisions. We don't have a single bridge. There are large numbers of rivers between us to cross. We don't have transport. The monsoon is about to break. And international penal [action] will not let you move. So these are the reasons we cannot move. I told him: [I'm] afraid it's not possible at this stage.

**Karan:** Two things: first of all, the reasons you had — and obviously they were good reasons — for not moving in April were reasons he had never thought of or appreciated as the Army chief.

**Gen. Jacob:** I can't comment on what he thought.

**Karan:** But clearly that follows that he was pushing you to move in, he rung you three times, were irritated by your refusal.

**Gen. Jacob:** But his people in Delhi pushed him.

**Karan:** Secondly, you also pointed out to him that if the Army moved in April, it would have been disastrous?

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, it would have been, because we [would have] got bogged down.

**Karan:** So the truth is, people say Manekshaw stood up to political pressure and delayed military action from April to December. The full truth is that he did this because the Eastern Command stood up to him on three separate occasions, otherwise he might have agreed to the pressure he was under.

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, maybe after he got our advice he went to the Cabinet and told them 'No.'

**Karan:** Let's now come to the war plan under which India fought the war. As Chief of Staff, Eastern Command, you sent your version of the plan to Delhi in May. What was the strategy that plan was based upon?

**Gen. Jacob:** We assessed that to win a war we had to take Dhaka. Dhaka was the geo-strategic heart of East Pakistan. No campaign would have been complete without it.

**Karan:** So the core of your war plan was the taking of Dhaka?

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes.

**Karan:** In August, Manekshaw came to Calcutta where the Eastern Command has its headquarters, where you were Chief of Staff. He came with [his] own war plan. How different was that to yours?

**Gen. Jacob:** It was very, very different. The orders that come with him, which he read out with his DMO, K.K. Singh, were the following:

You will take Khulna and Chittagong — these are the entry points — and territory. Those were the orders given.

**Karan:** And no mention of Dhaka whatsoever.

**Gen. Jacob:** None whatsoever

**Karan:** So Dhaka didn't feature in Manekshaw's war plan at all?

**Gen. Jacob:** At all.

**Karan:** I gathered [that] at that meeting in Calcutta there was a sort of acrimonious exchange of opinions. You fairly forcefully pointed out to Manekshaw that not taking Dhaka, not focussing on Dhaka, was a serious mistake. How did he react to your views?

**Gen. Jacob:** He was very upset. He said, don't you see sweetie — that term he uses when he doesn't like something you say. He said, don't you see if we take Khulna and Chittagong the war will be over? I said I didn't see how that could happen.

**Karan:** At that point he turned to General Aurora, who was there and who was your boss and army commander. And what did he say to General Aurora?

**Jacob:** Don't you agree? Yes sir, I entirely agree, said General Aurora.

**Karan:** At that moment of time, you were in a minority — General Manekshaw, General Aurora and DMO K.K. Singh were all in favour of the war plan which Manekshaw had brought, which concentrated on Khulna and Chittagong and completely ignored Dhaka. You were a lone voice demanding that the war plan should concentrate on Dhaka instead.

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, Manekshaw has briefed the government accordingly and these are orders, which have been approved.

**Karan:** So the nub of this is that ultimately when India went to war in December, it went to war with a war plan which completely ignored Dhaka?

**Gen. Jacob:** The war plan that was given to us in writing was [one that concentrated on] Khulna and Chittagong.

**Karan:** In fact, Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal, the [Air Force] chief of the time, writes in his book *My Years With the IAF*, that the Indian Army didn't expect that Pakistani forces in East Pakistan would collapse and that Dhaka would fall. As Air Chief Marshal Lal writes: "The possibility that Pakistani forces in West Pakistan would collapse altogether as they did and that Dhaka would fall... was not considered something that was likely to happen."

**Gen. Jacob:** That's correct. That was the recommendation given to the Government by Manekshaw.

**Karan:** So General Manekshaw did not expect that East Pakistan would collapse and Dhaka would fall.

**Gen. Jacob:** Correct

**Karan:** Air Chief Marshal P.C Lal has also contradicted something else that the Field Marshal has repeatedly said of himself. Manekshaw always claimed that he ran the war single-handedly — clearly suggesting that the Navy and the Air Force took orders from him. Air Chief Marshal Lal writes: "The three services, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, were left to plan their activities as they thought best." Whose version is right: Manekshaw's or Lal's?

**Gen. Jacob:** Difficult. Lal is right.

**Karan:** Lal is right? You're absolutely sure of that?

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, sure.

**Karan:** There were also moments when Manekshaw's behaviour upset and offended senior commanders. For instance, there is what happened on September 1971, when he flew to Calcutta with D.P Dhar. In front of him Dhar proceeded to scold senior generals... This was not only indiscreet and improper but could have affected camaraderie. They took that very badly.



**Gen. Jacob:** A meeting was there with the Army Commander, the Core Commander, the Divisional Commander, and Manekshaw started berating all of us.

**Karan:** And this had a bad effect on the Generals?

**Gen. Jacob:** It was resented deeply...

**Karan:** Therefore, at this critical moment of time, just two months before war began, this was very bad behaviour on the part of the Army chief?

**Gen. Jacob:** All I say is, people were surprised that Mr. D.P. Dhar, who is a politician and who was sitting close to the Prime Minister, was listening to it.

**Karan:** And the Army chief should not have scolded his senior Generals, whose services he critically required at that time, in this way?

**Gen. Jacob:** Well, I would have not done it.

**Karan:** Let's jump to the weeks immediately before the military action in December. I'm talking about November. Manekshaw refused to give you troops to tackle Dhaka because he refused to make Dhaka a part of the war plan. You moved three brigades from the Chinese border for this purpose. What did he say when he found out?

**Gen. Jacob:** He was furious. And you see...I told...Gill who was the DMO...it was done between us... and [he] agreed with me to take Dhaka. Manekshaw was not informed of the move of these brigades and he was absolutely furious with Gill. He told him that he would... and that the brigades would move back at once.

**Karan:** But the brigades didn't move back.

**Gen. Jacob:** I spoke to Gill and we had a long chat and I said I cannot move these brigades back.

**Karan:** So the brigades stayed where they were regardless of the fact that the Army chief was furious and wanted them to return.

**Gen. Jacob:** Gill did that...but...Gill made me promise since he was shouted at... I would not commit them inside Bangladesh without reference to them.

**Karan:** So you had access to them...should you need them...but you gave a commitment not to use them without further permission.

**Gen. Jacob:** I expected that I would be given permission once the war started... but permission was denied for five days... I requested every day for their deployment but they were not cleared to move in by Manekshaw until December 8.

**Karan:** So even when you needed these brigades he denied you permission for five full days. Had you got that permission five days earlier, could you have taken Dhaka five days earlier?

**Gen. Jacob:** We would not have taken Dhaka, but would have surely speeded up the fall of Dhaka.

**Karan:** So you could have speeded up the fall of Dhaka. You could have speeded up the war. But Gen. Manekshaw's refusal to let you use these three brigades held things up.

**Gen. Jacob:** They did.

**Karan:** One other thing. Am I right in believing that when war began by December 2-3-4, the plan was to go for Khulna and Chittagong, but you ignored it and instead you went straight to Dhaka, which you always believed was the right thing to do?

**Gen. Jacob:** That's correct.

**Karan:** Let's jump the story to December 13. At that point in time, the Indian Army had bypassed towns like Rangpur, Dinajpur and Sylhet and had reached the gates of Dhaka. Which meant that you

were virtually at the doorstep of the capital, but you had no major towns under your control except for Jessore and Comilla which the Pakistanis had evacuated and you had occupied. Is that a correct assessment of the position?

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes.

**Karan:** At this point in time, [there] was a great fear that India might be forced to accept a ceasefire and that if that happened [would be left] without major towns under its control?

**Gen. Jacob:** The U.N. was in session

**Karan:** The U.N. was in session, and if that had happened without any major town under its control the ceasefire would be very disadvantageous to India

**Gen. Jacob:** Entirely.

**Karan:** General Manekshaw sent you an order, copied to the Corps Commanders, asking you to capture all the bypassed towns. How did you respond to that order?

**Gen. Jacob:** Except Dhaka. Dhaka was not mentioned.

**Karan:** So he wanted all the towns that had been bypassed to be captured, but once again ignored Dhaka?

**Gen. Jacob:** No mention was made whatsoever. You can't capture a town, it takes a long time... See what happened in Faluja. It takes time and it's very heavy in casualties.

**Karan:** So you therefore ignored his orders?

**Gen. Jacob:** Well, there is an example in history. Horatio Nelson putting the telescope to his blind eye.

**Karan:** So you did the same thing.

**Gen. Jacob:** We did the same thing.

**Karan:** Now, in fact you went one step further... didn't you? You also contacted a Corps Commander who had to copy to Signals what instructions you gave them?

**Gen. Jacob:** Ignore it.

**Karan:** You said, the Corps Commanders [may] ignore the Army chief's signal. If you had agreed to what Manekshaw was asking and you had gone back to capture towns you had bypassed, there was the likelihood that you would have got bogged down.

**Gen. Jacob:** We would [have] completely [got] bogged down, we could not have captured the towns.

**Karan:** Secondly, ... [had you] concentrated on the bypassed towns, you would have failed to take Dhaka.

**Gen. Jacob:** Absolutely right. [Had] we gone back, we couldn't have taken Dhaka.

**Karan:** So had General Manekshaw's signal of December 13 been accepted, that could have endangered India's great victory?

**Gen. Jacob:** Well, I put it differently that it would have delayed the proceedings.

**Karan:** It would have delayed the proceedings... those proceedings, as you told me a moment ago, would anyway [have been] delayed because he denied you access to the three brigades. This order from Manekshaw was a bad order.

Let's jump to December 15. General Niazi, the Pakistani Commander, sent a signal offering a ceasefire. More importantly, he had 30,000 soldiers under his command in Dhaka.

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, about 30,000.

**Karan:** Whilst you only had 3,000 outside the city. So you were out-manned 10 to one.

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes.

**Karan:** In addition [to the fact that] the U.N. was in session, there was a Polish resolution in front of the Security Council calling for an Indian withdrawal. And the Russians had indicated that they were not going to use their veto in India's favour again.

**Gen. Jacob:** And Poland was [part of the] Soviet bloc.

**Karan:** So at that point of time, on December 15, the circumstances both within East Pakistan and internationally made it seem as if a surrender was not the likely outcome.

**Gen. Jacob:** You see, Niazi had merely sent a signal to us, which was conveyed to the Americans, that there should be a ceasefire under the U.N., a withdrawal under the U.N., handover to the U.N., and no more crimes... That's all.

**Karan:** And therefore if Niazi had used his 30,000 soldiers... he could have carried on fighting for another two to three weeks, giving the U.N. ample time to impose the ceasefire. And that would have been very disadvantageous because India had no other town under its control.

**Gen. Jacob:** That's quite right.

**Karan:** So it's a critical moment.

**Gen. Jacob:** Very critical.

**Karan:** Now on December 16 you arrived in Dhaka in response to Niazi's offer of a ceasefire. Four hours later you had converted a ceasefire into an unconditional surrender. What did you do to achieve what sounds now like a miracle?

**Gen. Jacob:** Well... one thing that happened was, on the morning of December 16. Manekshaw phoned me and said go to Dhaka and get a surrender. I said we have sent you a surrender document, do

I negotiate on those terms? He said just go, you know what to do. So I carried with me my draft what I sent to Delhi and I arrived in Dhaka with this draft with the staff officer. I was met at the Dhaka airport by the U.N.'s Mark Henry, Kelly and the others. And they said we are coming with you to arrange the ceasefire and withdraw the Pakistan Army and take over. I said, thank you very much, I don't need your help. Then I proceeded to Niazi's headquarters. The Pakistani Brigadier was with me, the Mukthi Bahini and the Pakistanis were fighting on the streets. Firing was going on. They wanted to kill this guy with me. With a lot of difficulty we reached the Pakistani headquarters and this thing was read out to Niazi — the surrender document. He said that you have only come here to discuss the ceasefire and withdrawal...Who said I am surrendering? So this argument went on. So it's an unconditional surrender. I said it's not an unconditional surrender, we have put the treaty with respect. We will evacuate all the civilians, etc., so it's not an unconditional surrender.

**Karan:** Then what happened? How did you get him to agree to a surrender?

**Gen. Jacob:** Then I told him, General, I assure you if you surrender, accept these terms, we look after you, etc., and I will ensure that. The Government of India has given the word and will ensure your safety and that of your civilians.

**Karan:** Did you also say to him [that] if you don't surrender, there will be no protection?

**Gen. Jacob:** I said that in a different way. I said if you don't surrender, we can take no responsibility.

**Karan:** Then what happened?

**Gen. Jacob:** Then he kept [on talking] and then I said General, I cannot give you any better terms. I will give you 30 minutes. If you don't comply I would have no option but to order resumption of hostilities.

**Karan:** During those 30 minutes were you panicking?

**Gen. Jacob:** I wasn't panicking but I walked out and I said god, he has 30,000 troops we have 3,000... Suppose he says no, what do I do? And I had no answer.

**Karan:** Thirty minutes later you went back to the room, and what did he say?

**Gen. Jacob:** He kept quiet, I walked up to him. The document was on the table and I asked him: General, do you accept this document? I asked him three times but he didn't answer. So I picked it up. I said, I take it as accepted.

**Karan:** At that point he also cried.

**Gen. Jacob:** He was in tears...

**Karan:** He was in tears... so in a sense you called his bluff... made him believe that you were in a more powerful position than you were...

**Gen. Jacob:** Yes, yes.

**Karan:** He fell for it and he failed to take advantage of the 30,000 soldiers he had.

**Gen. Jacob:** He was held to task by his own commission: why you didn't do it? You know what he said, I was forced to do it because Gen. Jacob blackmailed me, he said he would hang them over the massacre.

**Karan:** Very quickly, you haven't got the credit for the surrender that you organised almost single-handedly. Has history been unfair to you?

**Gen. Jacob:** No, I'm not commenting on that...I as a soldier did my duties, that's not my concern.

**Karan:** One other question. Today you have cast Gen, Manekshaw,

Field Marshal Manekshaw as he is, in a very different light to the way we've got used to thinking of him. You have suggested that the orders that he gave, particularly on changing the direction of military strategy, were wrong. You also suggested things about him when he was in his earlier post at Wellington that people will find hard to believe. You want to retract any other things you said?

**Gen. Jacob:** Listen, I have not suggested anything. You asked me questions and I have answered them to the best of my ability.

**Karan:** Do you stand by what you said?

**Gen Jacob:** I stand by what I said... all the things [relating to] the order for the operation are in Army Headquarters.

**Karan:** Everything you said is documented in Army Headquarters. Gen. Jacob, a pleasure talking to you on India Tonight.

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