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# Indo-Pakistan Strife at the Poor Man's Cost

by Dr M. A. Hussein Mullick, Kiel \*

**What is the new problem of the so called "Bangla Desh"? Is it a real revolt of the East Pakistanis against the West Pakistanis or is it rather a strife between India and Pakistan? These are some of the questions arising from the Indo-Pakistan conflict.**

Without going into much detail about the genesis of Pakistan, its merits and demerits, it may perhaps suffice to mention the following: The creation of Pakistan was not the work of selfish people, it rather was the product of a special mind. This mind worked on the following idea: the Muslims of India who had ruled over the Continent for 1,000 years were suffering under the great burden of decay and humiliation, not only at the hands of the British, but moreover at the Hindus' hands, the people forming the majority of the population in India<sup>1</sup>. In order to free themselves from that uncongenial condition of an inferior role, they sought to reassert the essential interests of the Indo-Islamic community. Hence there arose an urge to get their identity restored, as Dr Mohammad Iqbal, the philosopher-founder of Pakistan, so often said in his verses and writings<sup>2</sup>. Later political leaders, among them Dr Mohammad Ali Jinnah, followed the above lines and founded, after considerable struggle, the new state of Pakistan.

## Ideals Thrown Overboard

Putting to test the past 24 years of Pakistan's performance, it would seem to become painfully clear that the high ideals and goals once set by its Prime Minister have hardly been put into practice. Pakistan, despite its progress in average growth rates, in industrial production, in education, or lately in the "green" revolution, has not

done much on the employment front, on the social front, and least of all on the democratic front. GNP oriented development has made Pakistan somewhat stronger materially, but it has not improved the quality of life in the country at large. Any unbiased observer of Pakistan will have to admit quite frankly that present Pakistan, in terms of what it offers to the masses, is not the one which its people would have expected it to be. Many of its facets remain similar to what they had been during the colonial rule. Much of the earlier status quo and environment continues.

## Overwhelming Poverty

Conditions in the neighbouring country, India, are no better. There the dreams of the masses have also not been realised. Exploitation of the masses by the few is still the supreme rule. In terms of open unemployment and overall poverty, there can be no doubt that the masses in India are even worse off than those in Pakistan.

It is quite possible that the problems of India and Pakistan may be different in certain respects and that their solution or solutions perhaps also vary, but there is definitely one feature common to them: The leaders of both countries are reluctant to create politically democratic and socially acceptable orders. The little élan to be found during the early years already seems to have gone with the wind. And this may remain the case for a long time to come!

An American anthropologist recently wrote about India: "Inequality and exploitation are increasing; political dynamism is evaporating as reactionary provincials displace reforming cosmopolitans from the centres of power; deepening local particularism threatens the very integrity of the state; and income per head, though probably not actually declining is advancing at so slow a pace as to amount to virtual stagnation." He goes on to say: "What set out with Nehru's accession in 1947 to be a social and economic revolution, turned by his death in 1964, into a resurgence of

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<sup>1</sup> It may be mentioned here that the Mussulmans of East Pakistan (formerly East Bengal) suffered most at the hands of the Hindus. One prominent Hindu politician, B. R. Madhok, writes that at the time of the partition, the Hindus "owned nearly 80 p.c. of the national wealth of East Bengal. The majority of buildings and properties in each town of Bengal, in some cases more than 85 p.c. of town buildings, were owned by Hindus; 95 p.c. of the 1,290 high schools and 47 colleges in East Bengal were privately organised and financed by them." The Hindus were, however, no more than 25 p.c. of the population of East Bengal. See S. M. Ikram, "Modern Muslim India and Birth of Pakistan", Lahore: Ashraf, 1970, p. 327. See also K. Sarwar Hasan, "Political Background of The East Pakistan Crisis, "Pakistan Horizon", Vol. XXIV, No. 2, Second Quarter, 1971, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See particularly, Presidential Address of Dr Iqbal delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim League, held at Ahmedabad, in 1930, published in "Struggle for Independence 1857-1947", Karachi, March 1958, pp. 12-24.

petty plutocracy ...<sup>3</sup>." On the same line are some statements of the Fourth Five Year Plan of Pakistan saying: "The scattered information that can be put together reveals that income distribution has become fairly skewed in the process of economic development. Real wages declined by about one-third during the 1960s. ... The landless labour increased and there was the little gain in the real farm income per head for the small farmer<sup>4</sup>."

At present India and Pakistan are facing tens of millions of unemployed and underemployed people<sup>5</sup>. Further there is enough evidence to prove that a large section of the population is still at the lowest possible level of existence. Despite much planning and development, the welfare of a substantial portion of India's population (20 to 30 p.c.) has in fact declined over the period 1960–61/1967–68<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore no wonder that India today is faced with actively rebellious groups like the Naxalites.

This is how things look in India and Pakistan. The root causes for the present malaise and state of crisis in India and Pakistan are not so much the quarrels between the North and the South Indians or between the East and the West Pakistanis. They go much deeper. In fact they result from the failure of the leaders in India and Pakistan to reach the goals once promised by the founders Ghandi-Nehru and Jinnah-Liaquat Ali. It is the non-fulfilment of these goals that is now shaking the foundations of both young republics.

### Petty Issues Overplayed

Unable or feeling incapable of undertaking fundamental reforms, the leaders of both countries are engaged in finding excuses for abusing each other. While unimportant issues of lingual, regional and racial character have been overplayed in both countries, the burning issues confronting them, i.e. a better distribution of income, job opportunities or the solution of the Kashmir problem have been purposely neglected.

It is true that the creation of Pakistan was not accepted by many Hindus including among them

the majority of Indian political leaders, particularly V. B. Patel. But why should India not accept Pakistan today? Pakistan is now a *fait accompli* and India's leaders and people should take proper note of it. Against this background, it is not surprising to find Pakistan feeling insecure. Every time that tensions break out between India and Pakistan, it is Pakistan that suspects India's designs. Pakistan seems justified in doing this. It is much smaller in size and in population and has the added disadvantage of having two segments located at a huge distance from each other. Pakistan's past experiences with India in Junagadh, in Hyderabad, in Jammu and Kashmir, and the problems with the Eastern rivers (Farakka barrage) have continually refuelled Pakistan's mistrust of India's intentions<sup>7</sup>. The people of India and Pakistan—at least the masses—are too poor for being able to afford the luxury of playing at this kind of politics. They have too many social and economic headaches of a more fundamental and direct nature as to continue hating each other. No good will ever come out of this kind of irresponsible emotionalism.

### Chauvinist Politics

Looking at the politics of India and Pakistan, one feels in fact deeply pained to see that the vain game of chauvinist politics being played is not in the interests of the underprivileged people of both countries but precisely against them. It is time that these neglected people, and along with them the intellectuals, rise to the occasion and do something to improve the situation. Instead of arming against each other and spending huge sums of money on defence<sup>8</sup>, on propaganda, etc.,—all this calculated to create a still deeper and wider gulf between the people of India and Pakistan—both should now come to strike out along a new path. This path inevitably will have to lead to cooperation between the two countries in economical as well as in political and cultural matters. Both nations have a great deal in common. Through cooperation they are sure to gain more than to lose<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Clifford Geertz, Myrdal's Mythology, "Modernism" and the Third World, "Encounter", London, July 1969, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Planning Commission, Islamabad, July 1970, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> According to a recent article published in the German weekly "Die Zeit", an Indian journalist estimated open unemployment in India at 17 million and underemployment as much as 200 million. Jagdish Joshi, Die Zeit, No. 38, Sept. 17, 1971, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> The report "Poverty in India" states "The gains of development have remained largely confined to the upper middle and the richer sections constituting the top 40 p.c. of the population ... The per capita consumption of the lower middle and poorer sections constituting the bottom 40 p.c. of the urban population declined and the consumption of the poorest 10 p.c. declined by as much as 15 to 20 p.c. (during 1960–68)." Indian School of Political Economy, Poona, 1971, pp. 30–31.

<sup>7</sup> A. K. Brohi, Pakistan's leading lawyer and at one time ambassador in India recently wrote: "Judged by the past experience of Indian intransigence, no one can blame Pakistanis for regarding India's response to their domestic matters in the 'negative way' they have been doing." Rationale of India's Hostility to Pakistan, Impact International, London, September 10–23, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Fritz Baade, Weltweiter Wohlstand, Oldenburg and Hamburg, 1970, p. 193 ff.

<sup>9</sup> This factor is recognised even by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, dubbed so often by Indian writers and politicians as one of the greatest war hawks of Pakistan. He wrote in his book "The Myth of Independence": "Relations between India and Pakistan should resemble those between Sweden and Norway, countries which had to break apart in order to come closer to each other. India and Pakistan have so much in common ..." London, 1969, p. 182.

It is true that economic development in East Pakistan was for a long time neglected by the Pakistan government. But was this the only reason which led to the present secessionist movement? There is more involved. India itself has had a share in this affair. The idea that secession of East Pakistan would weaken Pakistan as a whole, was considered to be a sufficient basis to support the rebels. However, in doing this, India is not just supporting a victim people, but rather serving a narrow national interest. This national interest again is not the real interest of the vast majority of its people but very much of those who benefit by breeding hatred between the two peoples.

The "Bangla Desh" crisis has done a lot of damage to India and Pakistan. For Pakistan it has resulted almost in a ruin of the economy of its Eastern Wing, and on India it has placed the heavy burden of feeding millions of refugees<sup>10</sup>. One may ask who has gained from this crisis? Definitely neither India nor Pakistan though perhaps other powers to some limited extent. The economic and political salvation of India and Pakistan lies in the exploitation of new ways of getting closer to each other and in recognising the interests of their peoples as a whole.

The people of East Pakistan have every right to be treated equally with those of economically more powerful West Pakistan. They are also entitled to claim compensation for the neglect or

exploitation of the province in the past. The Awami League of Shaikh Mujibur Rahman can claim to have a mandate for autonomy and for more resource inflow to speed up the process of development but not for the disintegration of the country. In his public utterances at least, the Shaikh himself always was careful to speak of the emancipation of East Pakistan<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, with the government of all Pakistan possibly within the grasp of his overall majority, it is hard to see why he should have aimed at controlling the east wing only.

Any political scientist with some insight into the affairs of India surely would be able to recognise that if the so called "Bangla Desh" type of secessionist movement were to be promoted, the time will not be far off when India too will also be faced with another "Bangla Desh" in West Bengal, or with other such "Deshes", in other parts of India. Indira Gandhi's widely publicised election parole "Garibi Hatao" (remove poverty) seems to have been forgotten by the clever politicians. The cries for "Bangla Desh" and mounting funds for defence have since long begun to cast their dark shadows over the fourth Plan targets. The poor people of India are in the grip of a manipulated hysteria demanding still more sacrifices for the defence of the motherland. Can't they see that these tricks are played upon them, time and again, by a poor leadership?

### The Refugee Problem

If one looks at the refugee problem, it might be said that India's attitude is lacking consistency. While it is clamouring for the refugees' return to

<sup>10</sup> There are conflicting estimates about the exact number of refugees. While Indian sources seem to inflate to as much as 8.2 mn, the Pakistan Government puts it at around 2.0 mn. Even here there seems to be lot of national politics involved (cf. "Die Zeit", No. 36, September 3, 1971, p. 12; see also "Dawn", Karachi, September 2, 1971, p. 1). Jagdish Joshi estimates the number of refugees at 6 mn (op. cit.). Another source estimates the number of refugees between 2 to 2.5 mn (see statement made by the Special Assistant to the Secretary General of the League of the Red Cross, Mr P. M. C. Stanissis, "Dawn", Karachi, September 13, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> White Paper on the Crisis in East Pakistan, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, August 5, 1971, p. 4.



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their homes in East Pakistan it actively promotes guerilla activity along the Indo-Pakistan (East) borders. An indication of this double-faced policy is the recent statement made by Mr Jagjivan Ram, India's Defence Minister. The All India Radio announced it on 5th September as saying that "the (East Pakistan) refugees will go back to the "Bangla Dosh" of Shaikh Mujibur Rahman and not to the province held by Pakistani forces". The Government of India besides also continues to carry out "Bangla Dosh" and anti-Pakistan propaganda among the same refugees who are expected to return to East Pakistan.

It was natural for the various institutions of the United Nations and for several governments and privates to provide aid to India for the refugees' care, but this aid cannot be made permanent. As things look at present, India does not seem to have realised this. The millions of refugees cannot and should not be allowed to vegetate in refugee camps. They will have to return to a normal life. No Indian or foreign aid as large as it were can provide a real solace to the refugees. What they now need is a help for a safe and quicker way back home or a settlement in the host country. It is high time now that India swallows voluntarily the bitter pill of its failure on the "Bangla Dosh" issue. Any further delay would complicate things still more. A famine-like situation may arise and, who knows, an armed conflict between the two neighbours.

Another tragedy in the offing is the shortage of food in East Pakistan. Though the Government of Pakistan is feverishly engaged in procuring food from all sources, domestic (West Pakistan) as well as foreign (particularly the United States under the P. L. 480 programme), fears have nevertheless been expressed about the emergence of a dreadful famine in East Pakistan in the near future. Two American doctors, Lincoln Chen and John Rhode, recently wrote in the "Lancet": Famine now faces 25 mn of East Pakistan's poorer inhabitants. To avert this imports of nearly 3 mn tons of grain are needed<sup>12</sup>. Without the India-supported guerilla

activity along the sensitive borders being stopped even large imports of food would not be able to solve the problem. Food must be allowed to reach the people, and this obviously means no interference with the means of communication: no dynamiting of bridges or damages to road and railway traffic<sup>13</sup>.

### A New Beginning

Pakistan seems now to be well on its way to introduce civilian rule both in East and West Pakistan. Dr A. M. Malik, himself from East Pakistan, has recently been appointed by the President and has already taken charge of the provincial administration in the Eastern Wing. He is now well on his way to move towards paving the way for a government composed of elected members of the provincial assembly. Press censorship has already been largely withdrawn and political activity resumed. These and other steps are good signs for the achievement of normalcy in Pakistan. Such efforts will however be crowned with success only if India on its side now discards its obstinacy in supporting the secessionists. The cost of "Bangla Dosh" has already been too much for the destitute millions of both countries. Now wisdom dictates settlement, the quicker the better. It may well be that the "Bangla Dosh" proves an eye-opener for India as it may realize dangers of organised interference in the affairs of another country. And perhaps also Pakistan unlike in the past sees clearly the absolute need of restoring fuller democratic freedoms and of equating development gains in the two wings. If India and Pakistan give up their present belligerency and begin to strive towards a peaceful co-existence, there is a lot of good to come out of it. The poor people of both the countries need this.

<sup>12</sup> The Guardian, Manchester, September 10, 1971. Another source estimates the need of food imports for the crisis-ridden East Pakistan at 4 mn tons of foodgrains: Drohende Hungersnot in Ostpakisthan, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Zürich, September 19, 1971. See also "Krisenherde der Woche", Pakistan, Die Zeit, No. 39, September 24, 1971, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> It is almost barbaric for anybody to agree with the guerillas when they say: "... the relief supplies are being used as a political weapon by the army to win the loyalty of the population" (The Times, London, September 14, 1971, see Neue Zürcher Zeitung, op. cit.).

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