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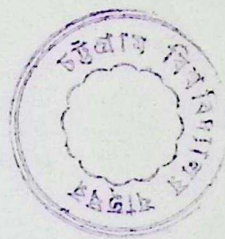
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BLOODBATH IN BANGLA DESH

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U.K. Press Comments





WAR CLOUDS OVER PAKISTAN

TIMES of March 27, 1971, in an editorial said that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had "responded heroically to the Pakistan army's intervention with a call for resistance and a declaration of independence." The paper raised doubts as to the eventual efficacy of Yahya Khan's "decision to break off the constitutional talks and order the army into action as a move to bring the province under control" and talked of the possibilities of guerilla warfare. "Even if East Bengal were cowed for a time, the demand for autonomy of some kind would not therefore be silenced," said the paper. "Yet the events of the past few weeks may have shown how much any half-way house of autonomy is possible at all given the geographical, cultural and political separation of the two wings of the country. When they first broke away from India to form a new country what united the two wings was the fact that both of them were Muslim areas of British India. But now an East Bengal has been proclaimed which would move towards a denial or a modification of that first assumption. This may be illustrated by the bargaining over autonomy of the past few weeks. One of the East Pakistani complaints has always been that they were denied the fruits of their own trade and of their fair share of the foreign aid allotted to Pakistan. Yet once their claim to manage their own trade is conceded then questions of currency, banking, taxation and suchlike all follow. Moreover, since freedom to trade without interference from the central or federal government would mean for East Pakistan freedom to trade with India, it would also follow in time that East Pakistan's relations with India could be pursued as the province thought fit. The reservation to the central government of defence and foreign affairs would soon be eroded, and at the end of the road, there would only be independence!" The paper discounted possibilities of a "half-way house" and opined "An independent East Bengal, divorced from the fact and the idea which created Pakistan, may eventually emerge."

ILLOGIC OF UNITED PAKISTAN

GUARDIAN editorial of March 27 said: "Bengal's secession means that the illogic of a united Pakistan — the hallowed Islamic inheritance from Mohammed Ali Jinnah — has shown itself again. The miracle

is that it lasted so long in spite of sporadic outbursts of regional tension. The backlog of ills harboured by the East towards the West may make reconciliation after this last outburst impossible. The East feels that its contribution to Pakistan's economy — mainly through jute — has been used exclusively for the benefit of the West's economic development and a massive defence budget. It has little feeling for the West's prolonged quarrel with India over Kashmir. In reaction against this feeling of neglect and as a positive demonstration of its own identity, the East's Civil Service has been responding fully to Sheikh Mujib's calls to stop and start work." GUARDIAN further said that "Bengali nationalism had swept him (Yahya Khan) along faster than his temperament or instincts intended." While regretting the immediate outcome of "a bloody reaffirmation of the East's worst suspicions of the West's intentions," the paper concluded "The pity is that President Yahya Khan could not see his way to accept Bengal's separate identity and to crystallise it in some blood-saving form."

DAILY TELEGRAPH editorial of March 27 said: "Separation is in the very fabric of the State of Pakistan. Not only are the Western and Eastern wings separated by 1,000 miles of Indian territory, they are just as much divided economically, socially and culturally. Although East Pakistan has 60 per cent of the population and is a major producer, it is subservient to West Pakistan which largely mans the central bureaucracy, the army and the business community. The inequality extends to foreign aid and imports and this, for East Pakistan with its dense populations and abysmally poor standard of living, has led to the formulation by Sheikh Mujib of demands for the control of its own taxation and foreign trade."

SCOTSMAN of March 27 in its editorial entitled "Pakistan Conflict" said: "Geographically and in other ways Pakistan is hardly a unitary state. President Yahya's resolve to hold it together by force of arms has not much to commend it politically. True, secessionist movements have been defeated as in Nigeria, but in Pakistan the difficulties of holding together two widely separated regions are much greater."

OLD PAKISTAN IS DEAD

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH of March 28 said that many thousands "it appears" had already died in the first hours of the conflict. "It is hard," said the paper, "for the Western mind to absorb the full dreadfulness of the civil war in East Pakistan. As with Biafra, as even with Vietnam,

the drama is almost too painful and at the same time too remote to be fully comprehended. Once again it seems that the full fury of the latter part of the 20th century has fallen upon one of the poorest and most vulnerable of peoples." With some optimism, the paper said: "Perhaps out of the present convulsion a more workable political structure in the Indian sub-continent will be born. Whatever happens, the old Pakistan is dead. The rulers are trying to deny that fact by arms, but the attempt cannot be other than tragic folly."

NO UNITY BY COMPULSION

OBSERVER of March 28 said: "An undivided Pakistan is a matter of great concern to the rest of the world; its loss could cause even more political instability in this turbulent part of Asia. But the unity of Pakistan cannot be maintained, or restored, by military force; this way leads to civil war and, by further inflaming Bengali nationalism, makes any accommodation unlikely. General Yahya Khan — a notably tolerant and statesmanlike soldier — has allowed himself to be pushed by the dominant political elements in West Pakistan into a suicidal course. In seeking to crush the Awami League, he has set himself the task of destroying the party which commands the enthusiastic support of a majority of all Pakistanis." Concluding, the paper said: "And if unity should prove to be impossible, it would still be in everybody's best interests to arrange for a peaceful separation of Pakistan into a confederation of two friendly neighbour-States rather than to plunge its people into civil war and, for years to come, try to compel the Bengalis to live in a State against their overwhelming desires."

MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

DAILY TELEGRAPH of March 29 in an editorial captioned "Divide or rule?" said: "Tragedy is unrolling in East Pakistan as inexorably as the tidal flood wave in the Bay of Bengal last autumn. The difference is that this time the deaths and the sufferings are man-made. It seems a prime example of man's inhumanity to man, made worse by the fact that it could have been avoided — not just in recent months, but over the years. Pakistan was an unlikely enough State from the start, but it surely could have been made to work after a fashion." The comment went on to enumerate on the "natural antipathy between the people of the two wings", to which was added "gross economic, representational and social injustice — inflicted on the East by the West." Concluding, the paper said: "The genie of Bengali

nationalism and separatism is well and truly out of the bottle. Not all the bayonets from the Punjab will shove it back."

UNREPORTED TRUTH

SCOTSMAN editorial of March 29 asked the question: "If everything really is calm in East Pakistan, as President Yahya Khan's Government maintains, why have all the foreign correspondents been hustled out of Dacca? Their despatches, compiled from memory, because their notes and films were confiscated, present a most unpleasant picture of the army's punitive tactics, glimpsed from confinement in Dacca's Inter-continental Hotel. No doubt the unreported truth is much more unpleasant. The Pakistan Government accuses India of distorting the truth and interfering in its internal affairs. But is there any reason to suppose that Delhi's version of what is happening in East Pakistan is any less reliable than Karachi's version? After what has happened since Friday, the Bengalis themselves can hardly fail to trust and admire their own official government less than any other government be it Indian, Chinese or Russian. It is natural that India should paint the worst possible picture of the activities of President Yahya's army, but the official Pakistani attempt to emphasise Indian culpability in this dreadful affair does not deserve to be taken seriously.

ARROGANT CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

GUARDIAN of March 31, carried an editorial which laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of President Yahya. "Only now", said the paper, "are we getting Pakistani facts to abet the fears. President Yahya Khan has striven to suppress these facts, filling his air waves and press with evasive propaganda, deporting every journalist he could find. But a few independent reporters escaped this net, and their stories — just emerging — reek with horror: crowds indiscriminately machine-gunned; student hostels razed by shells; shanty towns burned and bombed; civilians shot dead in their beds. We do not yet know the fate of those arrested in the East, or the true level of resistance throughout the province. But we do know, first hand and reliably, that many unarmed and unready Bengalis have died. From this point the whole complexion of the crisis changes".

Elaborating, the paper said: "The 'GUARDIAN' with many others, has long believed that the balance of advantage lay with a united Pakistan. But unity can never come through murder: and unity

is not worth the price of innocent lives. East Pakistan survives today only as occupied and exploited territory, living proof of every Bengali suspicion over the years. Mr. Bhutto, who purports to be a national leader, 'thanks God' for this miserable carnage. Yahya Khan hears none of Pakistan's friends who counsel mercy and morality even at this stage.

"But he must be made to hear. In contrast with Biafra, the rights and wrongs of East Pakistan are easily determined. Those — like America — who stock the Pakistan army must realise to what uses their weaponry is put. Those — like China and Ceylon — who permit forces to ferry from the West must realise what acts and purposes those forces pursue. Those — like Britain — who retain some vestige of influence in the area should spend it openly and forcefully. The fate of Dacca is an arrogant crime against humanity and human aspirations: no-one should stand mealy-mouthed by."

INDISCRIMINATE KILLING

TIMES of April 2 carried a despatch from Peter Hazelhurst, dated Calcutta, which commenced as follows: "Reports from refugees and students fleeing from hinterland of East Bengal indicate that indiscriminate killings by the Pakistan army have not been confined to Dacca. Politicians, students and ordinary citizens are said to have been shot down in towns throughout the province.

"Thousands of East Bengalis today began their flight from several cities to which the army has withdrawn during the past few days.

"Refugees from Comilla, on the eastern frontier, claim that at about midnight last Friday, the Army began systematically to shoot Awami League members of the provincial assembly and other prominent political leaders including Mr. Dhirendra Nath Datta, aged 94, a former Minister in the late Mr. Suhrawardy's Cabinet." Hazelhurst went on to describe several atrocities, including the description of Datta's death as related by his grandson: "Neighbours said that my grandfather was dragged out into the street and shot in public. The news spread, and as people began to move out into street, the Army opened fire. They estimated that about 100 were shot down."

WEEP FOR BENGAL

Mervyn Jones wrote a stirring piece for NEW STATESMAN of April 2, full text of which follows:

"Despite censorship and official lies, reports are coming out of Dacca that must shock even readers accustomed to all that's implied in the sinister phrase: 'Order was restored.' President Yahya Khan's tanks have been ordered into destructive action, no holds barred, against the people of East Pakistan: and, in grim logic, the enemy must be the whole people because they had declared themselves with rare unanimity for demands of self-rule.

"For the moment, one has to think of the human tragedy. With pitiful wooden shacks burned to the ground — soldiers were seen 'armed' with petrol cans — those who had little have lost their all. Many thousands, it seems, are fleeing to the countryside, dodging tanks that fire at random; but it is a countryside that can barely feed its normal inhabitants. Hunger and disease must be the followers of sudden death. And, this is only an episode in the bitter history of a people whose experience for almost 200 years has been of poverty, oppression and exploitation — at the hands of British rulers, of moneylenders and land sharks from other parts of the sub-continent, and, since 1947, of the arrogant oligarchy that dominates Pakistan.

"Nehru reflected in *The Discovery of India* (written during his last spell in prison) that the poverty of India can be correlated with the duration of subjection — the deepest misery in Bengal subdued by Clive, and the most effective maintenance of a viable economy in Punjab where the British defeated the Sikh princes as late as 1845. Of course, there are other factors. Still, the sorrows of history gather weight with time, each generation laying a load on the last. And, it was chiefly Bengal that endured the primitive stage of imperialism as sheer robbery and wrecking. 'Bungalow' and 'jungle' are British words taken from Hindustani, but so is 'loot'.

"The extreme of poverty has continued to be a major theme in Bengal's experience: over-population long before the rest of the world knew it, marginal subsistence farming in the countryside, squalor in the cities (Dacca's slums have long rivalled those of Calcutta), famine in 1891, famine in 1943. The other theme was desperate revolt and political violence.

"The background picture must also take account of a Bengali national character. One must handle this concept with caution, of course, but both reputation and self-awareness react upon reality. These, then, would be the generalisations: Bengalis are spontaneous, talkative, emotional, sensitive to slights, quick with the handshake or the embrace but also with the knife. They value poetry and music, the decorative arts, good food, and beauty in women. Outsiders regard them as undisciplined, rather comic and certainly no fighters (the British excluded them from the 'martial races' and recruited only a regiment of Sappers and Miners); resenting this, they are prone to demonstrative acts of heroism. They are skilful and inventive, but not systematic at work. West Pakistanis are the opposite of all this, and the absurd state of Pakistan is something like a forced union of Britain and Italy, with France in between.

"Pakistan is a Moslem nation, but history qualifies this too. Being a Moslem in the West is partly a racial inheritance, deriving from settlement by people of Iranian and Afghan origin. Conversion to Islam in Bengal was an opting out of the caste system by the poor. Moslem or not, Bengalis still felt passionately Bengali, so much so that they protested furiously when, in 1905, Lord Curzon tried to divide the province into East and West Bengal; it was one of the rare occasions when a Viceroy had to renounce a pet project. That Bengal was thus partitioned in 1947, with British rule ending, is a wry historical irony.

"Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was an upperclass Bombay Moslem, anglicised in his habits and not very religious, just as Carson was an upper-class Dublin Protestant. Power in the new state was monopolised by landowners and Sandhurst-type generals, all from West Pakistan, with no background in the fight against imperialism. This, in addition to the theocratic basis of Pakistan, was what Indians like Nehru so disliked about them.

"From the outset, they had no more intention of creating a democracy than had the similar oligarchy in Northern Ireland. True, the Bengalis were fellow-Moslems and had no yearnings to reunite with India (though they wanted neighbourly relations and lacked interest in the Kashmir vendetta). The point was that they were unreliable chaps, outside the closer circle. Top jobs in the civil service and the police went to men from the West. Economic development, not very impressive anywhere, favoured the already

wealthier western provinces. Attempts to right the balance were frustrated, when government was not openly dictatorial, by a limited franchise (80,000 citizens in a population of 100 million could vote for the presidency) and a judicious mixture of intimidation and bribery. I happened to be in East Pakistan when Ayub Khan was getting himself re-elected in 1965. An American friend used to exclaim 'There's a voter' whenever we saw a man inexpertly riding a new Honda.

"When real elections came, Sheikh Mujib's Awami League won a victory in the East comparable only to Sinn Fein's sweep in 1918. The difference was that he was demanding only 'home rule'. He was aware both of the appalling consequences of an armed clash and of the hard row that an independent Bangla Desh would have to hoe even if it could be achieved, given its wretched poverty. Popular feeling and Yahya Khan's stubbornness drove him, in the moment of crisis, to claim independence. I suspect that one could listen to an interesting debate if one could be a mouse under a table in Washington. There would be advocates of the oligarchy as the 'safe men', the counterparts of similar regimes endorsed from Greece to Brazil. There might be voices arguing that Bengal can't be held down and that Mujib — a popular leader but no revolutionary — is the best insurance against less controllable forces.

"Certainly, though the army may have won the first round by sheer brutality, maintaining a detested suzerainty over 73 million people isn't like sending the police to Anguilla. Bengal has no forests or mountains except on its eastern borders, but in its odd way it is fine guerilla country. The great Ganges-Brahmaputra delta is spattered with water at any time; when the monsoon breaks, after early June, main roads on embankments rise above an immense lake. I've only been there in the dry season, but I recall seeing the noses of boats, submerged to keep the wood from cracking in the sun, which are the sole means of movement once the rains begin.

"The crime of Yahya Khan in provoking war — if not now, then surely some time — is not incalculably but calculably appalling. We know from the Congo and Biafra that a rural population with minimal living standards can be plunged into the abyss of famine by any disturbance of the tenuous rhythm of sowing and reaping,

marketing and buying. Last year's typhoon, with the Royal Navy rushing to the rescue, took 200,000 lives according to probably minimised figures. A season's war is bound to take millions. A starving child does not suffer the less because the ends of power are being secured — nor because it is statistically surplus to its homeland's resources."

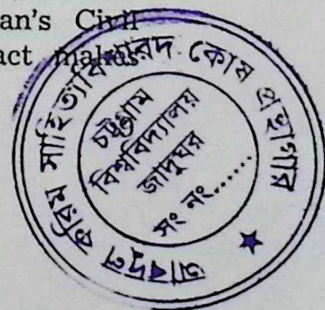
SENSELESS MURDER, HYSTERICAL CRUELTY

TIMES of April 3 in an editorial said: "The more the news from East Pakistan accumulates the more harrowing it becomes. Senseless murder, hysterical cruelty, and what must be a creeping fear run like a current throughout this packed mass of human beings. All this the distant observer may assume despite the protests of the Pakistan Government at some of the stories that have been given circulation." Later, the editorial went on to say: "By now the picture is a little more clear and a great deal more gruesome. Enough first-hand reports from Dacca itself and from some of the major towns have come in to confirm that what is happening is far worse than what might have been expected in a war of East Pakistanis resisting the forces of the central government in their demand for independence."

A TIME TO SPEAK OUT

GUARDIAN editorial of April 3 said: "The East Pakistan crisis is not what it was even a few days ago. Then it was a disastrous, bloodied mess; now it begins to stain the political map of Asia."

In conclusion, the paper said: "If Mrs. Gandhi is left as the solitary champion of Sheikh Mujib, then the whole issue clouds and is lost. Therefore, a chorus of disparate diplomatic voices is essential. Yahya's tanks roll on American treads; that is reason enough for the American voice to be heard. Yahya's commandos have shot and broken the Maoist leaders of the East; that is sufficient to give Peking pause. Britain has enduring influence on the sub-continent. Will Sir Alec express even mild distaste when he speaks to the House on Monday? Will the Foreign Office contrive privately even one formal expression of horror and regret? No single act at this stage will end the tempest of Bangla Desh — only a cumulation of outside pressures and civilised despair among rational men in West Pakistan's Civil Service, universities, and big businesses. But this very fact



all protests, however meek, however genteel, a contribution to human dignity; and it makes silence shameful."

DEEPEST TREACHERY

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH of April 4 carried a long despatch from David Lossak under caption "Pakistan's Path to Bloodshed." Loshak wrote "The macabre efficiency with which the West Pakistan army last week all but snuffed out the life of the independence movement of East Pakistan, seeking its self-determination as the people's republic of Bangla Desh, was the outcome of the most careful planning by Pakistan's generals and colonels, many of them British-trained, many of them in outward manner, though not inward mildness, "more British than the British."

Loshak went on to contrast the unpreparedness of the East Bengalis against the well-equipped army. Of the Bengalis, he said: "They had a few British Lee-Enfield rifles left over from World War I, but hardly any ammunition, a few "pipe-guns" smuggled across from Calcutta, where they are a favourite weapon of the streets; a few bazookas and may be a few machine guns raided from government armouries; and they had the 10,000 or so members of the East Pakistan Rifles — trained soldiers with some arms, but a poor match for the crack units of Punjabis and Baluchis from the West Wing."..... "The West Pakistan army, by contrast, has been immensely well-armed and equipped. Much of its material, jets, napalm, machine guns, a wide range of comparatively modern weaponry has been supplied by the United States for defence against external aggression.

"In addition, the army had a carefully-laid contingency plan. Its intelligence network had thoroughly infiltrated the Awami League. The Army had lists of hundreds of key party workers to round up. It had a schedule of targets in Dacca — the offices of ITEFAQUE, the leading Bengali paper; Iqbal Hall, the student centre; Mujib's house. Thus, it was only a matter of hours before the army was able to eliminate physically the essence of the Awami League.

"Clearly, the final preparations must have been in train, under the direct personal supervision of Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan, President Yahya's new martial law administrator, even as the President was having the last rounds of constitutional talks with Sheikh Mujib.

"If these talks were designed to lull the Awami League into a false euphoria based on the chimera that their aspirations were about to be fulfilled gratis by the government, then the trap succeeded. Mujib himself knew better, and as the optimism in the streets and talking shops of Dacca grew more heady, he became more fatalistic.

"Even as he conferred with Mujib, President Yahya must have known of the preparations that the army was making. It seems hard, on the evidence of the sequence of events, to acquit the President of charges of the deepest treachery."

UNJUSTIFIED OPPRESSION

GUARDIAN of April 6 came out in severe condemnation of "Sir Alec's muffled voice" in an editorial which said: "The Foreign and Commonwealth Office still seemed to believe the fact that a foreign Government diplomatically recognised is more important than the blood on its hands. Sir Alec Douglas-Home had the opportunity yesterday to declare Britain's support for democracy in East Pakistan. He wasted it. Instead, his statement reflected in every line the immemorial caution of his Department. Sir Alec cannot have been surprised that on all sides of him M.P.s questioned his intentions.

"The situation in East Pakistan is not, as Sir Alec said, "difficult and distressing." It is blood-stained, unjust, and highly dangerous. President Yahya Khan does not, as Sir Alec suggested, intend to "transfer power to the elected representatives of the people." What he has done, and is doing, is to use his army to oppress the East Pakistanis and their chosen leader. Nor did negotiations collapse in any ordinary sense. The President did not want Sheikh Mujib to assume the powers that his people had voted him. So the President reached for his gun.

"This is not something that the British Government or anyone else ought to gloss over with phrases about the regrettable collapse of negotiations and the unfortunate use of force. The East Pakistanis are an impoverished people who are being punished for having voted in a way that annoyed the President. By sending in the army he has shown himself to be not only careless of democratic rights, but a reckless ruler as well. The military intervention in East Pakistan was a deliberate act. It could lead to a worse and more wasteful conflict than even the Indians and the Pakistanis have known so far.

"Sir Alec was right to say yesterday that intervention from outside will only complicate matters. Interference by Britain or any other country would be counter-productive. But this does not mean that the established Government of West Pakistan is acting wisely. What is happening in East Pakistan is unjustified military oppression. Until Sir Alec brings himself to say so he should stop making statements."

ALIENATION COMPLETE

In GUARDIAN of April 7, Martin Woolcott reported on "Death and Victory in Bangla Desh" from Chuadanga. The despatch was accompanied by a photograph of bayoneted women and children in Jessore earlier that week. The despatch contained accounts of interviews with various people and concluded: "What is also stiffening Bengali morale is detailed news now coming out of Dacca, and above all enragement at the news of the killing of students and intellectuals. 'They are worse than Nazis,' another said. Whether this can be translated into effective military terms immediately remains to be seen. But the alienation of Bengalis from Pakistan is now so complete it seems impossible they will not win in the long run."

TERRIBLE MASSACRE

On April 8, EVENING STANDARD carried a lead story under caption "Pakistan: The Full Horror". A banner headline proclaimed: "Bengalis were being killed in their thousands. The Army was rounding up people and machine-gunning them ... they were shot from behind like dogs." The paper said: "Thousands of Bengalis have been killed and their corpses piled high and left to rot in the streets of East Pakistan. Hundreds of children were among those who met bloody deaths in a 'terrible massacre' in the port of Chittagong. These were among the tales of horror told at Heathrow Airport today when 15 British refugees flew in from Calcutta after fleeing the civil war in East Pakistan."

TIME TO SPEAK UP

OBSERVER of April 11 carried an editorial under above caption. Here is an extract: "But now that the full gravity of the situation is apparent, there seems something horrifying about the continued lack of any serious international effort at mediation in East Pakistan. It is in striking contrast with the successful effort made by the

United Nations Security Council, backed by Russia and the U.S. to settle the war between Pakistan and India in 1965. The legal position is, of course, very different, because the present civil war can be claimed by Pakistan as an internal, not an international, matter. But the kind of appeal already made by President Podgorny to the President of Pakistan for moderation and a negotiated settlement might carry more weight if made by the whole Security Council, including its other permanent members, the U.S., Britain, and France. No doubt such an appeal has already been made by the British and American Governments privately. It may now be time for quiet diplomacy to be supplemented by a public declaration."

THREAT OF FAMINE

TIMES of April 12 carried a despatch from Peter Hazelhurst who wrote that Bengalis were threatened with famine. Following is an extract from Hazelhurst's despatch: "As the civil war in East Pakistan enters its third week, officials from international relief organizations who have arrived in Calcutta believe that the 75 million Bengalis might be threatened by widespread famine which 'would make the Biafran tragedy pale into insignificance.' Millions of Bengalis are believed to have been left homeless and destitute by the war. Hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled from the cities may, it is feared, starve to death in the countryside if they are not offered relief in the next few weeks."

SHOCKING

DAILY TELEGRAPH carried an editorial on April 12 extracts of which are given below:

"Pakistan's civil war sickens the world by the savagery of the Western troops against the Eastern population... President Yahya Khan must answer for the policy of repression and its shocking enforcement, both of which increase the turmoil, the suffering and the instability in this crucial area..."

"Strict censorship and the expulsion of foreign correspondents make it impossible to say whether the instances of brutality reported by many eyewitnesses are typical. But enough has been seen to arouse the worst fears..."

RHETORIC AND REALITY

GUARDIAN of April 14 carried the following editorial:

"Where, after three weeks of messy bloodshed, do the military rulers of Pakistan now stand? Superficially they prosper. Bangla Desh's roving bands of "liberation fighters" have never and will never cope with the Pakistani Army in force. That force is being deployed to flatten urban resistance. Yahya Khan will soon have most cities and towns on a tight rein. He will also have all the Chinese spare parts, overflying rights, and hire purchase rhetoric he can take. For the moment, the Awami League "miscreants" are dead, incarcerated or negligible. Pakistan is cowed, but united.

"Yet, the true balance sheet is very different. Perhaps (ideally, and even at some cost) Pakistan is better together than apart. Perhaps continual martial law can maintain that state and, as famine saps revolt, bring smouldering servility. But Yahya must be forced to take a wider view. May be a coordinated Bengali resistance movement will need years to organise, but in the meantime Bengalis will remain one of the most populous people on earth, always simmering in crowds, always ready to overwhelm and slaughter patrols or lone Punjabi soldiers. The province which — head for head — provides a majority of Pakistanis will have to be held down by tanks and planes and large concentrations of troops for as long as any prophet can see. There is no decent hope of passing the buck to some civilian regime, since virtually every civilian politicians — bar the ancient, sickly Nurul Amin — was obliterated at the polls last December. Collaborators with Islamabad will have no democratic justification; they will not be able to appear in public without peril.

"The Eastern prospect, in short, is long, weary gloom—economic stagnation, starvation, murders, the slow growth of extremism. Even Chinese friendship has a touch of poison in the embrace. Peking may care little if Maoist Bengalis like Maulana Bhasani find themselves at the wrong end of Yahya's bayonets: anything to worst the pro-American Sheikh Mujib. But once the Awami League is defunct and East Pakistan is given over to wild men of rebellion, then only the most stupid of generals will be surprised to find Chinese arms in every guerrilla cache. And in the West there lies bleakness too. Mr. Bhutto may rejoice at army action

today; but he will not rejoice long if it keeps him from the power he won at the ballot box. Pakistan is a nation in hock to the World Bank and to the aid-givers of the world: they are already turning away, gorged on brutality. Pakistani defence policy (and the whole existence of the generals) rests on confrontation with India over Kashmir. Pakistan alleges that India holds the Pakistani-loving Kashmiris in check by steely repression. It is the most ludicrous of cases now, as the junta of Islamabad openly exercises just such repression on 75 million bonafide Pakistanis. The United Nations will surely collapse in bitter laughter if Kashmir comes up again. The issue is as dead as the students of Dacca University.

"Nobody can tell precisely what Yahya's strategists whispered in his ear three weeks ago. Nobody can tell, but anyone can deduce. They appear to have thought that cutting off the head would kill Bengali nationalism: precisely the reverse. They appear to have forgotten about world opinion. They appear, most insanely of all, to have ruled India out of the military calculations, so that the uncontrolled border and aid seeping in has them as much by the throat as proliferating diplomatic complications. To reiterate: the Bangla Desh affair is not a second Biafra or the fruits of more interminable wrangling between Delhi and Rawalpindi. It arose simply when a well-conducted, peaceful election produced a result the army could not stand. Sheikh Mujib himself has not, in any certain sense, declared Bengali independence. He was not asking essentially for more than the programme he legally fought and won the election on. Of course there are shades of grey; of course, responsibility for the carnage is shared. But influential and intelligent Pakistanis in the West can stop that carnage tomorrow if they add up the balance sheet aright and put their soldiers in economic chains. This is not a Sino-Soviet slanging match about Marxist technicalities. It is, at root, a simple matter: of freedom, of morality, and of humanity."

SLAUGHTER IN SYLHET

On April 15, DAILY TELEGRAPH carried a despatch from David Loshak in Sylhet, under caption "Slaughter goes on as East Pakistan fights for life." Loshak reported: "Savage fighting for control of this key town, the capital of East Pakistan's most remote and isolated district, yesterday reached a crucial stage as Central Government forces struggled to wrest control from the 'Bangla Desh liberation army'."

Here are some more extracts:

"Members of the 'Mukti Fouj', the untrained and barely organised 'liberation army' of East Pakistan, were fighting a last-ditch stand for the town, now a ruined, empty shell. They have killed about 200 of the Punjab unit's 800 complement.

"Their own losses have been far heavier, but Bengalis in their thousands are continuing the fight and constantly replacing the dead. I found their morale consistently high despite their desperate situation, and there is no doubt of their readiness to fight to the death."

"They are pitifully equipped. They have only an assortment of outdated small arms, possibly one or two captured mortars. But otherwise, nothing better than spears, bows and arrows and the local dao knife. Like the civilian population, they are short of food and equally vital supplies such as petrol."

"The Army's strategy appears to be solely one of causing maximum distress to the civilian population and lasting damage to the region. Signs of this have been the way soldiers have, on orders, fired blindly into occupied houses, burnt down entire villages and slaughtered the occupants as they fled. The Army's aim was to break the morale of the people within 48 hours of launching its first attacks. This failed, but the Government has persisted with the same sterile strategy. This has turned Sylhet, like many other major centres of East Pakistan, into a ghost city."

"Almost the entire population of 700,000 has fled into the surrounding countryside, leaving the streets to the helpless old and crippled, the corpses, wild dogs and vultures. Bloated corpses float in the Surma River which flows through Sylhet. They are testimony to the night of March 26, when West Pakistan troops burst into the city and launched a campaign of looting and slaughter."

"Special units were assigned to the killing of doctors, advocates, journalists, teachers and other professional people."

TROOPS LIVE OFF LAND

Under above caption, GUARDIAN of April 15, carried a report by Patrick Keatley. Here is a relevant extract: "The orders to live off the land are being issued to platoon, company and battalion commanders

as they leave Dacca with their troops. It suggests that the logistical supply system has broken down and perhaps that there is a problem of finance for the Central Government. But it conjures up the unpleasant prospect of troops obtaining their food supplies at the point of a bayonet, and clearly ushers in a new phase of what is already a savage military campaign."

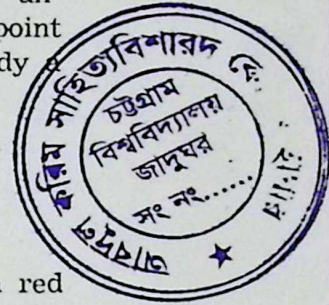
BLOOD OF BANGLA DESH

NEW STATESMAN on April 16 carried under the title above in red type on its front page, the following comment:

"If blood is the price of a people's right to independence, Bangla Desh has overpaid. Of all the recent struggles to bring down governments and change frontiers in the name of national freedom, the war in East Bengal may prove the bloodiest and briefest. On this level alone, the East Pakistanis have achieved a record of suffering. But even if their movement is destroyed within a few days or weeks, it may only be a temporary defeat in a war of liberation which will eventually be recognised as just.

"In all such cases, establishment opinion is heavily weighted in favour of the status quo. The chances of any world power declaring support for Bangla Desh are minimal. The Bengalis' case for statehood may be hard to refute, but it is inconvenient to everyone else. And yet, by an unusual combination of circumstances, Bangla Desh has managed to obey all the rules. So, this may be the moment to consider what we, and other countries, mean by those splendid words which recur like a chorus in the United Nations charter: 'the right to self-determination of peoples'. Objectively or subjectively, in Chinese or English, in capitalist or socialist jargon, it is hard to fault the East Bengalis, or justify their abandonment by all the major powers.

"Piously required, as third-world countries always are by the West, to make their demands known through the ballot box — they did so. They won an absolute majority in the all-Pakistan Assembly. It was the first general election the country had held, and the result came a considerable shock. Given the long history of Bengali separatism, from the language and anti-constitution movements of the early Fifties until today, it should not have



been so surprising. Loyalty became more important than ideology. A Bengali majority was the result.

"Faced with this, the Islamabad government of Yahya Khan, whose strength is based on an army from which the Bengalis are excluded, panicked; Islamabad fidgeted. The result was carnage. We have glimpsed via television and the newspapers what the West Pakistanis call restoring 'unity', the Easterners, genocide. The truth may lie somewhere in between the two. But for the foreseeable future pessimism is in order.

"As with Biafra, many emotional left-wingers in the West have averted their eyes from the distasteful possibility that non-white people may be ill-treating each other, and concentrated on the humanitarian side. But beyond the salvage operation, it becomes more complicated. East Pakistan really cannot be called a 'break-away' state in quite the same way. And the 'exploitation' takes a different form. The East Bengalis claim that they have been systematically used to subsidise West Pakistan ever since partition. It began as long ago as 1948, when President Jinnah made the first of several centralising moves by withdrawing the provinces' rights to raise their own income and sales taxes, and keep the major part of their import and export duties. East Pakistan was particularly hard hit, since its subvention from the central government was never correspondingly increased.

"Over the last two decades, for instance, 70 per cent of Pakistan's investible funds went to the West and only 30 per cent to the East. 75 per cent of revenue was spent in the West, and only 25 per cent in the East. Foreign aid is based on population: yet East Pakistan with two-thirds of the country's people, received only 20 per cent of the cash. East Pakistani economists estimate that since independence, the real transfer of resources from East to West Pakistan has been to the tune of some £3,000m. By this argument, Bangla Desh would certainly be more economically viable on its own. Another qualification for statehood fulfilled.

"The question of aid leads to that of great-power politics. East Bengal does not fit neatly into the cold war pattern, and the position adopted towards it are particularly complicated. The British are allied with the West Pakistan government in CENTO and SEATO—mere planning organisations, to be sure, but through which weapons can be channelled. Yahya Khan's links with China,

though, are closer and more significant. There are rumours that Peking will create diversionary activity on the Indo-Chinese border if India (backed by the Russians) intervene in Bengal. China has cynically betrayed the West Bengali communists, who would have liked nothing better than to help their brothers across the border, but could not do it alone. (Perhaps this is final proof that the Chinese have achieved great-power status.) As for Britain, what our government has to say is regarded, since Singapore, with cynical contempt on all sides.

"There are still, however, ritual motions to be gone through and lessons to be learned. The ritual concerns the U.N. The 75 million East Pakistanis feel they have at least as much 'national' call on the General Assembly as the 45 million Westerners, and are demanding what people always demand in such circumstances: that arms deliveries be stopped, aid cut off, sanctions imposed and so forth. None of this will happen. As Conor Cruise O'Brien put it, the United Nations is like the Delphic Oracle, and always gives the answer the strongest party to a dispute wants to hear. And there, for the time being, it rests.

"But not for ever. Pakistan is only the most recent of the post-imperial federations to be torn apart. When he drew the lines across the Indian sub-continent, Mountbatten listened too sympathetically to those who took religion more seriously than geography. It was, of course, a plain case of failure to learn from our own parochial experience — as the whole unhappy history of Ireland has made only too clear. Since the original foundation of Pakistan, the West Indian, Malaysian, Rhodesian and Arabian federations have all collapsed. Significantly, each of them, like Pakistan, was a 'state' created from above for reasons of political expediency. So, the lesson is a simple, if a hard, one: that such artificial structures cannot survive. How much human misery must be endured before that fact is accepted?"

CLASSIC TRAGEDY

SPECTATOR of April 17 wrote: "Right from its unruly birth at the hands of that incompetent midwife, Earl Mountbatten, the twin parts of Pakistan have never looked like a natural unified state. Separated by India — which alone, save for the Muslim faith, or foreign rule, could have united its parts — the most remarkable feature of Pakistan's

brief history has been the fact of its survival. Had the disastrous mistake of Kashmir not poisoned from the beginning the relations between India and Pakistan, had, that is, a normal and fruitful relationship between the two inheritors of the raj been possible, then West Pakistan and East Pakistan might have made a success of themselves. The continuous hostility between West Pakistan and India over Kashmir has ruled this out. When West Pakistan preferred to play around with China rather than support India and thereby demonstrated that its leaders who ruled in Karachi and then in Rawalpindi cared far more about their lost Kashmir than they did about anything else, it became clear that East Pakistan was very much the poor relation.

"Since Ayub Khan assumed power back in 1958, the army has ruled both parts of Pakistan: and that army is a West Pakistan army with West Pakistan traditions. In East Pakistan, they speak Bengali, not Urdu of the West. It is their Muslim faith, and that alone, which marks the Pakistani Bengalis apart from the Indian Bengalis who share the same life, and the same poverty, of the deltas of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Politically, economically, socially, the West Pakistan military regimes which have ruled both Pakistans have neglected East Pakistan; and there is nothing at all surprising that the Bengalis of East Pakistan should have sought independence as Bangla Desh. Nor is there anything surprising that these desperately poor people should lack the resources to resist the military power of the West Pakistan army should that power be deployed against them. And there is nothing surprising that that power should be thus deployed.

"The tragedy of Bangla Desh possesses a classic inevitability. The millions who inhabit the deltas flooding into the Bengal Bay seem more fated to meet with disaster, natural and human, than any others. When the tidal wave flooded them last year, the world shrugged it off as an act of God, and sent a few blankets; West Pakistan sent a few helicopters. The new disasters are made by men. There have been massacres — it is clear that the West Pakistan army slaughtered students trapped in their dormitories at Dacca University, and that wherever the army has met with even token resistance it has replied with butchery. No doubt the army will establish a degree of control. That control, hitherto dictatorial, could easily degenerate into tyranny. In the long run, after untold misery, the troops of West Pakistan will move away and the poor millions of Bangla Desh — or whatever, by then, they will choose to call their part of the world — will come together with the Bengalis of India, and Hindu and Muslim will see quite clearly

that those who live in the Gangetic plains and Brahmaputran deltas of Bengal are of a kind with each other.

"What, however, can we do now? Appallingly little, except officially to declare our outrage to the West Pakistan authorities in Rawalpindi, and halt all aid to West Pakistan until it is clear that the West Pakistan army in East Pakistan has stopped massacring and started distributing relief and building bridges. This is not much to ask that this country should do. It is, however, if the Biafra parallel is anything at all to go by, much more than the Foreign Office will allow to be done."

