**The Separation of East Pakistan**

The separation of East Pakistan was a great setback to Pakistan. By 1970, sentiments for national unity had weakened in East Pakistan to the extent that constant conflict between the two Wings dramatically erupted into mass civil disorder. This tragically resulted in the brutal and violent amputation of Pakistan’s Eastern Wing.

The physical separation of a thousand miles between the two wings without a common border, and being surrounded by Indian territory and influences, led to constant political, economic and social conflicts between the two wings; embittering relations bringing the country on the verge of collapse.

As a result of the separation of its Eastern Wing, Pakistan’s international credit was depleted and the military, being its most powerful institution, suffered a lot. To some, the very concept of Pakistan as the homeland for the Muslims in Southeast Asia no longer appeared valid.

Trouble started right at the inception of Pakistan in 1947. Almost immediately, East Pakistan claimed that as their population (55 percent as compared to 45 percent in the West) was greater, they were in a majority. Democratically, the Federal Capital, therefore, should have been in Dhaka and not in Karachi.

Since Karachi was the seat of the National Government; ministers, government officials and industrialists exerted immense influence on national and regional affairs, which brought them many benefits. But the East Pakistanis were unable to extract the same kind of advantages, as they were a thousand miles away from the Capital. Moreover, the Capital initially attracted wealthy industrialists, businessmen, administrators, doctors and other professionals who had fled from India.

The location of the Capital, it was said, created great economic imbalance, uneven distribution of national wealth and privileges, and better jobs for the people of West Pakistan, because they were able to sway decisions in their own favor.

Secondly, Bengalis resented the vast sums of foreign exchange earned from the sale of jute from East, which were being spent on defense. They questioned how the expenditure for the Kashmir cause would be justified, when it could otherwise have been productively used to build dams and barriers to control floods, eradicate poverty and illiteracy, and supply food and shelter for the ever-growing population in East Pakistan.

Thirdly, the people of the East believed that it was sheer regional prejudice that all white-collar jobs were taken by West Pakistanis.

Many mistakes were made early in the short history of Pakistan. There lived in East Pakistan about 15 million Hindus who, with the help of their fellow West Bengali Indians from across the border, were able to exploit East-West differences that emerged as a result of these mistakes. Grievances were exaggerated to foster anti-West Pakistani feelings that eventually created Bengali Nationalism and separatist tendencies. Bengali political leaders went around depicting the Central Government and West Pakistan as hostile exploiters. However, no effective efforts were made by the Government to check these anti-national trends.

Awami League, formed in 1951, was headed by Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman. He had always been an ardent Bengali nationalist. He began to attract popular support from Bengalis in East Pakistan. He put forward his Six Points that demanded more autonomy for the Provinces in general, and East Pakistan in particular. He was arrested in April 1966, and soon released, only to be rearrested and imprisoned in June the same year. He languished in prison until February 1969.

Being deeply aware of the explosive political situation in the country, the then Chief Martial Law Administrator, Yahya Khan, set in motion moves to transfer power to the elected representatives of the people, and announced that the general elections would be held on October 5, 1970.

In all his election speeches, Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman reiterated his demand for implementation of his Six Points and provincial autonomy plans.

The 1970 elections were postponed from October to December due to heavy floods that caused immense destruction and havoc in East Pakistan. The sheer enormity of the disaster attracted worldwide attention. This gave Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman a golden opportunity to have an international audience for his anti-West Pakistan feelings, which he accused of brutal callousness. The Awami League gained much sympathy and benefit out of this suffering, and Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman and his people were portrayed on the international scene as victims of West Pakistan’s indifference.

In the general elections held in December 1970, the Awami League achieved an overwhelming victory. They captured 167 seats, the highest number in East Pakistan and overall. In the West, the Pakistan People’s Party had won 85 seats. The way was now open to draw up a new Constitution.

The Awami League, now overwhelmingly victors, stood firm on its Six Points plan and refused to compromise on that issue. The Peoples Party in the West maintained that the Six Points Program did not really permit a genuine federation. It was in fact a unique constitutional proposal that proposed a federation that had power only over defense and foreign policy.

Efforts were made to start a constitutional dialogue and narrow the differences between the two Wings, but all in vain. Mujib-ur-Rahman’s adamant stand in support of his Six Points, and his proposal that East Pakistan should have a sovereign status independent of Pakistan, further aggravated the situation.

Mujib-ur-Rahman launched a non-cooperation movement. The civil administration was totally paralyzed. All government and educational institutions were closed.

People were asked not to pay any taxes. The transport system came to a standstill. Factories and shops were shut. All government activities between both the Wings ceased. The Awami League setup a parallel government. Gangs of local Awami League freedom fighters, known as Mukti Bahini, led violent demonstrations and howled racial and anti-West Pakistan slogans, inciting the people to more violence.

Amidst these disturbances, Genaral Yahya decided to convene the National Assembly in March 1971. But Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman unexpectedly put forward other demands such as the immediate lifting of Martial Law and power transfer to the elected representatives of the people, prior to the National Assembly session.

Unfortunately, on March 23, the Republic Day of Pakistan, the Awami League declared “Resistance Day” and Bangladesh flags flew all over the Province. There was a great massacre. East Pakistan had reached a point of no return. To quash the armed rebellion of Awami League militants, the Pakistan Army struck its first blow on March 27, 1971. Yahya Khan chose to use force to bring law and order in the country.

In the meantime, India exploited Pakistan’s dilemma to the full. It sought to wring full propaganda and strategic value for itself out of the Bengali suffering and misery. India launched an attack on East Pakistan on November 22, 1971. The use of modern Soviet missiles, geographical separation by a thousand miles lying across the hostile Indian Territory, and the collusion of Mukti Bahini and the Indian Army, made Pakistan’s military defeat in the East almost certain.

On December 10, 1971, the first feeler for surrender in East Pakistan was conveyed to the United Nations. On December 17, 1971, a formal surrender was submitted and accepted. Forty five thousand troops and an almost equal number of civilians of West Pakistan were taken as prisoners of war.

The surrender led to the disintegration of East and West Pakistan and the establishment of Bangladesh. After 25 years, the East Pakistanis declared themselves independent and renamed their Province as Bangladesh. Pakistan finally recognized Bangladesh at the Islamic Conference in Lahore on February 22, 1974.