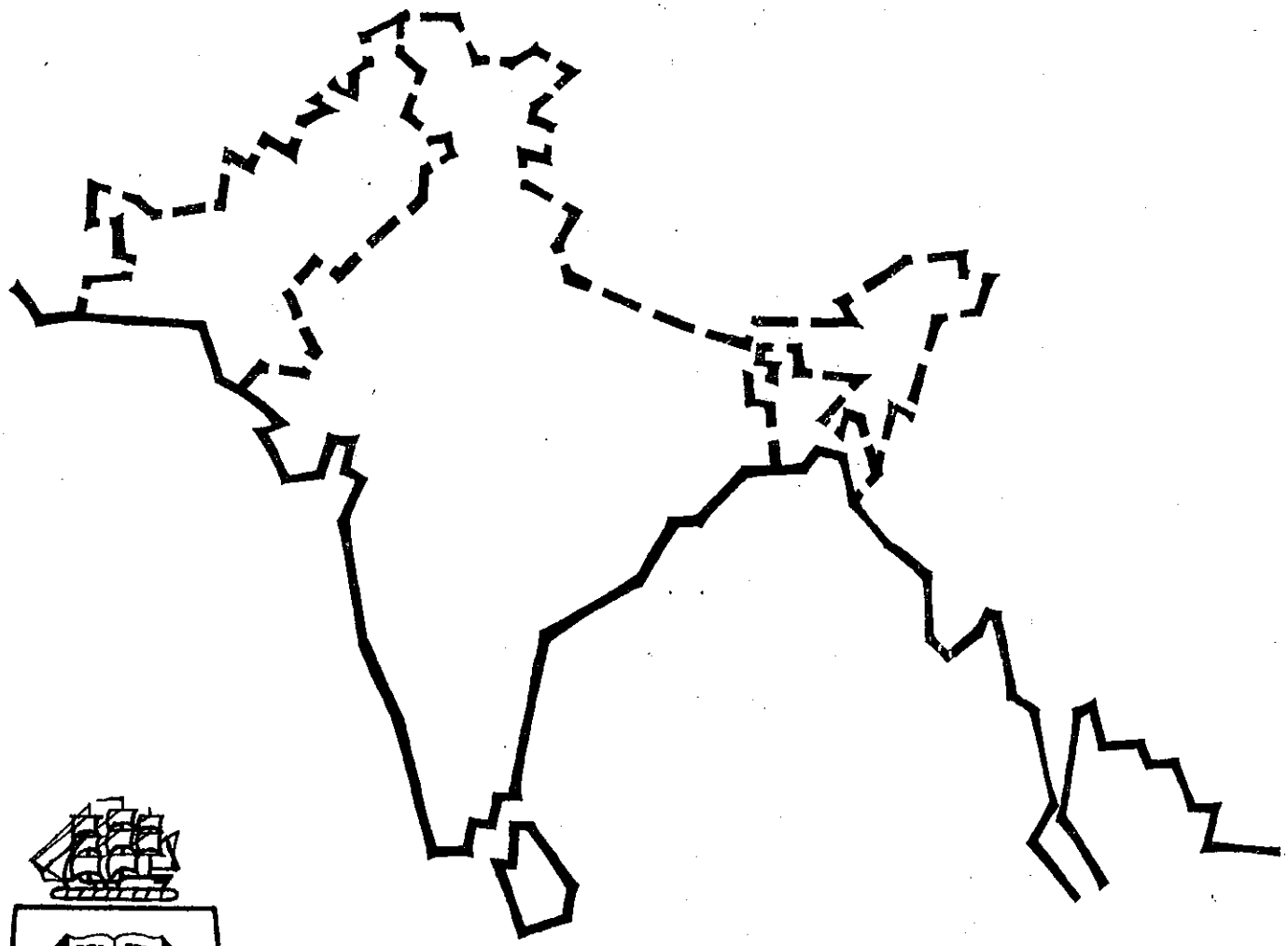
ASIA'S FLASHPOINT, 1971 — BANGLA DESH

Herbert Feith



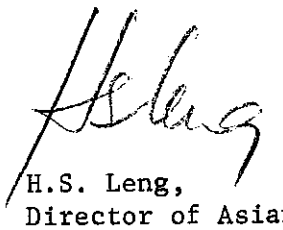
FLINDERS ASIAN STUDIES LECTURE 2

Professor Herbert Feith was born in Austria and attended primary and secondary schools in Melbourne. He received his B.A. (First-class Honours) and M.A. (First-class Honours) from the University of Melbourne. He worked in the Indonesian Ministry of Information before becoming a research associate of Cornell University's Modern Indonesia Project. Subsequently he gained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Cornell. From 1960 to 1962 he was Research Fellow in Pacific History, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. He joined Monash University as Lecturer in Politics in 1962. Since 1968 he has been Professor of Politics at Monash.

INTRODUCTION

Born of religion and decolonization, Pakistan has encountered more nation-building problems than most other new nations. Its latest attempt to build a nation of rule and consensus has ended in tragedy. At the cost of indescribable human suffering for an unremitting twelve months, Bangla Desh has become a political reality.

In this lecture - the second in the series of Flinders Lectures in Asian Studies - Professor Herbert Feith argues a case for Bangla Desh. This lecture was delivered at Flinders University on September 14, 1971. Once again we are reproducing it for wider circulation.



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December, 1971.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour to have been asked to give this second Asian Studies Lecture at Flinders. It is a particularly great honour, because of the stature of the man who gave the first of this series last year, Professor Wang Gungwu. Wang Gungwu is an outstanding scholar, an outstanding Asianist. He is also an outstanding man, outstanding in his wisdom and generosity of spirit as well as in his intellectual penetration. It is not easy to follow in his footsteps.

It is a particularly daunting assignment because the subject I have picked is one of which I have no specialist knowledge whatever. I am not any sort of authority on Pakistan politics or Bengal politics or Indian politics, and Dr. Leng was probably surprised and apprehensive and embarrassed when I suggested to him that I would rather speak on Bangla Desh than on an aspect of Indonesian politics as had initially been suggested.

Well, he took the plunge. I then had some hesitations. But I am going ahead. One justification is the rather sad fact that there is not a single Australian political scientist who is a specialist on Pakistan politics. Several Australian economists and geographers have done a lot of work on Pakistan, but I know of no political scientist who has.

Secondly, I suppose I can say I have been interested in things like the Bangla Desh crisis for some time. I have been teaching a course in which we talk about the dynamics of nationalism and the political problems of multi-ethnic or multi-communal societies.

But the real and only important reason why I decided to talk about this subject is the obvious and palpable urgency of it. Not only have something over 8 million East Bengalis or East Pakistanis made themselves into refugees in the last 5½ months, but the refugee flow is still continuing, reportedly at about 40,000 per week. And the new arrivals are telling tales of horror just as gruesome as those of the people who came before them. And indeed we have recently had warnings that East Bengal is in for a major famine, a man-made famine of proportions that are really without precedent. It may well be that East Bengal will

soon be experiencing the most horrible of famines on top of what is undoubtedly the greatest refugee flow of modern times.

And things may well be only starting. The crisis of the last 5½ months shows no evidence of being resolved early. It may be that the danger of a new India-Pakistan war has receded somewhat in the last few weeks. Some people maintain that the Indian-Russian treaty that was signed last month has introduced a new element of quasi-stability into the international politics of the Bangla Desh issue. But the danger of war has certainly not passed. And the prospect of a long sustained bleeding of East Bengal is in some ways just as frightening as that of another India-Pakistan war.

HISTORY IN REVERSE

So much by way of introduction. When I got to this point in preparing my talk I was not at all clear where to go next. History was obviously called for, but I could not see where the history should start. I thought first that the logical place was the bloody crackdown, the short sharp action that was supposed to put an end to the Awami League and East Bengali nationalism, to what has since become the Bangla Desh cause, the bloody crackdown of the night of the 25th and 26th of March 1971, when students and other members of the universities of Dacca and Chittagong were singled out as first victims in another night of St. Bartholomew on a much larger scale.

Then I thought, no, one really has to go back to at least the 7th of March of this year. That was the day when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the man who had led the Awami League to victory in the elections three months earlier, launched his movement of civil disobedience against the Pakistan authorities. He apparently decided that the only thing he could do in the face of the increasingly uncompromising posture of

President Yahya Khan was to launch a non-violent civil disobedience movement in East Bengal, demanding the immediate lifting of Martial Law and that the recently elected parliament be convened forthwith. Mujibur Rahman's appeal for civil disobedience was extraordinarily successful. It established him as the virtual ruler of East Bengal or East Pakistan, and it marked the beginning of what has sometimes been called the Prague spring of East Bengal, the period of high elation, high commitment and high sense of unity, when Bangla Desh as a state of mind was born.

But one must obviously go back further than that. Perhaps one should start with the elections of last December, when the Awami League scored so extraordinarily complete a triumph winning 167 out of the 169 seats that were contested in East Bengal and thereby obtaining a majority in the parliament of all Pakistan.

Some people have argued that that victory was largely a result of the cyclone disaster of October and November, that the cyclone and the clumsy indifference of the West Pakistani authorities in providing relief to its victims were major factors unifying East Bengali feeling behind the charismatic figure of Mujib. But several observers had predicted a sweeping Awami League victory before the cyclone struck. And it is relevant to point out that a landslide victory had been achieved on the basis of similar appeals in the East Bengal provincial elections of 1954.

Or perhaps one needs to go back to the events that led the Yahya Khan government to promise a universal franchise election. The circumstances that led to that promise being given in March 1969 were the circumstances which brought President Ayub Khan down after 11 years of rule. Now Ayub Khan's rule had been successful in a number of ways; and it had certainly earned the praise of many Western economists. G.N.P. had been rising fast. But Ayub's power crumbled disastrously in early 1969 as a result of widespread revolutionary social turmoil which was

particularly drastic and violent in East Pakistan. There was revolutionary violence against the government and its agents in towns and village areas throughout Pakistan, but it was greatest in the East. Incapable of reestablishing his authority in the face of this challenge, Ayub Khan decided to resign and hand over his mantle to Yahya Khan who was then chief of staff of his army. And Yahya Khan decided -- perhaps he regrets it now -- that the only way to defuse the revolutionary violence that had led to Ayub's fall was to promise universal franchise elections.

But one needs to go back earlier than that. Perhaps one should go back to the inception of the Ayub Khan regime in October 1958. Ayub came in then as the first military ruler of Pakistan. He and other military men had been playing important behind-the-scenes roles before that, and some writers argue that the real power was always with the army and the bureaucracy, rather than with the various short-lived cabinets of party politicians which existed in the pre-1958 period. But 1958 certainly marked a big change. From that time on Ayub provided strong and fairly stable government. He did so in the name of "basic democracy" or "basic democracies", which was essentially a system of indirect elections, a system which not only shut out the political parties but also buttressed West Pakistani predominance in East Pakistan or East Bengal. The fact that East Pakistan had a majority of the population, that East Pakistan was an aggrieved majority which might yet be able to right its grievances through universal suffrage elections -- this fact had presented problems for the Western rulers of Pakistan ever since the formation of the state in 1947. One way of dealing with it was to do away with universal franchise and popular politics. I do not want to explain Ayub's accession to power in 1958 solely in terms of East-West conflict. There were certainly many other issues involved, not only the long-standing issues between British-India-style bureaucrats and lawyer-politicians, but important new class issues

as well. But one important problem the parliamentary coalitions of the pre-1958 period had not resolved satisfactorily was that of stabilizing the power of the West Pakistani ruling group in a minimally legitimate fashion in the face of the embarrassing fact of Bengali numerical preponderance. One consequence of Ayub Khan's establishing stable authoritarian government after 1958 was to strengthen the predominance of West Pakistan and its ruling elite of big businessmen landlords and bureaucracy.

Well, does one have to go back to partition in 1947? Or does one have to go back still further, to the colonial period, or to the pre-colonial history of the Indian sub-continent? Maybe one needs to examine in detail the multifarious ways in which Hindus and Muslims have both fought and coexisted with each other ever since Islam first became a major force in the Indian sub-continent.

Having toyed with several of those possibilities, I finally decided that the best place to start would be in the 1920s and 1930s. As you know, the history of nationalism in British India is in good part a history of relations between the Congress Party and the Muslim League. The Congress Party was the dominant vehicle of Indian nationalism from late in the 19th century and very clearly so from the time that Gandhi emerged as its leader and made it into a mass movement around 1919. Now, Congress consistently declared that it was a secular body and not a Hindu one, and it always included a number of Muslims in its top leadership and indeed all the way down. But there were always other groups of Muslims who were strongly hostile to it and these were not only pro-colonial Muslims. Some of them were most certainly pro-colonial, Anglophilic princes and landlords who were frightened of mass mobilization of any kind. But there were also others who were sympathetic to the ideas of anti-colonial nationalism but frightened at what might happen to Muslims as Muslim in an independent India in which Hindus, as representatives of the great majority, were in some sort of exclusive control.

Now the influence of that second group of anti-Congress Muslims grew very rapidly in the 1920s and even more rapidly in the '30s and early '40s. It grew rapidly in the '20s because that was the period when Gandhi took nationalism to the mass of the Indian peasants, which naturally meant that the nationalist message was couched more and more in religious terms, in a Hindu religious idiom as far as the great mass of the Indian peasants were concerned. That was one major factor disposing large numbers of Muslims to be apprehensive about Congress nationalism. And their apprehension grew stronger in the '30s and early '40s because of another factor that came into operation then, because that was the period when the minds of more and more Indians came to be dominated by the prospect of the British actually pulling out. Indians had been campaigning for independence from Britain for a long time, but by the late 30s, and certainly after the mission that Sir Stafford Cripps led in the early part of the war, it became clear that the British were really going to get out. Whether they were going voluntarily or being forced out, or what ever the combination was, the British were going to withdraw. Once that was seen as the prospect the important question was no longer how do we get them out but rather how does my group see to it that we get a reasonable deal in the new post-independence dispensation.

The culmination of this process of Muslim disenchantment with Congress-led nationalism was, of course, the partition of India in the middle of 1947, and the creation at the same time of a two-part state of Pakistan, West Pakistan with something like 45% of the population, East Pakistan or East Bengal 1200 miles further east with something like 55% of the population.

The way in which partition came about is a long and very complicated story, and I can't go into it here. But one thing about it that is important to stress is that there was a good deal that was fortuitous and circumstantial about the actual mechanics of its achievement. I don't think there was anything fortuitous about the fact that a Muslim state

ame into existence at that point of time, about the fact that Islam egregated itself politically at the time of the British withdrawal. That fact has roots which stretch far back into the history of the sub-continent. But the way the split was effected, and specifically the fact that one Muslim state was formed, one state of Pakistan representing the aspirations of Indian Muslims as a whole, this was rather a product of the way in which the transition was achieved.

The idea of a separate Muslim state was put forward in concrete political form only very late, only in the 1930s. And it was only in 1940 that the Muslim League committed itself to the idea of partition and the formation of a state of Pakistan. That was in the famous Lahore Resolution, and one important aspect of that resolution is that it called for several states to come into being, several Muslim states rather than the one which was eventually formed. Let me read you the wording of the Lahore Resolution. It was passed by the All-India Muslim League on the 23rd March 1940 and it resolved that "It is the considered view of this All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles viz. the geographically continuous units are demarcated into regions which would be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the northwestern and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign." Note the words, 'the northwestern and eastern zones of India should be group to constitute independent states.'

Well, it did not happen that way. What happened was that a single state was created. The mechanics by which that eventuality resulted are hard for me to go into here. But the simple essential explanation is that the Muslim League's Jinnah was able to use the intensity of anti-Hindu feeling that prevailed in those years -- and the widespread fear of

the Hindus' exploiting divisions among Muslims -- to win the adherence of some crucial Bengali leaders for the idea of a single Muslim state. And so it was that which was eventually achieved in mid-1947.

I could dwell at length on the great contrasts in historical experience and cultural disposition that existed between the two halves of this newly formed country from the beginning. The Western half was always fairly strongly oriented to the Middle East. It was and is dry, and in large part highly mountainous. And it is fairly sparsely populated, by people who are generally taller and fairer and in many cases have European facial features. The other part was wet and flat and populated very densely by people who are generally smaller and darker and more Southeast Asian and south Indian in physical type. Moreover it was and is thoroughly Indic in its culture. It found a very important focus of unity in Bengaliness, the Bengalis having a very strong sense of the vitality and cultural worth of their language and traditions. Hindu Bengali poets and writers like Tagore have always spoken to and for the Muslim people of East Bengal as much as the poets and writers of West Pakistan who have sounded distinctly Islamic themes.

Islam and Bengaliness have always been rival themes and identifications for the Muslims of East Bengal. One should not overstress their Bengaliness now just because it is this that is being brought out in the current historical situation, as a consequence of the events of this year. But it is clear enough that the cultural traditions of East Pakistan are vastly different from those of the West. In the words of Professor Spate of the A.N.U., trying to keep the two halves of that country together has been like trying to plough a field with a camel on the left side and a water buffalo on the right.

THE PAKISTAN EXPERIMENT

The capacity of the new government of Pakistan to keep these two halves in harness was clearly on trial. The hope was, as it has been with many other new states, that the very existence of a state would

strengthen bonds of unity, and perhaps create bonds where these had not previously existed. At the time of partition only two main ties existed. On the one hand there was of course Islam, the religion of something like 88% of the population. Islam was never wholly satisfactory as a unifier of East and West Pakistan, partly because the Hindu minority was always much larger in the East than in the West -- the 1951 figures were 22% in the East as against 1½% in the West -- which helped to create a greater disposition to secular solutions in the East than existed in the West. Nevertheless Islam was a major force binding the two halves together. A second one of course was fear of India. That was later consciously exploited by the Western rulers to justify their own preponderance and draw attention away from the fact that they were getting vastly disproportionate advantages in the unified Pakistan state. But there is no doubt that the Western rulers were exploiting feelings which were very real, in the East as well as the West. Muslim East Bengalis had long-established grievances against Hindus, many of them stemming from the fact that Hindus had been prominent as landlords and officials in East Bengal before partition. Thus fears of India were never merely whipped up, though the artificial element of government-sponsored propaganda became increasingly important vis-a-vis 'natural' element of historical legacy as one decade succeeded the next.

West Pakistanis were heavily preponderant in the army of the new state from the beginning, and almost equally so in its civil administration. Not only did the Westerners assume a role of almost complete political dominance in the centre, they also exercised dominance in East Pakistan itself, and this despite the very clear preponderance of numbers in the East. Despite the fact that there are today some 72 million people living in the eastern region, or would be if 8 million had not fled -- the numbers in March were 72 million or so on the one side and 60 million or so on the other - despite

that fact the proportion of army officers who were Easterners was kept well below 10%.

In the case of higher civil servants the proportion was slightly higher but consistently less than 15%.

One consequence of this extraordinary discrepancy in power was a massive shift in the economic balance between the two halves. Foreign exchange from the raw materials that East Pakistan has always produced (which have been Pakistan's major foreign exchange earner for the whole of the 21 year period) has been used principally to buy capital goods and consumer items for West Pakistan. And 75 to 80% of overseas aid has been used for projects in West Pakistan. This could be justified in terms of economic profitability criteria. It could not be justified either in social justice terms or in terms of the longer-range imperatives of keeping Pakistan minimally unified as a nation. And there were indeed many Pakistanis from both halves of the country who pointed to this fact repeatedly, year in and year out, over the last 20 years.

The East Bengal issue is certainly not new. It has been a major issue for as long as Pakistan has been in existence, though it was partly eclipsed at periods when governments managed to keep popular politics switched off. But whenever politics reemerged, East Bengali nationalism reemerged with it. And indeed it has been in the hands of much the same men throughout the period. The Awami League was formed in 1949 and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was one of its principal leaders then. Over the next two decades East Bengali aspirations were never more than minimally accommodated. East Bengalis were often politically disunited and their divisions often paralleled and interacted with those in West Pakistan. But the sense of Bengali grievance remained. It was able to be kept submerged, but only for relatively short periods before emerging once more, usually in more violent form.

The tale of this crescendo of aspirations can be told in terms of equence of dates -- 1952, 1954, 1956, 1966, 1969. It is a fascinating e, full of allegations of treason against popular leaders. But I can't l it to you tonight. Suffice it to say that passions reached a new ght in the revolutionary social outbursts of early 1969. If I am right present crisis is a direct outcome of the way in which the Islamabad ders attempted to defuse that critical challenge to their hegemony. As ee it, Yahya Khan, who had come to power as a result of his predecessor's apacity to contend with the events of early 1969, took a gamble on ctions as a way out. He evidently hoped that the dangerous revolutionary rents which were flowing at that time -- and not only in the East -- could directed into relatively safe channels by universal franchise elections, en though this meant countenancing threats both to army rule and to rule and for the West.

The magnitude of the risks he had taken became clear when the elections re held last December. The sweeping victory of Mujibur Rahman's Awami ague, with its program of far-reaching demands for the autonomy of the East, eated a sense of impending showdown. Almost immediately after the lections there began a long and complicated series of negotiations on the untry's constitutional and political future, three-cornered negotiations tween Yahya Khan, Mujibur Rahman and Ali Bhutto of the People's Progressive rty, which had emerged as the single largest party in West Pakistan. They re extraordinarily difficult negotiations from the start. Mujibur Rahman as in no position to retreat from the far-reaching demands of his 6 Points rogram. Yet Bhutto and Yahya Khan saw any thoroughgoing implementation of is program as tantamount to a dismantling of Pakistan. For a time it seemed s if tightrope walking by both Yahya and Mujib might issue in some kind of greement. But after early March, when Yahya Khan first postponed the nauguration of the elected parliament, the prospects of a settlement windled fast.

On the 25th of that month Yahya abruptly halted the negotiations to launch his Pearl Harbour-like strike.

Most East Bengalis now insist that the negotiations preceding the strike were essentially a cover-up. Whilst they were going on soldiers and arms were being flown into East Pakistan in large numbers. The talking may well have been consciously designed to give the army time to prepare its crackdown. Even if it was not it served to make that a more powerfully threatening option.

When the bloody strike came on March 25 our reports of it were initially fragmentary. Most of them came from newspapermen who had been thrown out of East Pakistan precisely because the blow was about to be struck. Within ten days it was clear that the crackdown had been ruthless and extensive. But it also seemed then and for the next few weeks that it had been sweepingly effective. I was led to think of the situation as being rather like the one which developed in Indonesia in late 1965 and early 1966, when a short-lived left-wing coup gave the leaders of the army a long-awaited opportunity to destroy their arch-enemy, the Communist Party, and massacre almost all of its activist membership. For a while it seemed to me that the East Bengal crackdown of March and April might prove to have been successful, at least for a few years, if only because of its severity. But by May it was clear that the contrary was the case, that East Pakistan's circumstances were in fact vastly different from the circumstances that existed in Indonesia in 1965-66.

THE PROSPECTS OF THE BANGLA DESH CAUSE

By May a number of things had become clear. First of all we heard from the Indians -- and this was quickly confirmed by various United Nations authorities -- that something like 3½ million people had fled from East Bengal into India, most of them into West Bengal, and that a flow of between 40,000 and 60,000 a week was continuing and likely

to continue for some time. We did not know then, and we don't know exactly now how many of those refugees (or the ones who have come since) are Hindus. We do know that the proportions of Hindus have always been very high. Apparently Hindues were selected for particularly intensive persecution. Evidently the hope was that the spirit of Islamic unity might be revived by government encouragement for local Muslim militants who wanted to attack Hindus, drive them out and take their land. And, with large numbers of Hindus driven out, those who had been given their land and other possessions would have a stake in the new regime. However, it is not only Hindus who have been arriving. 10-15% of the 8 million or so who have come since the end of March are Muslims, townsmen and villagers associated with the intelligentsia-led nationalist movement of Sheikh Mujib. The size and composition of the refugee flow then testifies to very widespread fear in large sections of the East Bengal population of what the Pakistan army has been doing there. So it was clear by May that law and order had not been easily re-established, indeed that it had not been established at all. Even bloodthirsty governments do not authorize their soldiers to act with arbitrary terror except where fear is their only source of authority. They prefer to maintain orderly behaviour in their soldiery. But they find this difficult where there is sullen, obstinate popular opposition to their rule.

A second point that became clear in May and June was that a Bangla Desh guerilla movement was gathering strength and had real potential. The initial suggestion spread by a number of journalists was that the Bengalis are soulful poets, vivid talkers and clever politicians, but can never organise to do anything and certainly not to fight. That is the kind of national character stereotype one is warned to beware of and we should certainly be wary of it in this case. We still don't know much about the Bangla Desh guerilla movement, the Mukti Bahini, though we know that it includes a core of trained soldiers who had been part of the Pakistan Army and a good

many students. It may well be that it will be a long time before it achieves anything like NLF discipline or cohesion. But it will not take that for it to make life near impossible for the 80,000 or so soldiers of the Pakistan army in East Bengal.

A third point that became clear in May and June is that the Pakistan government has been singularly unsuccessful in getting support from members of parliament who had been elected on the Awami League ticket. It has made a number of efforts, it has threatened, cajoled, and bribed. Yet only something like 28 of the 167 Awami League representatives elected in December have agreed to serve in the National parliament if and when it meets. That is extraordinary evidence in my view of the power of Bangla Desh nationalism in the face of the promises that a currently dominant regime is able to offer. More recently we have had evidence of the appeal of Bangla Desh nationalism to Bengali members of Pakistani diplomatic missions in overseas countries. In the Washington embassy particularly, almost all of the Bengalis have defected to the Bangla Desh side.

Finally, it has been clear since at least early July that the Bangla Desh movement has important international sources of support. It is true that no country has as yet recognised Bangla Desh despite the great wave of world condemnation of Yahya Khan's atrocities. It is also true that the United States has continued to give arms to the Islamabad government, albeit in somewhat clandestine fashion. And even the Russians whom one might have expected to come out as clear sympathizers of Bangla Desh, if only because of their concern to keep good relations with India, seem to have been very cautious, urging India to refrain from recognizing Bangla Desh.

But there are grounds to be moderately sanguine about the international prospects of Bangla Desh. These lie mainly in the posture that has been taken by the Aid Pakistan Consortium, a group of eleven countries giving Pakistan development aid, which is in large measure simply foreign exchange support to make up for the

country's longstanding imbalance between export earnings and import needs. That consortium, whose members include the United States, Japan and a number of Western European countries has taken an extraordinarily tough line against the Islamabad authorities, partly because of the advice of the World Bank. As you may have heard, the New York Times got something of a scoop when it unearthed the recommendation of a World Bank team that nothing be done to help the Islamabad government until that government had agreed to negotiate with the leaders of the movement which swept the polls last December. When that recommendation came out in the New York Times the heads of the World Bank were acutely embarrassed, and its President, Robert McNamara, publicly apologised to Yahya Khan about it. Nevertheless the consortium decided to act on the recommendation. Its attitude to Pakistan is essentially "Until you find a political settlement, one that makes sense in terms of local conditions in East Bengal, there is no point in us spending our money upon you. You may call it development aid but we know that it would merely enable you to service an enhanced military effort against the East Bengalis." These various factors together make it clear that Yahya Khan's terrible gamble of 25th March has failed. Correspondingly, it is now acknowledged that the Bangla Desh cause has real prospects of success. Over the last two months outside observers, and particularly Asianists in various countries (including Australia), have come to take the Bangla Desh idea much more seriously as a practical possibility. I want to argue in what time remains to me that we should not only take it very seriously indeed but see it as the most desirable solution.

MORAL RESERVATIONS

The moral case for an independent Bangla Desh is in some senses self-evident. The strength of popular support for the Awami League, the murder of at least a quarter of a million of its supporters, the

akistan
ave the
ct that over eight million East Bengalis have been put to flight, and
e evident incapacity of the Pakistan army to build a new structure
authority in the area since March -- all of these suggest that
ere will not be government of an even minimally consensual kind
till Pakistan overlordship is no more and minimally consensual
overnment is one thing that most thoughtful observers of politics
gard as highly valuable -- whether they take this view on grounds
democratic principle or out of a belief in the value of order.

But some observers, conceding this case, continue to have
oral reservations: Would an independent Bangla Desh be viable?
ould Pakistan's breakup not be dangerously disruptive of inter-
ational order? And what about the likely suffering of the pro-
slamabad minority in East Bengal? Let me take these three in turn.

I personally see Bangla Desh as a reasonably viable state.
iability is a funny concept of course. By many standards of
iability three quarters of the nations of the world would be regarded
s failing. Is the United States a viable country? In terms of its
onsensus problems and its disparities of income distribution you
ould easily argue that it is not. If you mean by viability
country's ability to pay its own way in the world, very many
ountries are failing to do that, and are likely to continue to do
o. An independent Bangla Desh will certainly need international
aid on an enormous scale, if only to repair the devastation of the
last six months. But in the long run it would be reasonably
capable of meetings its import needs, because it does have two
fairly strong industries, jute and tea. Jute, in particular,
has been a mainstay of the export economy of all Pakistan. There
would presumably be a marked expansion of trade with India, something
which the Pakistani authorities have made difficult ever since 1947,
and the terms of that trade would be more favourable to the east
Bengalis than the terms that have prevailed between East and West

Pakistan. As for cultural and ethnic homogeneity, Bangla Desh would have that attribute of viability in fairly high degree. Indeed it would be very much more cohesive than the rump state of West Pakistan, which would have to contend with some quite serious secessionist pressures, particularly from the Northwest Frontier and Baluchistan, which have been the traditionally rebellious provinces in the West.

Secondly, people ask whether it is sensible to encourage the breakup of a state. Ought we not to avoid sentimentality here and say that it is a bad precedent to allow a secessionist movement to succeed whatever the human costs of allowing it to be crushed? Is it not true that allowing one secessionist movement to succeed would mean that secessionist movements elsewhere are infused with new hope and determination which might well be a further source of instability in the Third World. And if movements whose prospects of success are hopeless gain a new surge of life, will that not lead to more bloodshed in the long run? There is something to be said for that point of view, but I don't think one should take it too far. After all it would be more than surprising if the territorial boundaries established in 1945 or 1949 were to be immutable for the next thirty or fifty years. There are certainly few precedents in history for boundaries remaining unchanged in periods of fast technological and social change.

But indeed one can take a generally conservative position on territorial boundaries, a position which says that it was as well for the world that the Biafrans were defeated, and still support the Bangla Desh cause. This is partly because Bangla Desh is the movement of a majority not a minority. While all the other secessionist movements have spoken for minorities -- Biafra, Katanga, Sumatra, Nagaland, Tibet, the Southern Sudan and so on -- this one speaks for a clearcut majority of the population of the state of which it is part. Secondly, a break in which Bangla Desh became an independent

ate would presumably be a clean break. If Biafra had established
elf as an independent state there would still have been
rimonious conflict over the in-between territories; whatever
ndaries had been fixed there would have been borderland areas
ere one could not have established a generally acceptable
rritorial dispensation. With Bangla Desh achieving independence
ere would be no comparable residual problem any more than there
s when France conceded independence to Algeria.

Bangla Desh's achievement of independence would indeed
the first case in the post-war world where a secessionist movement
d succeeded in changing territorial boundaries. But the demonstration
ffect of that would not be very great because the Bangla Desh movement
unique in speaking for an area which is far away from its metropolitan
nother country'. Indeed it is much more like an anti-colonial movement
an any of the other would-be breakaway causes of the Third World. It
s an anti-colonial movement in every major sense except in not being
irected against a European power. We have traditionally come to see
nti-colonialism as a matter of brown people rising up against their
omination and exploitation by white people. But Korean nationalism,
hich was directed against the Japanese, was anti-colonial nationalism
oo. So why should we not see the Bangla Desh cause in this framework?

Finally let me acknowledge that any solution achieved, including
he victory of the Bangla Desh movement, is likely to be immensely
ainful. There is little point in pretending that the Awami League
eople are without sin, or the other components of the Bangla Desh
ovement for that matter. Some of the members of the movement have
committed some terrible atrocities this year, not only against West
Pakistanis, military and civilian, but also against the Bihari
inority, the Muslims from Bihar who fled East into East Pakistan during
and after 1947. The two or three million Biharis have traditionally
been the cat's paw of West Pakistani control in East Bengal, used by

and Islamabad and greatly hated by the proponents of Bengali nationalism. They would probably suffer greatly in any settlement favourable to the Bangla Desh cause. And so would many of the Bengalis who have taken up residence on a semi-permanent basis in West Pakistan. And indeed there are Bengalis who have stood out against mainstream Bangla Desh nationalism and been willing to support the actions of the Pakistan army, sharing the benefits that have flowed where the land of refugees has been distributed. A settlement of the kind I believe we should hope for is going to mean that some of these people are hurt grievously. Like the ex-Northern refugees in South Vietnam when the N.L.F. achieves victory there, or like those sections of the Catholic minority of South Vietnam which have supported Diem and Thieu, they will probably suffer severe persecution.

But the important point which emerges from analogies with Vietnam is that groups that have appropriated a powerful nationalism cannot easily be defeated, and certainly not by exclusive reliance on military machinery.

And so I would like to end with the hope that it will not take five or ten years of desperate terrorism from above and counter-terrorism from below before the world finds ways of achieving a relatively humane settlement in East Bengal or Bangla Desh, a settlement which makes it possible for at least sizeable numbers of the long-suffering refugees to return to their homes.

Thank you very much.

Q. What do you see as China's role in the Pakistan crisis?

A. There is no doubt that Pakistan is a major ally of China's. Indeed it is the one ally that China has, the one major power. One of the reasons that has often been given for why the United States' posture has been relatively favourable to the Islamabad government is fear that Islamabad-Peking relations

would become even closer if Washington, which has traditionally supported the rulers of Pakistan, disengages from them and shows evidence of sympathy for the Easterners who are revolting against them. The Chinese have certainly supported what Yahya Khan has been doing since March. In doing so they have earned enormous resentment and disenchantment from the more radical sections of the Bangla Desh movement which had previously looked to them.

But I think China's role in the whole affair is not as important as is sometimes thought. The Chinese are in no position to give anything like a substitute for the consortium aid for which Pakistan has become dependent on the Western world. They are just not in the aid-giving business on that scale. However there is one respect in which China may well be a major factor in the whole equation and that relates to the strange way in which the Chou-Kissinger diplomacy has criss-crossed the international politics of Bangla Desh. Let me say something about this. In the situation which existed before Kissinger flew from Islamabad to Peking one might have thought the Russians and Americans would get together in something like the way they did at the time of the India/Pakistan war of 1965. One could imagine the Americans saying to the Russians, 'We need to act in concert to keep some sort of stability in the sub-continent. We Americans will put pressure on the West Pakistanis to let Bangla Desh come into existence as an independent state, and offer them aid to help ease the pains of transition. You Russians should press India to offer a corresponding concession, conceivably by allowing Kashmir to become an independent state. Big-time international deals of that kind are never easy to pull off.' But that one might have been thinkable if this were a situation in which the Americans and Russians were still the world's only super-powers. But in 1971 the Americans are dealing as much with the Chinese as they are with the Russians. Indeed it is sometimes said that Nixon is going to win the 1972 elections in Peking!

Under those circumstances if the United States began to put strong pressure on the Islamabad government to disengage from East Pakistan, one could imagine Yahya Khan seeking help from Peking. 'You are our friends and the people we have depended on!', he might say. 'You and only you have the means in your hands of enabling us to stand up to this American pressure. All you have to do is revoke the invitation you have issued to Nixon to come to Peking. Once you threaten to use that card the Americans will stop trying to subvert our authority in East Pakistan. If you really believe in our surviving as a unified nation you will at least threaten to use that card vis-a-vis the Americans.'

Do the Indians not have to be careful about sending in help to the Bangla Desh guerillas?

Well they have been fairly cautious so far. They have only been providing light arms as far as I know. But it is possible that they will be bolder henceforth. I don't know the details of the military positions of the two sides. But as I understand it the strictly military aspects of the India-Pakistan balance are not greatly changed as compared with what they were at the time of the 1965 war. The relative strengths of India and Pakistan in terms of hardware are roughly the same. If anything, India has a more favourable position. The big thing that has changed of course is that large parts of the Pakistani army are now tied down by the guerilla movement in East Pakistan. But the Pakistanis would not be silly enough to choose to fight in East Pakistan, you say. They would surely prefer to fight in the West. That is no doubt so, but it is always open to the Indians in a hypothetical major war to counter-attack in the east.

The other country which is a major part of that particular equation is of course China. It is sometimes argued that the reason why India has been cautious and given few military supplies to the Bangla Desh guerillas is that it is afraid of a situation where the conflict escalates and China comes in on the Islamabad side. But I personally feel that this is not a very important factor because the Russians would have as much reason to rattle sabres on China's northern frontiers as the Chinese have for rattling them on the northern frontiers of India. As I understand the present state of Sino-Soviet relations, it is one where Russia is more disposed to look for a pretext to attack China than the other way. So I would think the possibility of a Chinese intervention into an India/Pakistan war is not very great, in which case the deterrent effect of that possibility is unlikely to be great.

Q. How important is Communist influence in the Awami League?

A. It is not important at all in the Awami League as far as I know, but it is important in the Bangla Desh movement as a whole. The Awami League is headed by a moderate group of intelligentsia leaders. It is sometimes likened to the Indian Congress Party in that it includes people of a wide spectrum of political positions, from socialists to conservatives dependent on traditional patron-client loyalties. Its extraordinarily good showing in the December 1970 elections is a measure of the spread and intensity of feeling against West Pakistani domination. But it is not a measure of the relative importance of the Awami League leaders within the East Bengal political world, for in

fact people further left play a major role in that world. These are people of various groups, many of which have occasionally been labelled Maoist.

Groups whose political orientation is to the Left of the Awami League will presumably grow in importance and influence as time goes on, especially if the struggle is a long one. Broadly speaking -- and I suppose it can only be a very broad generalization -- the longer the struggle goes on the greater the relative power of the more militant and more tightly organised leadership groups will be. But whether the beneficiaries of that process would Maoists, or pro-Moscow Communists or followers of the octogenarian maverick radical Maulana Bashani is a very open question. On the face of it the Maoists' chances are unlikely to be as good as those of their left rivals.

Q. Is there not grounds for being suspicious of the way the Indians are using the refugee crisis for their own purposes?

A. Indeed there is. Many Indians would undoubtedly draw a lot of 'I told you so' satisfaction if Pakistan broke up. And India's power position within the sub-continent would certainly be enhanced. Many Indians are genuinely concerned about the suffering of the refugees, but for others this is less important than delight in seeing Pakistan in such deep trouble.

But it is a fact that India has suffered grievously by having to make these very large outlays for the refugees - 'expellees' would be a better term -- just when it looked as if Mrs. Gandhi's large victory in the elections at the beginning of this year might make it possible to achieve some economic breakthroughs that would create new hope for India's future. The disappointment that is felt because of those breakthroughs have not been made is great.

Q. And there are increasing signs of social and political conflict between refugees and locals. There have been some quite bad instances of communal violence between these two groups. West Bengal, the state with most of the refugees, is becoming more turbulent than ever. It has always been a place of high political tensions and frequent political violence, where President's rule, non-parliamentary rule from Delhi, is periodically imposed. And that trend is likely to be aggravated by the existence of the huge refugee community.

A. What India is going to be able to do about this whole situation is an open question. Mrs. Gandhi is no doubt putting as much pressure as she can on various countries, trying to have them press Yahya Khan to negotiate with Mujibur Rahman. She is arguing that that is the only way in which conditions are likely to be created in which the refugees will feel they can safely return to their homes. But she does not seem to have got very far yet.

Do you think there is a possibility that the West Bengalis would try to secede from India if the East Bengalis succeeded in breaking away from Pakistan?

Yes, I think this is probably something that worries Mrs. Gandhi. But I am not sure that it worries her very much. When all is said and done Bengalis are a very important group in areas of India outside West Bengal. They have a powerful stake in their region's staying part of India because so many of them play important roles in its life as a nation. And Calcutta as a city would hardly derive advantage from leaving a large state to become part of a much smaller one. There is a long history of conflict between Calcutta and Dacca. So it is not easy to see a situation in which a Calcutta-centred and preponderantly Hindu West Bengal would allow itself to be absorbed into a Dacca-centred Muslim-dominated greater Bengal.

Q. But is it not possible that India will try to incorporate East Bengal into its own territory or at least make it into some kind of puppet state?

A. I don't think there is much likelihood of direct annexation. But it is possible that India will try to establish a Bangla Desh state that is heavily dependent on it -- especially if India gives help on a much increased scale. But even then making Bangla Desh into a simple client state would not be easy. After all this would be a country of 70 or 75 million people. It would have international links, presumably in the first instance with those countries that had helped it come into existence. As I see it, there would be various vested interests and international pulls
Q. working in the direction of it being a real as distinct from a purely nominally independent sate. It would probably be friendly to India. But it would have other powerful friends too
A. and be able to play them off against India.

Q. It is still not clear to me why it is that these huge numbers of people have left East Pakistan to flee into India. Can you tell us more about who they are and about the circumstances of their deciding to leave their homes?

A. Well the vast majority of them are peasants. In the early stages there was a very large intelligentsia component. But the preponderant majority of those now coming in are peasants. All of them talk about terror and arson, the burning down of whole villages, the taking away of large numbers of girls and simple indiscriminate shooting. It may be that the prospects of famine was an important deciding factor for many of the more recent
Q. refugees. People say that the famine will really get bad next month because of the long periods when rice was not sown or not

harvested in important areas and because of breakdowns of communications. That may well explain some part of the outflow, but even in periods of anticipated famine peasants don't readily leave areas where they have land or sharecropping rights or customary tilling rights of any kind. The notion that "the fields are green over in India" -- that that would have been enough to attract these large numbers of people is highly implausible. I think one must infer that the main thing that has driven them out is the treatment they have had at the hands of the Pakistan army and of the local vigilante groups, which consist partly of Biharis and partly of Bengalis who have bought into the system.

Q. Is there any prospect that an independent Bangla Desh state would come under leaders who want to build their society along socialist lines?

A. It already calls itself the People's Republic of Bangla Desh, but I am not sure whether that has any particular significance. I would think that the natural outcome of this sort of revolutionary turmoil is a trend to socialist political and economic organization. On the other hand the fact that China has been backing the other side in this conflict suggests that the kind of leftism that will emerge will not be particularly sympathetic to Peking. Unless you expect the left-wing leaders of Bangla Desh to make a distinction between the 'real Maoists' and those nasty Chou En-lai types who have temporarily taken over in Peking!

Q. Do you think it is likely that one of Yahya Khan's fellow generals will attempt a coup against him in the not too distant future? Would that be likely to lead to some kind of settlement?

A. I wouldn't think it would make much difference. The general view seems to be most people in the higher reaches of the Pakistani officer corps are behind Yahya Khan in relation to his actions in the East. There are undoubtedly quite important groups in the civilian population of West Pakistan who say 'The sooner we cut our losses in the East the better. More and more of our boys are dying there, our economy is going to be a shambles unless we can get more overseas aid. We are spending huge amounts on military expenditures and getting nowhere and the prospects for the future are no better.' And perhaps there are officers, people outside the top army leadership, who are now beginning to feel that the East Bengal game is not worth the candle... But from what I've heard this is not a sentiment which has spread to the top ranks.

Q. Would you say that there are elements of racialism in the conflict between West and East Pakistan?

A. Most Punjabis certainly have a sense of racial superiority towards Bengalis. It's reciprocated, mind you! That sort of feeling, a striking absence of empathy across that social and cultural gap, whether you call it racial or whatever you call it, has certainly characterized relations between the two main groups.

Q. Granted that one accepts your argument, what can one do, specifically in Australia?

A. If that wasn't a planted question, it ought to have been. Thank you very much! In the first place one must, I suppose, work to create public awareness of the issue. I was talking recently to a friend in the Labour Party and asked him about Mr. Whitlam's attitude on the Bangla Desh question. When he was speaking to Chou En-lai he used the word 'Bangla Desh' and also the word 'genocide'. And yet, as I said to this friend, he seems not to have been particularly concerned to push this issue in Australia in the last three months. The answer I got was that Whitlam had castigated Pakistani genocide in Bangla Desh in quite harsh terms before a Labour Party Conference in New South Wales three months ago and then had no response from anybody, either inside the party or in the press. Pragmatic politician that he is, he presumably decided that there was not much point in keeping talking about the issue until other people had begun to.

At the present time the Australian government's attitude is that we would not be party to the dismemberment of another Commonwealth state. But the government could well be made to reconsider this. It seems to me that there are awfully good pragmatic grounds as well as humanitarian ones for taking this cause seriously, and it can certainly be presented as being in Australia's national interests. It is after all in Australian interests very conservatively construed that the Indian national development effort should not be completely stymied by the presence of the refugees.

But I would hope that there will also be concern which flows from compassion -- like the concern of this group of three people who have started a hunger strike on the steps of the Melbourne GPO, saying that they will not eat until Australia has raised its aid to the refugees to $10 million. That kind of response will I think stir people's interest in the origins and political background of the actions which have caused this immense suffering.

Just how one should go about raising awareness of these issues in our community -- how one makes people more sensitive to the human suffering and more aware of its political origins and possible political alleviation -- I don't know. Writing letters to the editor and putting pressure on parliamentarians is probably part of the answer... And perhaps one should also write to various government people in Canberra and to the representatives of other countries there.

One thing that is clear is that the issue is coming up at the United Nations General Assembly later this month. A Bangla Desh delegation is there pressing its claims... And so Australia's position will be put on the line, as to whether we are content to be conventional, cautious and legalistic on this issue or whether we will be prepared to see it more broadly and imaginatively and in human terms.
