

Liberation War Debates In the
 United Kingdom Parliament
 The House of Lords
 &
 The House of Commons
 Edited By
 Dr. Nooh Ul Alam Lenin
 &
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 Dhaka, Bangladesh
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Introduction

In order to understand the international politics involved with the Bangladesh Liberation War; the co-relations and roles of the world governments need to be emphasized. It would then help to analyze how the international relations and reactions around the globe shaped the fate of this war.

As a whole, seven governments of the world have influenced the international politics of liberation war at most. They are Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, UK, USA and the USSR. As a result of their interrelations and exchanges the war of liberation was escalated to an international level from Kashmir to the deep waters of the Bay of Bengal.

To have a thorough view of the liberation war's history; the government proceedings, reactions, and diplomacies involved must be studied, yet we don't see a good many books regarding them. To date, studies of the international reactions of liberation war are limited in studying the govt. proceedings of Bangladesh, India and USA. Even these studies are made largely depending on secondary sources or newspaper clippings. But secondary sources and clipping themselves have some kind of political prejudices even if not intended. On the other hand, govt. proceedings of China, USSR, Pakistan are not studied because of a lack of resources and barriers by language and politics.

The British role and how it influenced the fate of Bangladesh is not thoroughly studied too. Though it doesn't have language barriers

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or of political in that extent but yet not emphasized. One cause of that can be the lack of primary resources again.

This publication aims to avail primary resources for researchers of social sciences and curious minds dedicated to understanding our past. So that, light can be shed on the forgotten and unknown pages of history.

If we consider the length of this book, which is about 500 pages, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the British MPs were a bit of obsessed with the Liberation War debates than most of other Western parliaments in the west of Suez and only second after the Indian Lok Sabha in the world. Between 25th March and 16th December of 1971, the sessions of the House of Commons were held for a total of 129 days; during which they debated the Liberation War issue for 55 days, which is 43% of the total.

The visit of a parliamentary delegation of 4 members to Bangladesh at that time funded by the British government, the visit of the Minister of State for Overseas Development to West Bengal's refugee camps, Visit of other 6 MPs to Bangladesh and Pakistan either by self-funding or by the invitation of Yahya Khan, inauguration of Bangladesh Postal Stamps in the British parliament building the Westminster or having a Visa Seal by the immigration authority of Bangladesh in 1971 on a British MP's passport and other events undoubtedly shows the close ties of the liberation war affairs and the British parliament. Why the parliament was putting so much time and effort into this war is an obvious question. Surprisingly the answer does not have much to do with the realist school of thought since Britain's national interests in the subcontinent had nothing common with those of the USA or USSR or China.

The attention of the parliament was a reflection of the attention among the government and its people into the calamity of the

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subcontinent. The subcontinent was ruled by them for 190 years. The 190-year span is more true for Bengal than any other part of the vast lands. Even the capital was situated in Bengal for most of the colonial rule. Losing Bengal or losing India was a fresh 24-year-old memory for the Britishers' like we have fresh memories for events happened 24 years ago like 9/11 in the USA or Bombing the Ramna Park on Pahela Boishakh.

Along with these historic backgrounds, London was the largest campaign base of the Bangladesh Movement only after Calcutta. The Government of Bangladesh even established a high commission in the UK as they did earlier in Calcutta. London was the second base not only because it was an important city but a lot of Bangladeshi people, especially the people from greater Sylhet lived there. Bangladesh's de facto chief of diplomacy Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury

functioned and campaigned from there and held meeting with many parliamentarians of both the houses and state minister including the Secretary of state for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Sir Alec Douglas Home himself. Finally, London was the destination of the president of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after his release from prison. It was not the Pakistan Government who sent him there but Bangobondhu himself chose to go to London than any other available option like Tehran or New York or New Delhi. We hope this publication will provide access to many events and insights into British policies on the Liberation War for the constructive minds and social researchers. We hope this book will help us to narrate the past for a better understanding of our future.

Dr. Nooh Ul Alam Lenin

&

Irfan Sheikh

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How to Read This Book

The debates regarding the liberation war of Bangladesh are presented in this book by dates. The members of parliament who also hold offices in the government are often mentioned here by their designation. The names of these cabinet members are shown in a first bracket.

On the other hand the constituencies of distinguished members of the parliament are also shown with a first bracket beside their names.

Both Houses of the British parliament are quite noisy and the debates are way livelier than most of the parliament in the world, especially it is true for the Lower House which is the House of Commons. The honorable members often interrupt each other during debate. Heckling, Interjections or often witty insults and jokes are not unusual.

That is why writing or reading a verbatim of UK parliament's debate is not a very easy task. In this book, many hecklings or noises are omitted since they bear no historic significance. But often many members rise against someone's motion or they reject someone's stand by making noises altogether. These kinds of acts are addressed in this book using 'Several Noble Lords' for the House of Lords and 'Several Hon. Members' for the House of Commons.

The interrupted speeches by these kinds of rising or heckling are connected using '-' this punctuation. And sometimes the interruptions themselves are separated using a third bracket.

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The Logo for both the houses are identical except for their color. The logo of the lower house is green and the upper house is red. Since this book is printed in black ink, it would not be possible to distinguish them. Thus, the logo of the House of Commons is kept same but instead using the House of the Lord's logo, the 'British Coat of Arms' is used. So that it will be easier for the readers to distinguish debates among the houses.

The parliament mentioned these debates mostly as Pakistan debate, East Pakistan or even India and Pakistan but never as Liberation War Debates or Bangladesh Debates. And these debates were held not exclusively under the foreign policy sessions. Often, they were debated in Aid sections, Arms and Defense policies and even sometimes in trade sections. For this the liberation war issue rose many a times in a single day in different motions of the parliament. This book offers all these fractions of liberation war debates from different motions of the house under a single date. The discontinuities of these debates are shown using three dots (...).

To understand the hierarchy of the MPs involved with the British Foreign Policy as whole, this diagram can be followed.

The Prime Minister

Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

The Overseas Development Office (which functioned independently without the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that time) had no

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secretary but the office was directed by a minister of state since the office had comparatively little importance. It can be compared to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs or the Ministry of Power and Energy of today's Bangladesh as they are run by a state minister, not ministers. But historically, the Overseas Development Office had a very close contact and synchronization with Foreign Office and in the parliament the state minister is found responsible to answer many of the questions asked to the Secretary of State.

Cabinet ministers are chosen from both the houses of the parliament but mostly they are from the lower house. Among the important cabinet members regarding the liberation war, all the members were from the House of Commons except the Secretary of State for Defence and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who were from the House of Lords.

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Personalities

Government (Conservatives)

Alec Douglas Home - Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Anthony Kershaw - Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Anthony Royle - Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Edward Smith - Prime Minister

Joseph Godber - Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Lord Balniel - Minister of State for Defence

Lord Carrington - The Secretary of State For Defence

Marquess of Lothian - The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Reginald Maudling - Secretary of Home Affairs

Richard Wood - The Minister for Overseas Development Opposition (Labour)

Denis Healey (Leeds East) former secretary of defence Harold Wilson - Leader of the Opposition

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Others

Arnold Smith - Secretary General of Commonwealth Indira Gandhi - Prime Minister of India

Richard Nixon - United States's President

Sadrudin Aga Khan - UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -

President of Bangladesh Swaran Singh - Minister for Foreign Affairs of India U

Thant - Secretary General of the United Nations William Rogers - United States's

Secretary of State Yahya Khan - President of Pakistan

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Abbreviations, Metonyms and Annotations 10 Downing Street - Office of the Prime Minister of UK

CENTO - Central Treaty Organization (A security Pact comprising the UK, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan)

ECOSOC - United Nations Economic and Social Council FCO - Foreign and Commonwealth Office

HMG - Her Majesty's Government (British Government)

Permanent Under Secretary - Equivalent to Secretary in present day Bangladesh

S.E.A.T.O. - Southeast Asia Treaty Organization

Secretary - Equivalent to Minister in present day Bangladesh Minister -

Equivalent to State Minister in Present day Bangladesh United Nations First Committee - General Assembly

United Nations Second Committee - Economic and Financial Committee

United Nations Third Committee - Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee or SOCHUM

Whitehall - Secretariat Building of the British Government

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29 March, 1971

The House of Commons

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Alec Douglas-Home): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House, I should like to make a statement on the situation in Pakistan.

The whole House will join me in regretting the loss of life in Pakistan, a fellow member of the Commonwealth, and in hoping for a restoration of normal conditions. As the House will appreciate this is an internal matter affecting relations between two parts of a sovereign country, and I will not be expected to speculate on political matters which are the concern of the Pakistan Government. Her Majesty's Government are, however, watching the situation very closely, and we remain in constant touch with the Pakistan authorities.

A fortnight ago, on the advice of the Deputy High Commissioner in Dacca, some 200 United Kingdom and Commonwealth women and children were evacuated from East Pakistan. In the past few days of disturbances, we have had no reports of any injury to members of the British Community in East Pakistan, who now number about 700. The British Council offices and library in Dacca were attacked in the course of operations on the night of 25th March in the area of the university; the damage cannot yet be properly assessed, but no

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member of the Council staff was hurt. There are no other reports of damage to British property, but, as communications from East Pakistan have been restricted and communications between Dacca and other parts of the Province disrupted, the House will appreciate that our information may not be complete. I shall keep the House informed.

Mr. Healey: I thank the Foreign Secretary for that report. The whole House shares his deep sorrow at recent events in Pakistan. We recognise that at the moment information must necessarily be incomplete, and we welcome the right hon. Gentleman's assurance that he will make another statement when more information is available.

The House will be particularly concerned for the safety of British lives and property, and in this connection I should like the right hon. Gentleman to answer two questions. First, does he know who was responsible for the attack on the British Council offices in Dacca, and are steps being taken to obtain compensation for any damage caused? Second, has he an assurance from the authorities in East Pakistan that all assistance will be given should it be necessary to evacuate further British personnel?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's last question is, "Yes", although the Deputy High Commissioner, as we understand it, does not advise further evacuation at this time. The Army was responsible, as we understand it, for the attack, on the British Council offices. We have brought the matter to the notice of the Pakistan authorities and we shall in due course ask for compensation.

Mr. Thorpe: We share the sadness which the Foreign Secretary has expressed about these events in a Commonwealth country with which we showed our solidarity at the time of the floods.

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In view of the unhappy experience of this country's involvement in another Commonwealth civil war, namely, in Nigeria, will the Foreign Secretary confirm that, apart from offering our good offices if they should be required, there will be no further involvement, and, in particular, there will be no question of supplying arms to either side?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: I have said that we have no intention of getting involved in this matter, which is a civil matter for the authorities in Pakistan. As regards arms, no new contracts have been entered into with Pakistan for a good many months now. I shall review this question, but I think that nothing imminent arises.

Sir F. Bennett: I am delighted to learn that Her Majesty's Government have no intention or thought of intervening in an internal matter, which could only make things a great deal worse, but could my right hon. Friend tell us whether the same restraint is being exercised elsewhere, since what is already a horrible matter could become a great deal worse if any other outside Power—quite apart from Great Britain—intervened?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: I have not heard that any outside Power is intervening

or intends to intervene.

Mr. Shore: These are deplorable events. Will the Foreign Secretary impress upon the Pakistan Government the abhorrence felt by very many people in this country at the brutal and repressive measures which they are taking against the East Bengal people, and will he impress upon them also that we are most concerned that their troops should be withdrawn, that the killing should stop, and that Sheikh Mujib and his followers should not be the victims of repression?

Further, will the right hon. Gentleman do everything in his power to impress upon the Pakistan Government that the people of Bengal have the right to decide their own future, and, if need be, to decide on a separate future for themselves?

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Sir Alec Douglas-Home: I do not think that it would be helpful for me to comment on those matters at this time. Everyone abhors violence. The President of Pakistan, as we understand it, was faced with a situation in which his country might have been divided in half. We must allow the Pakistan authorities to deal with this matter without our intervention.

Mr. Wilkinson: I associate myself with the expressions of deep regret at the tragic events which have befallen Pakistan, a Commonwealth partner with which we have personal as well as historic links. When my right hon. Friend speaks of a British community of about 700 in Pakistan, does that include Pakistanis of British citizenship who have gone on short trips to East Pakistan, or does he mean British people only? Further, will my right hon. Friend, through the usual diplomatic channels, try to obtain information about the relatives of East Pakistani citizens who have connections in this country who might be affected by the troubles?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: The figure of 700 does not include Pakistanis. At the time when we brought out the 200 United Kingdom citizens, the Deputy High Commissioner was in touch with most of the families in Pakistan. Everyone understands how difficult it is to get communication with those up-country, but at that time we took out all who wanted to come. At the moment, the Deputy High Commissioner, as we understand it—although communications are difficult—does not advise further evacuation, but plans are laid should people wish to leave.

Mr. Alexander W. Lyon: May I press the Foreign Secretary on the questions of arms? There appear to be considerable differences between this situation and the Biafran situation. It is recognised that we do not supply arms at the moment. Will the Foreign Secretary give an undertaking that, if the Pakistan Government did ask for arms, he would make a statement to the House before coming to any decision about it?

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Sir Alec Douglas-Home: That is a hypothetical situation which we had better leave at present.

Mr. Judd: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we must be careful not to intervene in what is essentially an internal affair, but would he not agree that one of the causes of frustration in Pakistan is the disproportionate amount of economic assistance going to West Pakistan as compared with East Pakistan, and will he assure the House that, in the aftermath of this unfortunate incident, we shall do everything possible within the aid consortium to encourage full economic assistance to the eastern half of Pakistan?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: The ironic aspect of this situation was that for the first time it was possible for an East Pakistani to be Prime Minister of a united Pakistan, and this opportunity has slipped.

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29 March, 1971

The House of Lords

The Marquess of Lothian: My Lords, I should like to repeat a Statement made by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The Statement is as follows:

"The whole House will join me in regretting the loss of life in Pakistan, a fellow member of the Commonwealth, and in hoping for a restoration of normal conditions. As the House will appreciate, this is an internal matter, affecting relations between two parts of a sovereign country and I will not be expected

to speculate on political matters which are the concern of the Pakistan Government. Her Majesty's Government are however watching the situation very closely and we remain in constant touch with the Pakistan authorities.

"A fortnight ago, on the advice of the Deputy High Commission in Dacca, some 200 United Kingdom and Commonwealth women and children were evacuated from East Pakistan. In the past few days of disturbances we have had no reports of any injury to members of the British Community in East Pakistan, who now number about 700. The British Council offices and library in Dacca were attacked in the course of operations on the night of March 25 in the area of the University; the damage cannot yet be properly assessed, but no

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member of the Council staff was hurt. There are no other reports of damage to British property, but as communications from East Pakistan have been restricted and communications between Dacca and other parts of the province disrupted, the House will appreciate that our information may not be complete."

My Lords, that is the Statement.

Lord Shepherd: My Lords, I am most grateful to the noble Marquess for repeating that Statement. We on this side of the House share with Her Majesty's Government their deep concern and sympathy with the Government and people of Pakistan in their hour of great difficulty. I am glad that the noble Marquess stresses that this is an internal matter. If I may, I would applaud the words of the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi, when yesterday she called for restraint within her own country. I am glad that so far British subjects have not been involved, and I have complete confidence that Her Majesty's Government will ensure, if it is necessary to bring out our people, that steps will be taken.

May I make two points? First of all, we have no knowledge of the extent of damage, loss of life or effect upon the Pakistan community. However, I hope that if relief is called for Her Majesty's Government will be one of the first to offer relief to the people of East Pakistan. My second point I make with a degree of caution. I hope that Her Majesty's Government will make it clear to the Government of Pakistan that it is very much in their own interests that knowledge and information should be made available to their friends within the Commonwealth, because I have a feeling that at the present moment some of our newspaper and radio reports could be well misunderstood in Pakistan and could well make things even more difficult there. Therefore, I hope that Her Majesty's Government will in the most friendly way, put forward the suggestion to the Government of Pakistan that it is very much in their interests that information is made available.

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The Marquess of Lothian: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, and I will certainly consider what he said. I entirely agree with him on his point about information, and I am quite certain that action will be taken in the way he suggests, as it will be if it becomes necessary to contribute anything in the form of international aid.

Lord Balogh: Nevertheless, my Lords, I do not think that this occasion ought to pass without somebody in this House protesting against the destruction of democracy in East Pakistan.

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2 April, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Shore: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Foreign Secretary, through you, whether he will consider making a statement this morning on the events in East Bengal? I have managed at short notice to communicate with the Foreign Office about this matter. I think that the House will agree that, in view of the reports of the escalation of the killing there and the likelihood that many lives will be lost during the coming weekend, it would be desirable if the right hon. Gentleman could tell the House of his information of what is happening, and give us the opportunity of putting questions to him and pressing upon him our concern about these events.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no notice of any statement. But the right hon. Gentleman is here.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Alec Douglas Home): If it will help the House, may I say that I hope to make a full statement on the situation in Pakistan on Monday. At the moment, as far as my information goes, the position is as I stated it when I last made a statement, that no United Kingdom citizens have been killed or hurt so far.

Mr. Shore: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that information. I hope he has taken the opportunity to impress upon the Pakistan

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Government that we are concerned not only for the lives of our own nationals, but equally about the slaughter, as it may be, of innocent people supporting a democratically-elected majority Government as represented by the Awami League.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has made his point. I think that we must now come back to more regular procedures.

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5 April, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Shore: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Foreign Secretary, through you, whether he will consider making a statement

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Alec Douglas-Home) With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House, I wish to make a further statement about the situation in Pakistan.

Since I last reported to the House, the conflict in East Pakistan has continued. Our information about what has taken place is still not complete, but there can be no doubt that many lives have been lost. The whole House and country will join me in urging an end to the strife, a start on reconciliation and on the task of bringing relief to the injured and the homeless.

Over the past weeks, we followed with anxiety the course of political negotiations in Pakistan, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had expressed to President Yahya Khan his concern that political differences should be settled by agreement. We were aware of the endeavours of the President to achieve this end, and we hoped that he would be successful. We feared that violence would do permanent damage to the constitutional fabric of Pakistan. To our great regret, negotiations collapsed and military force was used.

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We are deeply concerned at the loss of life and suffering of all sections of the Pakistan community and welcome the President's statement that his aim remains the transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people. It is our earnest hope that this objective will be achieved.

Her Majesty's Government have no intention of interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs, and I wish again to emphasise that this is our position. It is the people of Pakistan themselves who must decide their own destinies, and intervention from outside will only complicate a very difficult and distressing situation.

The British Government and public gave dramatic evidence of their deep compassion for the East Pakistanis who suffered in the cyclone last year. We again stand ready to play our part in an international effort to help in mitigating suffering in East Pakistan, should we be asked to do so.

The House will wish to know that we have still received no report of injury or damage to British subjects or property in East Pakistan, apart from the attack on the British Council premises in Dacca which I reported in my earlier statement. It has, however, not been possible to contact some British subjects known to be in outlying areas. In these circumstances, the Deputy High Commissioner advised that women and children and those whose presence was not essential should leave the country if, in their judgment, they could make the journey to Dacca in safety. As a result, about 100 United Kingdom nationals have left Dacca by air, by Royal Air Force and civil aircraft, since my last statement; and about 40 have left Chittagong by sea.

I should like to express my gratitude to the Deputy High Commissioner Mr. Sargeant and his staff in Dacca, to the members of the British community in East Pakistan, and to the members of the Royal Air Force and the Merchant Marine, who have been cool, resourceful and effective in a very difficult and dangerous situation.

Mr. Healey: The House will welcome what the right hon. Gentleman said about the Government's intention to give material aid to those who are suffering in the present situation, and also what the right hon. Gentleman said about the evacuation already carried out of British subjects. We join in the tribute he has paid to those responsible for carrying out that evacuation so competently in such difficult circumstances.

In view of the very convincing reports of indiscriminate bloodshed in East Pakistan and the patent risk of external intervention in these events, may I underline to the right hon. Gentleman the importance of Her Majesty's Government using any influence they can bring to bear on the two issues to which the right hon. Gentleman has himself referred? These are, first, that there should be an immediate end to the bloodshed and, secondly, that there should be a peaceful solution of the political problems of East Pakistan in accordance with the wishes of the people of that territory, expressed with such remarkable unanimity in the recent elections.

All of us in this House will, I am sure, be deeply concerned about the physical safety of Sheikh Rahman and the other leaders of the people in East Pakistan. Has the right hon. Gentleman any information to give the House about their present whereabouts and situation? Can he assure the House that he will express to the Pakistan Government the desire of all of us on both sides of the House that people so recently elected with such an overwhelming vote should be treated with the respect they deserve in a democracy?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: We will certainly use any influence we have to make clear that we hope that bloodshed will be ended as soon as possible. There have been elections quite lately and there was the intention of calling together the Assembly to frame a constitution. We hope that these processes can be resumed. Certainly, too, we are interested in clemency and justice, but the right hon.

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Gentleman will not ask me to make a judgment about the internal affairs of Pakistan.

Mr. Braine: While it is right that there should be no intervention in the internal affairs of a friendly Commonwealth country, is my right hon. Friend aware that the basic problem facing Pakistan is the sharp economic disparity between the two wings of the country? Is he further aware that the Select Committee Sub-Committee which went to Pakistan at the end of 1969 came away convinced that substantial outside help from the world community would be necessary if that disparity was to be corrected? Will Her Majesty's Government take any initiative in calling an early meeting with, or having discussions with, the World Bank and the Pakistan Consortium to see whether some definite and positive move could be made in this direction?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: I have long been convinced, as everyone has, that a programme of economic development is necessary for East Pakistan. We are willing to play any part in an international organisation which would contribute to that end. The first thing, however, is to end the fighting and get back to some kind of political stability in the country.

Mr. Shore: We welcome what the right hon. Gentleman has said about ending the strife and the need for reconciliation. Will he add something more about the safety of Sheikh Rahman and impress upon the Pakistan Government how essential it is to release the leaders of this freely elected democratic party so that the political process can be resumed?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: I do not think that I can go further than to say that in our view there will have to be a political settlement. For that purpose there must be political talks. I cannot as a member of the British Government possibly dictate to anyone in Pakistan what form those talks should take.

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Mr. St. John-Stevs: While fully supporting my right hon. Friend's declaration of neutrality and non-interference, may I ask him to use his influence to impress upon neighbouring States, including India, the necessity to follow a similar policy?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: As I understand it, the Prime Minister of India has said that India has no intention of intervening in the internal affairs of Pakistan and has cautioned people against creating new difficulties by talking of it.

Mr. Thorpe: All of us would agree that we should not interfere in the internal

affairs of Pakistan, but while accepting that the Commonwealth Study Group—for reasons I will not go into—is not exactly a happy precedent, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he would not nevertheless approach the Commonwealth Secretary-General to see whether there could not be some Commonwealth initiative for a form of mediation which would bring the two sides together?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: This must be a matter for the Government of Pakistan if they want any assistance.

Mr. Douglas-Mann: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the widespread feeling that Pakistan, after the events of the last few weeks, can never again be one country? Is he further aware that to take the view that this is an internal matter of a Commonwealth country—which in most circumstances would be perfectly proper and appropriate—is not in this context the right one, and that the British Government do have influence and should be using it to secure a cease-fire? Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that there is a widespread opinion on both sides of this House—an all party Motion to this effect secured over one hundred signatures today—that the right hon. Gentleman should use the significant influence he can exercise to ensure that the fighting in Pakistan ceases as soon as possible?

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Sir Alec Douglas-Home: Certainly I respond to the hon. Gentleman's request. We will use all the influence we can. We are deeply concerned about the division of Pakistan. We believe that the division should be ended. I do not believe that it will be ended by external intervention, although it may be helped by private advice.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must now get on to other business.

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6 April, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the effect of the present political crisis in Pakistan on the flow of British aid to the victims of the recent floods in East Pakistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wood: The political crisis interrupted discussions on the use of our contribution of £2 million to the reconstruction programme. We had made an offer of various types of boats, navigational aids, bridging equipment and pontoons. The £500,000 that we gave for food aid financed the shipment of 20,000 metric tons of Australian wheat in two ships to East Pakistan. One of the ships had reached Chittagong and started unloading by 17th March. We have no information about the arrival of the other ship.

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20 April, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. William Hamilton asked the Prime Minister if he will seek to pay an official visit to India and Pakistan.

The Prime Minister: I had the pleasure of visiting India and Pakistan in January, and I have no plans at present for further visits.

Mr. Hamilton: Does the Prime Minister agree that there is a great danger of conflict in the area between Pakistan and India? Is not it time Her Majesty's Government made an outright and forthright condemnation of the bloody outrages now being committed by the Pakistani Army on the East Pakistanis?

The Prime Minister: The Prime Minister of India has given very firm assurances, both in public and in private, that India has no intention of intervening in the situation in East Pakistan. The object of Her Majesty's Government is to do everything possible to bring an end to strife and to try to bring about a political solution to the difficulties. It is to that end that we have been working.

Mr. David Steel: Whilst we accept the general proposition that we do not comment on the internal difficulties of any other member of the Commonwealth,

are not the reports coming out of East Pakistan so outrageous that some comment is called for from other members of the Commonwealth?

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The Prime Minister: We are all aware of the reports which have come out of East Pakistan, but if we are endeavouring to bring an end to conflict and achieve a political solution, we must be allowed to adopt the means which seem to us best.

Mr. Sandys: Whilst I deplore the tragic loss of life in East Pakistan, is my right hon. Friend aware that he will have general support for maintaining the policy adopted by the previous Government in regard to Biafra and giving no encouragement to rebel forces in any Commonwealth country?

The Prime Minister: I have set out what our objective is in the matter. My right hon. Friend understands that we want to see a political solution to an immensely difficult situation. In my messages to the President of Pakistan it has been my purpose to achieve this.

Mr. Harold Wilson: We took the view, supported by the then Opposition, that it was not right for the House to intervene in the internal problems of Nigeria, but we at least used our influence with the Nigerian Government together with others, to persuade them to invite observers into the areas concerned to provide some guarantee that there was no genocide and that there was no truth in some of the allegations being made internationally about what was going on, and what would go on, in the so-called Biafran territory. That was totally successful, and the reports showed that there was no genocide. Has the Prime Minister made such a proposal, either separately or with Commonwealth colleagues, that there should be international observers—one from this country, perhaps, one from Asia, one from the United Nations, and so on—to report to the world outside about conditions in East Pakistan and about the very grave accusations of murder of civilian populations?

The Prime Minister: I would appreciate it if the right hon. Gentleman would not press me on the details of the exchanges I have had with the President of Pakistan. If I recall correctly, the right hon. Gentleman himself was very careful in his discussions with the

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Nigerian Government not to reveal the details of confidential exchanges and was extremely careful in the timing of any of the proposals he made.

Mr. Harold Wilson: I answered many questions in the House on the matter, and made a very full statement after my visit to Nigeria. We had a series of debates, including Standing Order No. 9 Adjournment debates, about these questions at the time. The House was informed about the proposal for observers after we made it and it was accepted, and was kept fully informed about further proposals we made. At the right moment, surely, the right hon. Gentleman will want to give a full account to the House of what he has done in this matter?

The Prime Minister: Yes—at the right moment I am fully prepared to give further information to the House.

...

Mr. Shore: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 in order to discuss a specific and important matter which should have urgent consideration, namely, The need for a Government initiative to halt the savage repression by the Pakistan Army of the people of East Bengal and of the majority party in the recent all-Pakistan elections. Recent events in East Pakistan have caused growing concern on both sides of the House. Before the Easter Recess, over 200 right hon. and hon. Members put their names to a Motion calling for a cease fire. The matter is specific enough, I believe. It is the suppression in a Commonwealth country—which recently subscribed to the Commonwealth Declaration of Principles—of a new-born democracy by armed power. There can be few examples in history where the will of the majority so recently and clearly expressed in a free election has been so ruthlessly set aside. That is the heart of the matter.

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I say to the Prime Minister and others who have commented that it is this which distinguishes what is happening in Pakistan and in East Bengal in particular from many other cases where there has been internal strife, both in the Commonwealth and in other countries, and where we have not thought it right

perhaps to be over-ready with comment. We are seeing the suppression of a democracy and the recent declaration of the will of the electorate. That is the heart of the matter, and it is that, of course, which has led to the bitter civil war which is now raging and which is bound to leave a grim legacy of division, strife and hunger.

The matter is urgent because great damage is being done out there day by day. The shelling, bombing and strafing of important centres of population and the use of force on a scale which often appears to be as senseless as it is brutal are now known to most right hon. and hon. Members. There is, I regret to say, evidence of the Pakistan Army's intention to eliminate many of the civil, military and intellectual leaders of East Bengal. There are reports of serious food shortage, and the House will recall that it is only three or four months ago that East Bengal was ravaged by the cyclone. These events have come on top of the devastation caused then. Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of refugees are on the march in East Bengal and about 100,000 are reported to have crossed the Indian frontier in the last three days alone.

We are in the midst of a tragedy and, unhappily, one in which the next stage may be even worse than the one gone before. On 5th April, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary—[Interruption.]—I am coming rapidly to my conclusion—urged an end to strife and a start to reconciliation. That view was shared by all of us, but there has been no response.

I say to the Prime Minister that there is a point at which our desire to be restrained may be interpreted as a shameful and indifferent silence in face of events. Whatever the Government may feel about

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expressing too clearly what they are saying to the Pakistan Government, it is right—and I hope that we shall have an opportunity in a debate—for this House to express on behalf of the British people its feelings that the fighting should stop, the troops be withdrawn, the political process resumed and the future of Pakistan and East Bengal decided by none other than the people themselves.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member for Stepney (Mr. Shore) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 in order to discuss a specific and important matter which should have urgent consideration, namely, The need for a Government initiative to halt the savage repression by the Pakistan Army of the people of East Bengal and of the majority party in the recent all-Pakistan elections. The right hon. Gentleman was good enough to give me notice of his intention to make this application. I have considered the matter and have noted very carefully what he has said. This is a serious matter. I have to interpret the Standing Order according to its terms and in the light of the Report of the Select Committee upon the basis of which the Standing Order was changed. I regret that I cannot submit his application to the House.

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21 April, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Judd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he will make a statement on Great Britain's aid programme to Pakistan in the light of recent events in East Pakistan.

Mr. Wood: The British aid pledge to Pakistan was £10 million for the year 1970-71, of which £7.5 million has been committed. We have also offered an interest-free loan of £2 million for the East Pakistan Reconstruction Programme for the cyclone-damaged areas and we have provided £500,000 for food aid for East Pakistan.

Aid projects in East Pakistan have been brought to a halt by the present fighting and British technical assistance personnel have had to leave. British suppliers are unable to ship goods provided under loan agreements to East Pakistan, as the port of Chittagong is not functioning normally. Disbursements of aid will inevitably be affected, but it is not our intention to increase our aid to West Pakistan to make up for the shortfall.

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26 April, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on future aid talks with Pakistan; and whether he will consult with other aid donors so as to make further aid dependent upon a cease-fire in East Pakistan.

Mr. Wood: We should normally have had talks with the Pakistan Government and other aid donors at a meeting of the Pakistan Consortium in July. As it is, we shall have consultations with other donors before then, and the conditions for further aid will certainly be considered.

Mr. Prentice: Is the Minister aware that many hon. Members would normally oppose the use of our aid programme to impose political conditions upon a recipient country? Nevertheless, if the conditions in East Pakistan are so appalling, this is an exceptional case. In view of the thousands of people who have been slaughtered and the imminent threat of famine in East Pakistan, will the Government consider consulting the other aid donors to impose some basic minimum conditions on the Pakistan Government before fresh aid pledges are made?

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Mr. Wood: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has announced, we are ready to participate in any international effort for relief in East Pakistan if asked to do so. As I have already said this afternoon, we are ready, and, indeed, we have plans, to consult the other donors about conditions of future aid as soon as we can.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend inform me whether the aid programme was maintained throughout the period of the Nigerian Civil War? If so, as I believe, surely it is appropriate, in view of the necessity for rehabilitation in the eastern wing of Pakistan and the severe overstrain on the economy of West Pakistan to maintain the aid programme?

Mr. Wood: We are anxious to maintain the aid programme if we can, but the conditions on which we do so must be resolved.

Mr. Shore: Does the Minister agree that there is a distinction between a relief programme to deal with famine and other consequences which no one would wish to interrupt or interfere with, and the more normal economic investment programme which in this case is probably a suitable vehicle for making it clear to the Pakistan Government that we want to see proper changes in East Bengal and in the political situation there as a condition for continuing it?

Mr. Wood: I appreciate the distinction between relief and other programmes. We have a programme which we were in the process of implementing in East Pakistan, and I should like to continue that programme in conjunction with other donors and the World Bank as soon as possible.

Mrs. Hart: Will the Minister consider two points? The first is that there is probably an urgent need for relief in India where the refugees from East Pakistan have been going so recently. Will he, therefore, consider the need for an immediate relief operation there? Secondly, will he give details, perhaps in the OFFICIAL REPORT, of the precise projects at present under way in East and West Pakistan

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respectively, because in the light of the very much lower standard of living and G.N.P. in East Pakistan there are many on this side of the House who would wish us to concentrate on projects in East Pakistan?

Mr. Wood: I shall certainly do my best to provide the information for which the right hon. Lady has asked.

Mr. Barnes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the result of his review of the question of arms contracts with Pakistan.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: I have reviewed the position, which is as I informed the House on 29th March. No contracts have been signed since 1967 with the exception of one for refitting a naval vessel and another for radar equipment. There is none in prospect.

Mr. Barnes: Although Britain is a small supplier of arms to Pakistan, does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that when a Government use arms that they have acquired from other nations for external defence in the appalling way in which

the Government of Pakistan did against their own people, surely it is the concern of all nations in the arms-supplying business? Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that Britain should have reacted immediately in far stronger terms to what happened in East Pakistan than she did?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: We reacted very quickly to the horrible events that took place in Pakistan—but these events do take place in civil wars. As for the hon. Member's Question, I have reviewed the position. There are not outstanding contracts of any significance. I shall keep the matter under review, but I see no reason to alter Her Majesty's Government's policy now.

Mr. Wilkinson: Has my right hon. Friend been in contact with the military or Ministerial representatives of Pakistan in the course of the present S.E.A.T.O. conference? As Pakistan is a S.E.A.T.O. ally of ours, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the military capability

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of Pakistan, which is a linchpin of that alliance, is maintained as far as possible?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: Pakistan is a S.E.A.T.O. ally, as my hon. Friend says. The Question referred to whether I have reviewed the questions of arms contracts to Pakistan. The answer is "Yes", and I am satisfied that we need not change our policy now.

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3 May, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on future aid talks with Pakistan; and whether he will consult with other aid donors so as to make further aid dependent upon a cease-fire in East Pakistan.

Mr. Wood pursuant to his reply, supplied the following details of British projects which were under way in East and West Pakistan on 1st March, 1971. Since then the British aid programme in East Pakistan has come to a halt.

East Pakistan

1

The East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority. Power distribution project (1970)

345,000£

2

Pakistan Eastern Railways. Strengthening of bridges (1970)

400,000£

3

Tea machinery and irrigation equipment (1970)

500,000£

West Pakistan

1

Pakistan Western Railway Electrification (1966)

5.8 million

The above list necessarily omits non-project aid and technical assistance.

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5 May, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Stonehouse asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking in the current meetings of creditor countries of Pakistan with regard to the extension of credit

facilities.

Mr. Wood: There have been consultations between the members of the Pakistan Aid Consortium. Its Chairman, Mr. Cargill of the World Bank, is now visiting Islamabad to discuss Pakistan's economic situation and its external debt.

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6 May, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Stonehouse asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of aid provided to Pakistan in each of the past five years has been spent in East Pakistan.

Mr. Wood: It is not possible to say what proportion of British aid in any one year is spent in East Pakistan, because disbursements are recorded only for the whole of Pakistan. New commitments of project aid for East and West Pakistan during the last five years were as follows:

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East Pakistan £ million

1966-67 3.4

1967-68 4.2

1968-69 1.0

1969-70 0.4

1970-71 0.122

West Pakistan £ million

1966-67 1.9

1967-68 1.6

1968-69 2.5

1969-70 3.6

1970-71 1.6

New commitments of non-project aid during the same period have totalled £28.8 millions but no figures are available of the division of non-project aid between the Provinces.

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7 May, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Stonehouse asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the amount of United Kingdom aid per capita spent in East Pakistan and West Pakistan, respectively, during the period since independence.

Mr. Wood: From the financial year 1951-52, when Britain first provided aid to Pakistan, until 1969-70, the total disbursements of British aid to Pakistan were £104 million. It is not possible to provide separate per capita figures for British aid to East Pakistan and West Pakistan as aid has been provided to the Central Government.

Mr. Wilkinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps he is now taking in concert with other nations to provide special aid for Pakistan.

Mr. Wood: At a recent meeting of aid donors, the British delegation and others expressed their willingness to participate in an international programme of relief in East Pakistan. The Pakistan Government has not yet asked for any relief aid, but I understand that it has the matter under consideration.

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11 May, 1971

The House of Commons

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Alec Douglas-Home): Last Thursday, during business questions, the Leader of the House was asked by the Leader of the Opposition whether I could make a statement about the situation in Pakistan which might assist hon. Members in the debate which is to take place on Friday. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House, I should now like to do so.

In previous statements to the House I have expressed Her Majesty's Government's concern about the situation in East Pakistan and our wish to assist in alleviating the suffering and stress.

Within East Pakistan communications have been disrupted as a consequence of the

recent strife and there may well be food shortages later this year, particularly in areas already affected by last year's cyclone. I repeat that Her Majesty's Government stand ready to play a part in any international relief effort, and that it is our view that this can best be organised through the United Nations.

After consultation with the American Secretary of State, I recently sent an agreed message to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in which we suggested that he should approach the Government of Pakistan to renew his offer of international

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humanitarian assistance. U Thant is in touch with the Pakistan Government on the problems of relief.

I hope that they will be ready to allow a team of experts to make an objective appraisal of what is needed and that they will be prepared to accept assistance, if that is judged to be needed, on an international basis. Clearly, any relief effort must be made with the agreement and co-operation of the Government of Pakistan. We are, of course, ourselves in close touch with President Yahya Khan about the situation.

There is the separate problem of aid and assistance to the Pakistan economy in general. Pakistan faces serious economic difficulties, including shortage of foreign exchange. Consultations about these problems are proceeding within the framework of the aid consortium under the chairmanship of the World Bank, and decisions about future action must await the result of these consultations. There is, finally, the problem of the very considerable number of refugees who have crossed from East Pakistan into India. Already a consortium of British charities had decided to offer assistance. They asked for Government assistance to transport supplies necessary for health and shelter. I decided that Her Majesty's Government should make an immediate contribution, and this has been done. Supplementary provision for approximately £18,000 will be sought in due course and, if necessary, an advance will be made in the meantime from the Civil Contingency Fund.

The Indian Government have since approached the United Nations for assistance over the refugees, and a United Nations team is now in India to assess the need for international help. As with the other two problems which I have mentioned, I consider that this matter is best handled by international organisations.

Mr. Healey: I thank the Foreign Secretary for that statement, which will be useful in our debate on Friday. I am sure that hon. Members

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on both sides of the House agree with the advantage of involving the United Nations in this problem. Indeed, some of the dangers in prospect might well justify the United Nations concerning itself with some of the political aspects of the problem, no less than with the relief aspects.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the bald terms of his statement conceal a human tragedy which has few precedents in recent history? Is it not a fact that there are already 1½ million refugees in West Bengal who, according to Indian Government estimates, will require £25 million per month to feed? Is it not a fact that even more people require assistance in East Pakistan itself? Is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that aid is now getting through to those in need in East Pakistan? Is he aware that a Red Cross aeroplane loaded with medical supplies was refused permission to land and that there are well authenticated reports that a large volume of stores is already stocked in Chittagong, but that permission has not yet been given for these goods to be distributed to those in need?

Does he agree that little can be achieved to relieve the suffering in this area or, indeed, to aid the economy of Pakistan unless there is a rapid movement towards a political settlement of the problem, in conformity with the wishes of the people of East Pakistan, as recently expressed in democratic elections?

As he promised when I last questioned him on this matter that he would make a statement, would the right hon. Gentlemen tell us whether Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is in prison in West Pakistan awaiting trial? Does he agree that if Pakistan is left without democratic leadership, other forces may take over and that this could be a disaster not only for Pakistan, but for the whole of the sub continent.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: As the right hon. Gentleman says, this is, of course, a

very real human tragedy. The scale of it, considering the

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number of refugees in India and the possible problem of the relief that may be necessary later in the year, is very great and, therefore, it justifies bringing in the United Nations, which is perhaps the only body that can handle it, and that, I hope, will be done.

The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question about a political settlement is that this must be for the people of Pakistan. Nobody from outside can dictate it. As I have said, we have been in constant touch with the President of Pakistan about the need for a political settlement. That is the only way, in the end, to solve the problem. But this must be for the President and the people of Pakistan.

Mr. Healey: Would the Foreign Secretary answer the specific question that I asked? Has he any information about the refusal by the authorities in East Pakistan to allow distribution of medical supplies and other assistance already available?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: One consignment from the Red Cross was refused entry by the Government of Pakistan. The difficulty, so we understand, of distributing the food which is at present there in sufficient quantities is one of communications, and the distribution, according to our information, has to be done at present by the Pakistan Army, and this in itself presents difficulties. That is why I urge that the team should go in as quickly as possible to assess the need and to see how food can be got to the people. The other problem does not arise at the moment.

Mr. Woodhouse: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Charity Commissioners in this country have ruled that money in the Pakistan Flood Relief Fund may not be used for relief in the present calamity? If the objection to that is purely of a technical character, would my right hon. Friend indicate whether it may be possible to remove it?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: We have looked at this matter. It would be very difficult to remove it after the conditions applied. One of the areas worst affected is, in fact, the cyclone area, and if we can get the

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food moving, certainly the money subscribed for that purpose can be used.

Mr. Thorpe: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that we welcome his recognition of the importance of the United Nations as the appropriate agency for relief? Further, is he aware that reports of appalling atrocities are still coming out from East Pakistan? Can he say whether Her Majesty's Government can take some further initiative, either through the Commonwealth Secretariat or through the United Nations, for a team of observers either to establish or to disprove these disquieting allegations?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: At present, I do not think that it would be helpful to ask that observers should be admitted to Pakistan. We have no reason to believe that they would be accepted. As the right hon. Gentleman probably knows, six international journalists are being let in this week, so more information will come from the country.

Sir F. Bennett: All other considerations apart, would the Foreign Secretary agree that the precedents show, without any doubt, that however well-meaning an attempt to interfere politically in the affairs of another Government may be, the result is counterproductive for the people themselves?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: Without generalising, in this particular case that I am dealing with private representations are certainly better than any public statements.

Mr. Shore: Can the Foreign Secretary clear up this matter and say whether relief and aid personnel have free movement in East Pakistan at present? What response has he had from the Pakistan Government to the representations which we hope he has made about a political settlement and respect for democratic decencies in Pakistan?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: The response that we have had is the desire and wish, as expressed by the President, that there should be a

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political settlement and that talks should be resumed between representatives of East Pakistan and the President. We must hope that this will take place. As

for the introduction of aid into East Pakistan now, the great trouble is the lack of communications, which have been almost totally disrupted in the last three months. When they are restored, aid will begin to flow.

Mr. Marten: Would my right hon. Friend agree that one of the long term problems will be the 3 million refugees who fled from East Pakistan to India, and their resettlement back in East Pakistan? If the situation in East Pakistan deteriorates rather badly, the situation will become similar to that which has arisen in Ceylon, where North Korea has been operating pretty sharply.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: If the situation were to deteriorate further in East Pakistan, the consequences would be as my hon. Friend describes. The hope must be that some kind of political stability is restored, in which case I am sure that those who are now in India would wish to return and to resume the work which they were doing.

Mr. Douglas-Mann: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that the view of the majority of people who are very familiar with the situation—I cannot claim to be so, but I have visited the area—is that East Pakistan is embarking on what is likely to be a very long war and that the situation creates grave dangers of war between India and Pakistan? Does the Foreign Secretary accept that this is not a situation analogous to a civil war in one country but it is a matter of aggressive war by West Pakistan against East Pakistan? Does the Foreign Secretary accept that this is a situation in which two countries have voluntarily joined and one half has demonstrated overwhelmingly that it wishes to separate itself? The matter should be treated as an aggressive war between two countries rather than as a civil war in one country.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: We must not be led into statements as to whether the results of the elections in East Pakistan favoured

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secession. There are different interpretations. It is not for me to make them. Political settlements must be arrived at by the people of Pakistan. We profoundly hope that this will happen. There is little that we can do to influence that. That is why I have concentrated today on the humanitarian aspects, in which we have a part to play.

Mr. Biggs-Davison: Is my right hon. Friend aware that General Chaudhuri, of the Indian Army, writing in the Hindustan Times, has expressed exactly the opposite view to that of the hon. Member for Kensington, North (Mr. Douglas-Mann)? May I ask my right hon. Friend whether it is not the case, in times past, when there have been difficulties and scarcities, that there has been a movement of refugees across the frontier and a movement back when normal conditions have been restored? Is not there ground for hope that this will occur again?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: There is a hope; but it has not happened yet. The attitude of the Indian Government has been strictly correct in the matter of their relations with their neighbouring country.

Mr. Foley: Would the Foreign Secretary direct his attention to the plight of East Pakistan refugees in India? Has he no means of assessing the dimensions of the problem? Is he informing the House that the sum of the contribution made by Her Majesty's Government to the relief of the distress of East Pakistani refugees in India is £18,000? Is this the total contribution?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: That is what we were asked for by the organisations concerned, to fly in the supplies which they had waiting but could not transport. So for this purpose, quite appropriately, as the House will agree, we supplied the money and they were, therefore, able to do so. The Indian Government have now asked the United Nations to take over the management of the problem of refugees. We think that is right.

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Mr. Dalyell: Would the Foreign Secretary turn to the specific question put to him by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey, namely, the issue of the medical supplies that are held up in Chittagong? While we can understand that there are transport problems elsewhere, it seems inconceivable that, if they wanted to, the Pakistan Government could not move those supplies out of Chittagong to other places.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: We are making inquiries on this matter to see whether medical supplies can be moved. The hon. Gentleman should not underestimate the dislocation of communications that has occurred. For example, our Deputy High Commissioner was unable to go from Dacca to Chittagong until quite lately, in

the last day or two. This is a real problem.

Mrs. Hart: May I ask the Foreign Secretary about the attitude taken by the British representatives on the Pakistan aid consortium? Looking to the future, I ask whether he is instructing our representatives to concentrate, in the light of extreme economic inequalities between East and West Pakistan which have been part of the reason for the present difficulties, upon project aid specifically directed to East Pakistan rather than to West Pakistan?

Sir Alec Douglas-Home: The right hon. Lady will not underestimate the problem of solving the existing problem of development, let alone looking for new ones. This will be a very expensive project. But development projects for the future of East Pakistan are immensely important in the context of the whole country. Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am afraid we must get on.

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14 May, 1971

The House of Commons

Mr. Bruce Douglas-Mann (Kensington, North): I beg to move, That this House, deeply concerned by the killing and destruction which has taken place in East Pakistan, and the possible threat of food shortages later this year, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to use their influence to secure an end to the strife, the admission of United Nations or other international relief organisations, and the achievement of a political settlement which will respect the democratic rights of the people of Pakistan. This Motion is a little more specific than Early Day Motion No. 509 which I tabled, calling on the Government to use all their influence to secure a cease-fire in East Pakistan. That Motion has been signed by 300 hon. Members, which I believe is a record for this Parliament, and it reflects the concern felt in the House and the country about the situation in East Pakistan. I hope that the change in the wording of the Motion will not detract from the support which that previous Motion gained. This second Motion only spells out in more detail what is implicit in the first—that there is a tragic situation in East Bengal, over which the British Government can and should exert some influence.

The nature and extent of the tragedy are well known. Estimates of the numbers who have died vary widely. The official estimate of the West Pakistan Government is that only 15,000 have died, but the

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lowest independent estimates start at 100,000, and many estimates are that over a million have died already. But whatever the numbers who have died, what is certain is that over 2 million people have thought that the situation in their country was so terrifying, that they have left their homes and taken refuge in India in absolutely appalling conditions.

On 22nd April, I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wednesbury (Mr. Stonehouse) visited a number of the refugee camps in West Bengal. The camps were appallingly overcrowded. They consisted of roofs of tarpaulins slung on poles, with corrugated iron laid on the ground and a straw mat on the top. The space allocation at that time was 10 ft. by 10 ft. per family. The camps are nearly all situated in flat, low-lying ground, and at the time that I was there the rains were just starting. Immediately one stepped off the corrugated iron, one was in soft mud.

The fact that thousands of families have been compelled to take up their residence here with the monsoon now starting, in circumstances in which the space where the camps are situated is likely to be flooded in the near future—if it is not flooded already—so that there will be barely enough standing room on dry ground for the numbers there, reflects the conditions from which the families fled.

The food in the camps was adequate, but that food is costing the Indian Government one rupee per head per day—about 6 new pence. When one reflects that over 200 million Indian citizens are living well below the standard of one rupee per head per day, one can appreciate that this is a strain which the Indian Government cannot possibly continue to bear by themselves for very long. It is essential that international aid be provided to help deal with the problem of the refugees, which is imposing a tremendous social and political problem on India, as well as a financial problem.

But, apart from the problem for the refugees in India, we can only speculate about the conditions of those still in East Pakistan. I made

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a brief visit into East Pakistan on 24th April, without the knowledge or approval of the Indian Government, as they had told me that they would be concerned for my safety if I went inside. I was anxious to see what I could do of the areas held by the Bangla Desh.

I wanted, first, to get the story from the refugees, and the right hon. Member for Wednesbury and I spoke to a number of them in the camps. The stories they told were all extremely similar. I assure hon. Members that we were careful not to make stories from those who pushed themselves forward to tell us of the atrocities that had occurred. We went to speak with families who were sitting by themselves disconsolately, and we asked them why they had left their villages.

Time and again we were told the same story: troops of the West Pakistan military authorities had entered the village, which had not then been defended, had shot the men in the fields and killed the women and children and then, having killed a great number of people from the village, had burnt it down and left.

Inside Bangla Desh territory I met more refugees, who told me more or less the same story. These people were heading towards the Indian frontier. Their village, which was about four miles away from the point at which I met them, had been burnt down that morning. The refugees told us that crops were not being planted and that in the villages through which they had passed on their way to the Indian frontier, crops were not being planted, either. Only in areas controlled by the Bangla Desh was any planting going on.

It was abundantly clear that the hatred of the Punjabis, which has been generated in the last six weeks among the people of East Pakistan, who are overwhelmingly Bengali, is now so deep that it is quite impossible that Pakistan can ever again be one country.

There have, no doubt, been atrocities on both sides. War is a foul business and killing begets more killing. We have heard conflicting

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reports from many sources, and particularly from the British Press, of the nature of the atrocities. On 2nd May the Sunday Times carried an account which appeared to present the entire situation as one in which all the atrocities had been committed by Bengalis and it blamed the whole tragedy on a planned Bengali mutiny.

Whether that account was true—it was regrettable that a paper of the stature of the Sunday Times did not make it clear that the reporter who had presented the account was not only a West Pakistan national but the news editor of the Karachi News, which is controlled and owned by the West Pakistan Government National Press Trust—or whether the accounts of other, more independent, Western journalists are true, it is clear from all accounts and from the public relations statements which hon. Members will have received from the High Commission of West Pakistan, that the killing was started by West Pakistan forces, whether or not to prevent a possible mutiny.

That is the first point that is clear. The second is that fresh victories are being claimed with each day's handout. I received a release this morning, from which it appears that serious fighting is still going on. The third point is that the scale of the killing and of the hatred is such that Pakistan as a single State is now dead. In the words of Mr. Tajrddin Ahmed, Prime Minister of independent Bangla Desh: Pakistan is dead and buried under a mountain of corpses. It is possible to hold East Pakistan down only by large military forces.

I met the Prime Minister of independent Bangla Desh at an army camp inside East Pakistan. From the talks I had with him, and the second in command of the Bangla Desh Army, Major Osman, certain things became clear in my mind. The first is that the war will continue until West Pakistan is forced out. The second is that there is a capacity on the part of the Bangla Desh forces and the Awami league to organise and continue the guerrilla war, remembering that, according to what we have been told, the rural areas are still largely under the control of the Bangla Desh forces.

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It is, of course, true that West Pakistan forces, with better equipment and superior fire power, can force a way through any area in which it chooses to take that course, as long as the bridges are not blown up. This country is dependent on bridges for its communications, and without bridges over the waterways progress would be difficult.

Basically, the administration in the rural areas is carried on by the Bangla Desh Army. They have substantial support from the population, which is overwhelmingly hostile to the West Pakistan forces. Indeed, it would be impossible for West Pakistan to administer this State in a satisfactory fashion.

The point stressed to me by the Prime Minister of independent Bangla Desh is that he is more worried by the threat of starvation and disease for the people of East Pakistan than he is by the military situation. He told me that approximately one-third of the country is not being planted and that the proportion is higher in the rice

growing areas, which are principally relied on for the food crop.

In any normal year East Pakistan imports between 2 million and 3 million tons of food grains. This year the West Pakistan authorities are not allowing in any imports. There has been destruction of stocks of grain, particularly rice, and there was the appalling damage caused by the cyclone last November.

The independent Bangla Desh Government are extremely aware of the danger of starvation that exists for millions of their people. They are trying to ensure that crops are planted, at least in the areas which they control, but many areas are far too dangerous for men to be willing to work the fields.

The next point which the Prime Minister of Bangla Desh impressed on me was that the Bengali people are deeply aggrieved at the fact that the rest of the world should be treating this situation as part of the internal affairs of Pakistan, and it was in this connection that I

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was reminded of the history of the establishment of Pakistan—of the Mountbatten proposals and so on.

The House will recall that originally there was a proposal that there should be a federation of three States, West Pakistan, East Pakistan and Assam, and then the rest of India. That was rejected, and then the Mountbatten proposals were put forward in 1947; for the legislative assemblies in each area to make a decision. In some areas there were referenda, but in East Bengal it was a voluntary decision of the Legislative Assembly to associate with West Pakistan in one country. It is that decision which the East Bengali people are now trying to rescind.

I was also reminded of the economic exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan that has continued since Pakistan was set up. The information I now give the House is derived not from the Prime Minister of Bangla Desh but from independent sources, and I would refer in particular to an article in the Financial Times on 29th March.

In 1947 the per capita incomes of East Pakistan and West Pakistan were approximately equal. However, as a result of discrimination in the spending of aid, in the collection and spending of taxes, discrimination in jobs, with job preference for Punjabis, and the ban on trade between East Pakistan and India, which has resulted in East Pakistan losing its natural trading partner in West Bengal and West Bengal losing its natural market in East Pakistan, enormous economic hardship has been inflicted on the people of East Pakistan. Whereas prior to partition the per capita incomes were about equal, last year the per capita income of West Pakistan was 47 per cent. higher than that of East Pakistan.

It is not surprising that in the elections last year the Awami League, which had a programme for the economic autonomy of East Pakistan but within the State of Pakistan, gained 167 of the 169 seats, gaining 80 per cent. of the popular vote. As a result of this overwhelming victory, the Awami League is entitled to be regarded as the

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Government of the whole of Pakistan. It is not claiming that. However, as a result of what has happened—of the declaration of war at 11 p.m. on 25th March—it is claiming the right to represent the people of its own country—the people who overwhelmingly elected it.

The Prime Minister was anxious to see that his Government was recognised by other Governments and above all, because of the historical relationship, by Britain. I explained to him—and I think that he accepted and appreciated this—the difficulty of granting that recognition particularly since, unless and until the Bangla Desh forces control a large part of East Bengal, it may be necessary, in order to provide aid to the people of East Pakistan, for foreign Governments to work with the military Government of West Pakistan. They are desperately anxious that as the elected Government of their country they should be recognised as such. I was impressed by the calibre of those I met. The members of the Government were overwhelmingly liberal social democrats and I believe that I could match them person to person with Members in this House. They are aware of the difficulties facing them in fighting a guerrilla war and retaining their social democratic ideals. It is difficult to be a guerrilla and a liberal at the same time. I came away convinced that a long guerrilla war is inevitable. At the worst, if the West Pakistan authorities are more successful than they have hitherto been, it will be a guerrilla war conducted largely from bases inside India.

The Indian Government's attitude is a very correct one. I spoke to the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers in Delhi and they impressed upon me that they were aware of the dangers of getting into a conflict with West Pakistan and of subsequent involvement with China. Nevertheless, Indian public opinion would not permit the Indian Government, however much it might wish to do so—and I do not think it does—to seal the frontier.

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Consequently it is inevitable that the refugee camps will become the bases from which guerrilla activity begins. That is liable to lead to a good many border incidents which could escalate dangerously, possibly into war. The fact that the Bangla Desh forces are pushed back to the frontier, will mean that the incidents will occur at the border and there will be a greater danger of the war being conducted from bases inside West Bengal. Unless action is taken this situation will result in a long and tragic war, with millions of deaths. However, it is a war which could be prevented. It is one in which economic sanctions might seriously and rapidly affect West Pakistan. West Pakistan has a large import bill. Its overseas debts are estimated at about £1,800 million. At the beginning of the war its reserves were about £35 million and it has already repudiated its liability for debt repayments of about £80 million due in May, postponing them until November, when even then it seems unlikely that it will be able to meet them.

Today's Times reports yet again on the acute financial crisis in West Pakistan. The article in this week's issue of Newsweek discusses this as did yesterday's Financial Times. The economy of West Pakistan is bankrupt, on the point of ruin. The war is costing the West Pakistan Government nearly £1 million a day. In these circumstances the rest of the world has a good deal of influence to exert. I urge that we should suspend all payments of aid while West Pakistan is fighting a war of this kind against East Pakistan. In any event, we should certainly not enter into any new aid commitments and we should appropriate instalments on existing debt commitments to the servicing of existing loans. I hope that the British Government will press the aid consortium to apply similar sanctions to West Pakistan to suspend aid payments while the war continues. I hope that we will use our influence with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to ensure that they do not provide assistance to West Pakistan to fight what is clearly and undoubtedly an aggressive war against East Pakistan. We

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should end all military assistance and cease to provide any spare parts or ammunition, following the example of the United States Government. I hope that at the United Nations we will be joining with other countries in pressing for the admission of relief organisations and for the organisation of international funds to help with this relief problem and to ensure proper distribution. The relief handled by the West Pakistan Government and its military forces is likely to be used to feed the forces to help them kill more people rather than feed those who are starving.

Above all, we should be using whatever international pressure we can exert to compel West Pakistan to withdraw its troops from East Pakistan, to allow the

Government of Bangla Desh, the Awami League, to take over the administration of East Pakistan. There is still a good chance of securing an independent East Pakistan under a moderate and responsible leadership. It will still be one of the poorest countries in the world but it will benefit enormously from freedom to trade with India. The goods and products for West Bengal are exactly those which East Bengal needs.

The desperate poverty in two of the poorest regions of the world would be alleviated at one stroke if East Bengal were free to trade. The longer the war continues the greater the poverty, the greater the distress, the smaller the chance of moderate and democratic leadership surviving and the greater will be the number of people who will die.

Mr. Speaker: A great many hon. and right hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that those who do catch my eye will be reasonably brief.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Richard Wood): The hon. Member for Kensington, North (Mr. Douglas-Mann) has touched on a great many aspects of the recent wretched events in Pakistan. I hope that the House of Commons will forgive me for rising very early in this debate to join him in expressing the concern

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that we all feel at the suffering which, not tens or hundreds of thousands, but literally millions of human beings have undergone as a result of these recent events. I think that there will be general agreement today that we must try to do all we can to alleviate this human distress and to bring about the return of political and economic stability.

This House is naturally, and rightly, reluctant to debate the internal affairs of other countries, but in my opinion it is necessary to try to understand the background of the present situation to decide what our attitude should be.

Anyone who travels from East to West Pakistan, or in the other direction, must be struck by the utter dissimilarity of the two parts of that country. It is a country which geographically, seems to be unique. On the other hand, if those two parts are visited, as I visited them during the Fast of Ramadan, I think it is equally evident how close the ties were between the two in the Muslim religion. Pakistan was founded on the establishment of an Islamic homeland for 100 million Muslims in the areas where they were clearly in the majority. Many hon. Members who have seen it for themselves would agree that it would be hard to exaggerate the difficulties inherent in the government of a nation divided into two parts at least 1,000 miles apart from one another. But these inherent geographical difficulties are only too well known and so, in the House, is the short history of independent Pakistan.

After the Presidency of President. Ayub Khan, martial law was again declared by the present President when he came to power in March, 1969. But the declared aim of President Yahya Khan has been the early transfer of power to a civilian democratic regime.

Last November I had the opportunity of meeting the President during the visit I paid to Pakistan immediately after the cyclone in the Ganges delta, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as the House knows, held discussions with him during his visit to Pakistan last January. I was convinced then—and I remain convinced today—

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that the President was wholly sincere in his desire to establish a civilian democratic government.

But the President insisted then, and has insisted since, that it was essential to maintain the unitary Islamic State of Pakistan. The results of the elections, which were the first in Pakistan to be based on universal suffrage, were clear-cut. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League won an overwhelming victory in East Pakistan and an overall majority in the Constituent Assembly. Sheikh Mujib and the League had long campaigned on the basis of a programme calling, among other things, for a large degree of autonomy in East Pakistan, with a relatively weak central government controlling only defence and foreign affairs.

As the House knows, after those elections there were preliminary talks between the President, Sheikh Mujib and Mr. Bhutto, the leader of the majority party in West Pakistan. As the House also knows, agreement unfortunately could not be reached, and after a long series of talks in Dacca, the President took military

action towards the end of March.

As the hon. Member pointed out, there have been acts of brutality in East Pakistan committed—as he rightly said—by both sides in this dispute. This is the basis of our deep concern today at the loss of life and suffering in all sections of the East Pakistan community, in a country with which Britain and many people who live here have a great many ties, a country which is a fellow member of the Commonwealth and a country from which a great many people have come to live in Britain. It is because of these close ties, both past and present, that we tend to be more concerned with a country such as Pakistan than with other parts of the world.

In the disturbed situation that existed at the end of March and the beginning of April, it became necessary for us to help our own nationals resident in East Pakistan to leave the country if they

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thought it necessary to do so on the ground of safety. About 800 British citizens left the country under these arrangements.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) this week asked my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary about the safety of Sheikh Mujib, and my right hon. Friend omitted to answer and has asked me to apologise to the right hon. Gentleman and to do so. This question, among a great many others, is a matter about which he has been in touch with the President of Pakistan, and our latest information is that the Sheikh is in custody in West Pakistan and that it is likely that he will be brought to trial, but we have no confirmation of reports that he has been flown back to East Pakistan.

I doubt whether there will be any substantial differences among us today about what is the immediate necessity in Pakistan, although I am perfectly clear that there will probably be deep differences upon the means by which that objective could be achieved. The only sensible objective is the re-creation of peace and stability in that country. We have made our interest perfectly clear to the Government of Pakistan, and that Government have made perfectly clear to us that they are wholly committed to this objective.

But for Her Majesty's Government, and for other Governments outside Pakistan, there seem to be three separate problems. The first is that of relieving distress and possible food shortage within East Pakistan; the second, as the hon. Member mentioned, is the problem of relieving suffering among the refugees who have crossed from East Pakistan into India; and the third problem is one of long-term development aid.

In his statement here on 11th April, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary repeated the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to play a part in any international relief effort, and he said on 11th May, after consultation with the American Secretary of State, that in our view this could best be organised through the United Nations. Therefore, a message was sent to U Thant suggesting that he should

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renew his offer of international assistance. U Thant is in touch with the Pakistan Government about the problems of relief with a view to their allowing a team of experts to make an objective appraisal of what is needed and accepting any assistance needed, on an international basis.

The second question to which the hon. Member devoted much of his speech is that of the very considerable number of refugees now in India. I am aware of the deep concern of the Indian Government about this matter, and I can express this Government's deep concern that the situation should be dealt with. The Indian High Commissioner discussed the situation with me only two days ago, and again the problem is to be quite sure about the actual needs that we must try internationally to resolve.

As the first step, as my hon. Friend has told the House, we made an immediate contribution by offering assistance to certain British charities to enable them to fly out relief supplies on 6th May. We are very glad that the charitable organisations have taken these steps, and I hope that that will continue. I understand that representatives of the charities—perhaps the right hon. Member for Wednesbury (Mr. Stonehouse) and other hon. Members may be able to comment upon this—are now in India appraising the situation. I also understand that the Indian Government have approached the United Nations for assistance, and that a team from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is also now in

India. We shall await its report also with great interest. An international relief effort is clearly required. In our view, it must be handled by the United Nations in co-operation with the Indian Government. The third problem I mentioned was the separate problem of the difficulties facing the economy of Pakistan and the aid which may be required to meet them. This is a matter which we are discussing with the World Bank and the other members of the Pakistan Aid

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Consortium to try to establish the conditions under which such aid might be more effectively provided.

I also discussed this recently with Mr. McNamara of the World Bank. It is clear to me that the other donors share all our anxieties and agree with us that the donor countries and institutions must act together. We are therefore hoping that a consortium meeting on Pakistan will before long be arranged, at which it may be possible to reach decisions on further aid.

When she intervened on Tuesday the right hon. Lady the Member for Lanark (Mrs. Hart) mentioned the inequality between East and West Pakistan. The hon. Gentleman referred to this matter this morning. We and the other members of the consortium are very conscious of this and we had been laying plans long before these tragic events took place to spend the greater part of our aid in East Pakistan. It is not only we who reached this conclusion. When I was in Islamabad before I set foot in East Pakistan last November, I was made perfectly well aware of the intention of the Pakistan Government that the imbalance that had existed in the past, and which they recognise, should be redressed in the future. I remember that the phrase that was continually put before me was—"the necessary transfer of resources from West to East". Therefore, this is not something which we have thought up on our own it has the support of the Pakistan Government.

Our aid was to be directed particularly, as the right hon. Lady knows, into the Action Programme for Water and Agriculture Development which the World Bank had prepared last July. This is, as the right hon. Lady well knows, a very large and ambitious programme for irrigation and flood control throughout the country of a kind which is bound to be needed as a basis for any economic development. After I returned from East Pakistan last autumn, we went some way in agreeing with the Pakistan Government what form our own British contribution to the Action Programme should take. We

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discussed various possibilities. Some were getting under way; but, as the House will be well aware, all this has now come to a halt. Our experts and consultants have had to be withdrawn from East Pakistan and the supply of British goods under our loans has been interrupted.

Hon. Members may have seen that the Export Credits Guarantee Department has been obliged to cease covering further export transactions to Pakistan. I am told that this is a step which has been taken with the greatest reluctance, but, given the Department's obligation to operate on a self-supporting basis, it is inevitable in the light of present economic conditions in Pakistan. Not only has the internal business of the country been disrupted by the disturbances but, much more serious, future export earnings are likely to be severely reduced. All this, coming on top of the strain of the earlier floods on an already delicate economy, must raise the gravest doubts about Pakistan's ability to continue to service her existing burden of foreign debt.

This existing economic difficulty which I have mentioned brings into focus a controversy which is likely to loom large in this debate. Her Majesty's Government are anxious, as I hope that I have already made clear, to resume, when it can be resumed, development aid to Pakistan. The hon. Gentleman argued, as no doubt other hon. Members will argue during the debate, that we should give no further aid to Pakistan unless President Yahya Khan agrees to certain specific action. Although aid may play a part in a general solution of problems, I profoundly disagree that it can be used as a lever to enforce a particular solution which observers here, thousands of miles from Dacca or Islamabad, with knowledge that must be incomplete, may wrongly think will contribute to peace.

Therefore, I would prefer to solve this dilemma in what I consider to be a more positive way. We are ready, I repeat, to resume aid for development, but we can

clearly do so only if conditions are restored in which that aid could be effectively deployed. Therefore, it remains

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the view of Her Majesty's Government that a political solution in East Pakistan is necessary and that this must be a matter for the Pakistan Government and people to achieve. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been in touch with the President on a personal and confidential basis, asking him to work towards such a settlement. I am aware that the President intends to do so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has expressed our concern at the suffering in East Pakistan, which I hope I have adequately underlined this morning, and our hope that a settlement to the dispute will be achieved as soon as possible on a basis acceptable to all the parties to it.

I hope that it is clear from what I have said that I am not in any way giving advice to the House to take the step, which I think would be wrong, of voting against the Motion, which has given us an opportunity to have what I hope will be a useful and constructive discussion. The Government are aware of the concern of the House and especially the concern of a great many hon. Members who may have constituents with personal and economic ties with Pakistan. This is a concern which we fully share, and we intend to continue to work for a solution which will enable us to go on playing the part which we should like to play in the future development in the whole of Pakistan.

Mr. Michael Stewart (Fulham): We are all grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington, North (Mr. Douglas-Mann), who raised this subject and who spoke so movingly and moderately about it. We are obliged to the Minister for Overseas Development for intervening early in the debate. We were glad to hear of the steps the Government have already taken with regard to the possibility of relief in the future—the discussions they have had with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with the charitable organisations.

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There will remain, and it will become increasingly acute with every week that passes, the question of what will be the attitude of those who may happen to possess power in the afflicted areas—be they the authorities of West Pakistan or of Bangla Desh—towards the getting in and the administration of relief. Similarly, as the Minister said, if aid is to be resumed and if it is to show that leaning towards the needs of East Pakistan which he described, the turning of these policies into realities will depend upon the reaching of a political solution in East Pakistan. We are therefore obliged to consider that aspect. I know as well as anyone here the difficulties that beset a Government in that situation. There are many dissimilarities between this conflict and that in Nigeria, but there is one formal and legal similarity which has some importance. It is that in both cases this is a civil war in a Commonwealth country. I realise that the problem facing the United Kingdom Government is—how can we do anything useful without simply being subjected to the charge by Pakistan that we are interfering in its internal affairs and possibly finding that anything we do is counter-productive? I believe that there is one answer to that which I hoped that the Minister would give. It is to try to act through a Commonwealth framework. For Britain alone to try to act in a matter like this is to arouse all the suspicions that we are trying to be the imperial power again.

One of the reasons for building up the whole idea of the Commonwealth and for creating the Commonwealth Secretariat was that the Commonwealth nations can be in touch with one another in a way that ought not to provoke hostility or accusations of interference. I do not say this merely as a general or theoretical principle. Here is an instance where the Nigerian parallel is of some importance. I remember that early in 1969, at the time of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, Chief Awolowo was here in this country representing the Nigerian Government. There

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were also in London representatives of the secessionist régime. The British Government were able, against the background of the Commonwealth Conference, to get Chief Awolowo to agree to meet representatives of the secessionist régime under, in effect, Commonwealth auspices. It was very unfortunate that those representatives refused that opportunity. In that case, the country that was

saying "This is our internal affair" was none the less prepared in a Commonwealth framework to discuss the possibilities of a settlement. I wonder whether the Government could not do a bit more than they have in trying to use the Commonwealth framework to promote a political settlement in this appalling dispute.

We should also remember that the Nigerian Government, despite their undoubted status as a sovereign State, were willing to have international observers accompanying their forces actually to watch how they behaved and to report to the world. They did not think it beneath their dignity as a sovereign State that that should be done. I do not know what might be the attitude of the Pakistan Government. But, in view of the example set by Nigeria, in view of the undoubted concern of people the world over at the fearful slaughter in Pakistan, I believe that this is something that they ought to be invited to consider.

I will not say more than this as I know that many others wish to take part in the debate. I suggest as moderately as I can that we thank the Government for what they have done so far about relief. I believe they may be assured of the full support of the House in any further steps which they may take to that end. I want only to suggest, in addition, that there is one line of political approach that perhaps has not been used as much as it might have been and that might possibly be fruitful.

Mr. Hugh Fraser (Stafford and Stone): I too wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Kensington, North (Mr. Douglas Mann) who opened the debate in such a reasonable and statesmanlike way. I also

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wish to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on what he has said in what inevitably had to be an extremely guarded speech. I think it is fair to draw the conclusion from what he said that the influences which we have will be brought to bear to see that a solution can be found.

It is with some emotion that I follow the right hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Michael Stewart), after the times when we were in conflict over the Nigerian civil war. I, too, in a short speech would like to join with him in suggesting that there are other means whereby more can be achieved than merely through the United Nations or by this country acting alone.

There is no question that the present horrors in East Pakistan present a real problem which affects not merely the moral sense of the House but the whole question of stability in that part of the world. As the hon. Member for Kensington, North made clear, there are other forces trying to batten on the misery of people so as to disturb an area where absence of strife is essential for world peace. I regard this as a matter of real concern, not just because of the feeling we have for these people who are suffering—and many of us have friends in Pakistan—but because of the real danger that this could create to the stability of Asia. Therefore, just to rely on the United Nations to produce an improved situation is, alas, not enough. With our experience from the past, this effort would have to be on a larger and far more profound scale than has so far been envisaged by Her Majesty's Government.

Here I immediately join forces with the right hon. Member for Fulham. I believe that the Commonwealth Secretariat would have a real part to play, and I think that that should be invoked. But there are two other areas outside the United Nations where pressure could be brought and help could be made available to deal with the immediate problem of food distribution. I believe that under the CENTO pact—which, after all, is of great importance to Pakistan,

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and of which we and Turkey, among others, are members—a proposal should be made that engineering troops should be made available to deal with those problems which are essentially of an engineering nature and which are clearly beyond the possibility of the Pakistan Army to deal with. I believe also, as has been suggested by the right hon. Member for Fulham, that it should be put to the Pakistan Government that observers should be allowed to see that the food which is available is getting in and is being delivered.

Lastly, I believe that we have a position of responsibility and of importance, which has been touched on by my right hon. Friend, and that we should make it clear that it is impossible to extend aid until such time as the infrastructure is there for the reception of aid. I do not believe this is a threat. This is a

matter of reality, and my right hon. Friend touched on it with a great sense of responsibility and of not pushing the point too far. Quite apart from any humanitarian matter—and that affects us all as individuals—but as a House of Commons bringing influence to bear on our Government, we suggest that this country and our Government should not be timid in what they attempt to do. As a leading member of the Commonwealth, as a leading economic power and as possibly the most important and dynamic member of the CENTO pact, we have the opportunity of seeing that this terrible situation is controlled and does not become, as it so easily could, a menace to the peace of the world. Mr. Peter Shore (Stepney): I join right hon. and hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington, North (Mr. Douglas-Mann) on bringing his Motion before the House. I express thanks to him, also, and to other right hon. and hon. Members who have been to East Pakistan, so far as they were able to do so, and who have come back with first-hand accounts of what they found there. I pay that tribute for the simple reason that one of our great problems in assessing the situation is the "iron curtain"

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which has descended over East Pakistan for the greater part of the past six weeks.

We knew in detail the events which immediately preceded the seizure of power or the occupation of the various centres in East Bengal by the Pakistan army. We knew about events until then, and we knew, incidentally, that it was not a situation in which the leading political figures in East Bengal had declared independence but was one in which they were still insisting upon a political programme which they had put to the people in their own country and, indeed, to all-Pakistan elections.

Since then, however, and within a few days of the army's moves and attack in East Bengal, we have been deprived of systematic and continuing information. Correspondents were brought together and dispatched from the country at the earliest possible moment. Now, five or six weeks later, we are beginning to receive further reports as a number of correspondents, in tightly controlled conditions, have been allowed by the Pakistan army to see some part of what is happening.

I turn for a moment to the report which appeared in the Financial Times of Wednesday, 12th May, sent from Dacca the previous day by Mr. Harvey Stockwin. He wrote: All reliable and impartial sources are definite that the dead run into hundreds of thousands", and he reports that, De-urbanisation is continuing on a wide scale; the majority of workers continue to be absent from factories and peasants from their fields. In addition to these reports, such as they are, from inside East Bengal, we know of the great flood of human beings who have been driven to cross the frontier into West Bengal and into India. Clearly, we are witnessing a catastrophe, and I have the unhappy feeling that the scale of it is much greater than we have yet begun to understand or believe. We have to ask ourselves, therefore, the difficult question—always difficult for a British Government in

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relation to what have previously been the affairs of not only a friendly country but a fellow member of the Commonwealth: what are our duties and obligations in respect of these events?

I have never been one who would lightly urge that we should, as it were, as a first priority in order in some sense to satisfy our own inner anxieties, act in any way which did not objectively help the true situation. In this case, however, after hearing several statements from the Foreign Secretary, and knowing that he has made private representations to the Pakistan Government, though believing, unhappily, that those private representations have had very small effect, at best, I feel that we are right to speak out, and plainly, about what is happening.

When I say "we", I mean virtually all Members of Parliament, and I hope, also, that the Government themselves, though perhaps not in quite such strong language, will see fit to express their views unmistakably, and in public. This brings me to one part of the Minister's analysis of the events which led up to this tragedy with which I cannot agree. Very rightly, the right hon. Gentleman drew attention to the extraordinary construction of the State of Pakistan. So far as I am aware, no other State in the world has ever been

divided in this way, one part separated from the other by over 1,000 miles. Such a State can be held together only by some strong common impulse. That strong common impulse was there in 1947 and was represented by the Muslim faith. The truth now, after the 20 years or so which have elapsed since then, is that that common impulse has weakened and no new bonds of common purpose have been forged to take its place.

A State of this kind cannot be held together unless there is a will in both areas to keep it as one. That will, it seems to me, has been broken and is unlikely to arise again.

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The point in the right hon. Gentleman's account at which he lost my assent and sympathy came when he told us of how negotiations had gone on. He said that President Yahya Khan had been interested at one stage in carrying out a transfer of power to a civilian democracy, and that is what he had wanted to do. Perhaps that is so. But at the very moment when that democracy emerged, the very moment when it appeared to have a will different from his own, he smashed it. That is his crime, his offence. He broke it. He could not stand the result and implication of what the people themselves wanted. It was as though, on 18th June last year, as we watched the numbers changing, we decided that we did not like the results of the General Election and called out the troops to make sure that the right hon. Gentleman did not have his present place on the Government Front Bench.

That is a crime, a crime against democracy. Let us state it clearly. I do not want to decide, any more than the right hon. Gentleman does, the future of that country, and whether it is to be two or one. What I want is that the people should decide, but they have been deprived of that right of decision by the action, the brutal action, of the Pakistan Army.

Having said that—I am amazed at my own moderation, for it is a horrible sequence of events which has taken place—I turn for a moment to consider the aims of our policy and what we can do. I fully understand what the Minister said about the use of our aid programmes, and I see the implications of his remarks. While accepting that aid programmes must not, as it were, simply be carried along by political judgments, he is saying that there can be no possibility of aid being resumed while the political infrastructure, as the right hon. Member for Stafford and Stone (Mr. Hugh Fraser) pointed out, makes any kind of serious economic aid impossible to support. That must be so, and it is right that the Pakistan Government should understand it. As regards sending in aid for relief purposes, I agree that we must mobilise all the agencies and forces available to

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us. I warmly support the initiative taken with the United Nations, and I very much hope that it will succeed.

I also attach enormous importance—as, I believe, do the right hon. Member for Stafford and Stone and my right hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Michael Stewart)—to the question of getting observers of one kind or another into the country. The pressure, the influence and the restraining effect that people who are free to move and witness events can have upon a Government, however insensitive it may be to internal opinion, can be very great. Indeed, the precedent established, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Fulham reminded us, in the case of the Nigerian civil war was extremely important and one which, I hope, will be urged strongly upon the Pakistan Government to adopt. Finally, I come to the question of what we can do and whom we can bring into this to bring, as it were, further pressure to bear in the right direction. The right direction must be a political solution—of that I have no doubt—and a political solution must, in the end, be one that the majority of the people themselves desire.

It should not be beyond the possibilities of vigorous diplomacy, looking now not only to the Commonwealth forum, not only to the forum of CENTO, in which we are both strongly based, but thinking also of the known views of so many of the great Powers, including the United States, the Soviet Union and India as an important neighbouring country, to find ways and means of bringing international pressure to bear, as diplomatically as any right hon. Gentleman wishes, with the purpose and aim of achieving peace, an end of the carnage and the restoration of the rights of the people of that land.

Sir Frederic Bennett (Torquay): Having listened to your reminder, Mr. Speaker, that we should try to keep our speeches short, I hope that I may be forgiven if I do not refer to the remarks of the right hon. Member for Stepney (Mr. Shore) but revert to the opening

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speech of the hon. Member for Kensington, North (Mr. Douglas Mann), to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude for moving his Motion today.

Having listened to the hon. Member, there are only three points that I wish to make. The first—and I can understand how this happened—is that when the Motion refers to a cease-fire, although there may well be sporadic fighting, my information differs from that of the hon. Member in that I believe that to a large extent the active fighting on any scale has now died down, if it has not ceased altogether, in East Pakistan.

My second point is that with a nation of 60 million or more people—I am referring to East Pakistan—however many troops the West Pakistan Government can send, in the last resort it will be impossible to hold that country together by military force alone. Therefore, if it is to survive, as, I am sure, most of us at least would wish, we cannot do anything other than harm by urging that any future rejoining of the two halves is out of the question. The political consequences, which have already been mentioned, are all too clear for anyone who wants to see: namely, that the creation of an impoverished and stricken East Pakistan as a separate nation State today—let us not forget that it has no wish to go to India, even though it may not currently have any wish to go to West Pakistan—would be a sore which had repercussions far outside its borders. We do not need to look far to think of the countries which would immediately take advantage of such a situation. Incidentally, India would be one of the first losers from the standpoint of her own stability. Therefore, even with all the difficulties, our aim should be to try to heal the wounds and keep Pakistan all together, if possible, rather than face a fait accompli that the damage is already irrevocable.

My only other remark in this context is that I deplore the suggestion, which I find wholly illogical, that we should suspend all aid to

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Pakistan. That would be the converse of what hon. Members are trying to achieve, because facts are facts and the only effective way at present to get aid to East Pakistan is with the concurrence of the West Pakistan authorities. They are in charge in Dacca, Chittagong and the other ports and the airfields. Therefore, if we were to use a form of indirect sanctions by cutting down aid to Pakistan as a whole, and West Pakistan had to tighten its belt even further, there would be even less aid available for East Pakistan. Rather should we be bending our efforts—this was why I listened with respect to my right lion. Friend—to increase the aid from international and other sources to West Pakistan by doing our level best to ensure that a right and fair proportion goes for the benefit of East Pakistan. That is the way to tackle the situation rather than to threaten to withdraw aid, which would certainly not have the effects that some would wish.

This is as tragic an occasion for me as it is for anyone else, because no one in the House has closer personal ties than I have with Pakistan, dating back over more than one generation as regards the Muslim community in the subcontinent, which I remember from childhood from my father, who was a great personal friend of Jinnah.

I do not think that we do a service by twisting the history of Pakistan and forgetting two factors. The first is that this country, and all parties in it, bears a great responsibility for the creation of Pakistan. To talk now about its absurdity is to forget that, to a large extent, Britain was responsible for creating this State. Having said that, however, it should be added that it was also in accord with the wishes of the people. One must go back far further in history to understand what might seem to be a ridiculous thought geographically that the two main Islam communities on the Indian subcontinent wanted to come together, as they did. To do that—and I have no wish to raise the temperature about Indian history—one

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