Behind Mujib's release: *Behind Mujib's release Good offices sought Economic snags abound
By John K. Cooley Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor
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Like a skilled stage manager, Pakistan President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto kept the world in uncertainty about the exact circumstances surrounding release of the East Bengali leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, until the last minute.

With unrest at home and reports of new fighting incidents with India on their cease-fire line, President Bhutto evidently tried to derive the maximum political advantage from his final talks with the sheikh Jan. 7 and his subsequent expected release.

Mr. Bhutto’s final conversations with Sheikh Mujib followed talks with United Nations special envoy Winspear Guicardi, who reportedly briefed Mr. Bhutto on his visits to New Delhi and Dacca.

Sheikh Mujib’s anticipated return as President of Bangladesh will have several immediate effects, Indian and Pakistani diplomats here say:

• It will raise Bangladesh expectations of recognition by the big powers. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad has been sounding out the foreign consuls general in Dacca who were accredited to Pakistan before the Indian invasion. And there have been talks among the big powers on the subject.

U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers was noncommittal on possibilities of U.S. recognition in a television interview Jan. 5. U.S. diplomats believe President Nixon may not want to tread on Pakistani or Chinese sensibilities before his scheduled visit to Peking next month.

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For Britain the problem is delicate because India and Pakistan are both Commonwealth members. British diplomats say they doubt whether London’s usual criteria for recognizing a regime have yet been completely met: total recognition by all under its authority, and the physical means of ensuring this sovereignty and protecting all persons living there.

If Bangladesh applies for Commonwealth membership, these diplomats say, the Commonwealth Secretariat would canvass other members without need to call a full Commonwealth conference to decide.

They recall the historical precedent of Singapore’s breakaway from Malaysia in 1965. The Commonwealth Secretariat helped solve that problem behind the scenes and then recognized Singapore’s independence.

Good offices sought

President Bhutto has evidently been trying to get Sheikh Mujib to promise his good offices to secure repatriation by India and Bangladesh of well over 70,000 Pakistani war prisoners. He also wants a commitment not to try the former East Pakistani civil administration’s chiefs for “war crimes.”

On Jan. 6 President Bhutto offered to continue the talks with Sheikh Mujib in Dacca “if invited.”

Such commitments by Sheikh Mujib are highly unlikely without a parallel commitment by President Bhutto to recognize Bangladesh independence. This is something President Bhutto cannot do and politically survive in West Pakistan. Even if Sheikh Mujib were to make them, Pakistan diplomats here believe he would risk being overruled by radicals in Dacca.

Economic snags abound

Direct talks between Dacca and Islamabad are urgently needed to unravel the chaotic economic situation between West Pakistan and its former eastern wing. Bank accounts, payments, the east’s share of Pakistan’s huge foreign debt—which must be serviced by somebody—and shares in nationalist enterprises, among many other things, must be sorted out in the interests of both Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Sheikh Mujib inherits a war-ravaged economy and a population of 75 million, some of whom are starving and most of whom are out of work. Many Bengali refugees in India, reports from Calcutta say, have indicated they do not wish to return. Forcing them to do so would quickly deteriorate relations between India and Bangladesh and the central Indian government and its own Bengali populations.

Bangladesh Interior and Rehabilitation Minister M. B. Kamruzzamman estimated that $3 billion would be needed to reintegrate all the refugees. But the Bangladesh treasury is virtually empty and the current jute and tea crops are being lost through war damage and the lack of transport to move them.