

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

 Understand the reasons why Pakistan was an extraordinary state.

CREATION OF WEST & EAST PAKISTAN

- The transfer of power took effect as proposed at midnight of August 14–15. Lord Mountbatten marked the transfer of power in ceremonies
 - **≻August 14 = Karachi, Pakistan and**
 - **≻August 15 = New Delhi, India**
- Independence Day in either country is celebrated on the dates of those respective ceremonies.
- The Bengal delta becomes part of the new state of Pakistan under the name 'East Pakistan'. Dhaka was the regional capital.



PARTITION EFFECTS

- The Partition of India was a geographical solution to a political fiasco (disaster).
- The partitioner's knife cut through three provinces
 - **>** Bengal,
 - > Assam, and
 - Punjab; and
- through innumerable trade routes and family ties.
- It created two long borders and left the partitioned societies in shambles (disorder), ruining millions of lives and upsetting cherished social arrangements.
- Many of the effects were unintended, unanticipated and long term.



HOMELAND FOR MUSLIMS

- The point of Partition was to create a homeland for Muslims.
- In Bengal, Islam had become a mass religion in the Mughal period, when the fertile eastern delta was brought under the plough.
- It was no surprise, therefore, that East Pakistan's centre of gravity was the active eastern delta and that its population was overwhelmingly rural.
- Dhaka, the city now chosen to be the provincial capital, was the very one that the Mughals had built up to control the marshes and riverscapes of what they had called 'Bhati' and the British later referred to as 'Lower Bengal'.

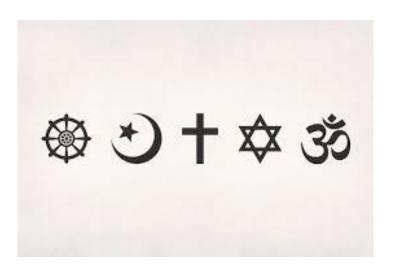
HOMELAND FOR MUSLIMS

- For the first time in its history, the Bengal delta was encased in a modern international border, a phenomenon that its inhabitants had no previous experience of whatsoever.
- The new border encircled most Muslim-majority areas of Bengal and in that sense East Pakistan became the homeland of most of Bengal's Muslims.
- But millions of Bengali Muslims were now in Indian territory and millions of non-Muslims continued to live in East Pakistan.
- This ensured that the political fiasco that had prompted Partition in the first place – the inability to overcome communalist politics – was set to carry on under the new dispensation.

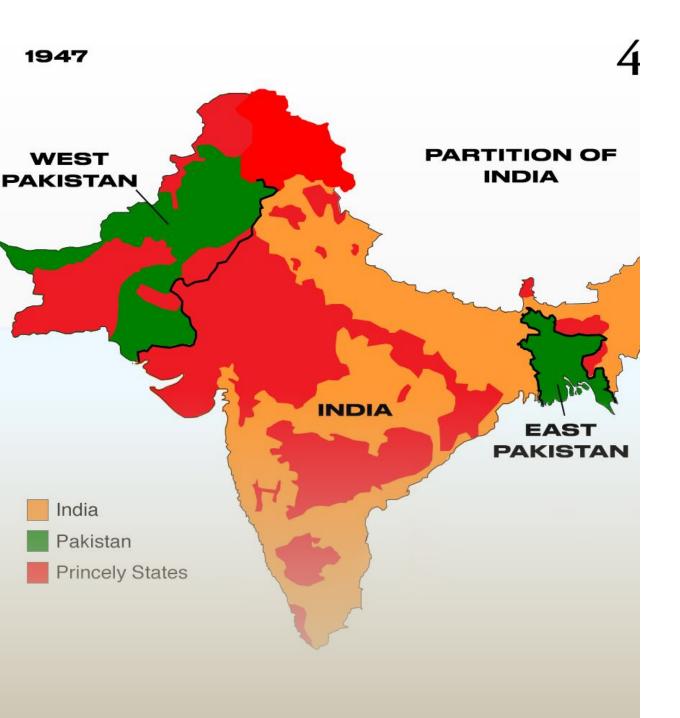
BECOMING PAKISTAN

- Under its new name East Pakistan the Bengal delta now joined a unique experiment in state-making.
- There were three reasons why Pakistan was an extraordinary/special state.

BECOMING PAKISTAN



- First, it was founded upon religious nationalism.
- Religion was supposed to cement a new national identity, something that had not been tried before the only other modern example of a religiously based nation-state being **Israel** (which was founded a year later than Pakistan).



BECOMING PAKISTAN

- Second, Pakistan was a state administering two discrete territories, separated from each other by about 1,500 km of Indian terrain (Map 11.1).
- West Pakistan was by far the larger of these two wings, but East Pakistan was more densely populated.
- In fact, most Pakistani citizens lived in East Pakistan: the first population census in 1951 revealed that Pakistan had 78 million inhabitants, of whom 44 million (55 per cent) lived in East Pakistan.



Map II.I. The two wings of Pakistan, 1947-71.

BECOMING PAKISTAN

- These two factors combined with a third:
 Pakistan did not become heir to any of the colony's central state institutions.
- India, on the other hand, inherited the capital New Delhi as well as most of the civil bureaucracy, armed forces and police.
- The bulk of the colony's resources and industries, and its major port cities of Mumbai (Bombay) and Kolkata, also went to India.
- By contrast, Pakistan inherited largely rawmaterial producing regions.
- Whereas the new rulers of India replaced the British in the old centre of colonial power, the new rulers of Pakistan had a much harder time to establish themselves.



BECOMING PAKISTAN

- In other words, Pakistan was uniquely experimental:
 - > no other postcolonial state combined the loss of its administrative hub,
 - > the need to govern two unconnected territories and
 - > the ambition to found a national identity on a religious one.

EASTERN WING

- In the eastern 'wing' of the country the situation was especially difficult.
- Initially the eastern wing of Pakistan was known officially as 'East Bengal'. It became 'East Pakistan' in 1956.
- In August 1947, 'the new East Pakistan government was hastily housed in a College for Girls [Eden College in Dhaka], with a large number of improvised bamboo sheds added to it for greater accommodation.

EAST PAKISTAN

- On partition, East Pakistan received only one member of the former Indian Civil Service who belonged to that region.
- Six others were hastily promoted from the Provincial Civil Service.
- As a result, the civil service of East Pakistan was largely non-local, and decision-making was in the hands of officials with little knowledge of East Pakistan's needs.

EAST PAKISTAN

- An official publication described the predicament (difficulty) of the administrators in heroic terms:
- For the many directorates there was no accommodation at all and these
 were sent to outlying districts. One Minister sat in a boat on the Buriganga
 river, disposing of files and transacting official business. Hundreds of officers
 chummed together in ramshackle tenements. Even camps were a luxury and
 bamboo constructions sprang up to provide shelters for officials and staff
 who were used to comfortable Calcutta flats and rooms.

EAST PAKISTAN

- The General Officer Commanding (East Bengal), who arrived in January 1948, later reminisced (think back to):
- The provincial government . . . was newly formed and poorly staffed. But worse still, it was politically weak and unstable. There was no army. All we had in East Pakistan at the time of Independence were two infantry battalions [one with three and one with only two companies]. We had very poor accommodation: at Headquarters there was no table, no chair, no stationery . . . we had virtually nothing at all; not even any maps of East Pakistan.

MUSLIM LEAGUE

- These initial uncertainties and the artificial nature of Pakistan's unity fuelled the desire for a strong, centralised state.
- The ruling party, the Muslim League, benefited from the prevailing mood in Pakistan, which was one of euphoria (intense happiness).
- Having attained a sovereign homeland, Muslims could now safeguard their political, religious and cultural rights and they could complete their economic emancipation.

PROBLEMS IN ADMINISTRATION

- But it did not take long for them to realise that the road ahead was anything but smooth: the two elements that most Pakistanis shared — an Islamic identity and a fear of India — proved insufficient to keep them united.
- Immediately fights broke out over the equitable distribution of resources, both material and symbolic.
- Only three months after independence a first serious crack in the edifice (structure) of Pakistan appeared over the question of the national language.
- It was the initial portent of enormous tensions over how the new state should be organised. These strains would gradually spoil the prospect of building a Pakistani nation.

TWO NIGHTMARES

- Right from the beginning, they took the form of a confrontation (face to face) between Pakistan's two wings over issues such as language, autonomy, food security and economic policy.
- In the unfolding drama of Pakistani politics, the Bengal delta would play the role of the disenfranchised (deprived) sibling clamouring (yell) consistently and unsuccessfully for rights withheld.
- Throughout the twenty-four years of the Pakistan experiment, the country's various rulers shared two nightmares: to be humiliated by India and to see control of the state pass democratically to East Pakistan. The latter fear would be their undoing (downfall).

REFERENCES

• Willem van Schendel (2009). A History of Bangladesh [Cambridge University Press]

