Monday, Dec. 20, 1971

Bangladesh: Out of War, a Nation Is Born

JAI Bangla! Jai Bangla!" From the banks of the great Ganges and the broad Brahmaputra, from the emerald rice fields and mustard-colored hills of the countryside, from the countless squares of countless villages came the cry. "Victory to Bengal! Victory to Bengal!" They danced on the roofs of buses and marched down city streets singing their anthem Golden Bengal. They brought the green, red and gold banner of Bengal out of secret hiding places to flutter freely from buildings, while huge pictures of their imprisoned leader, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, sprang up overnight on trucks, houses and signposts. As Indian troops advanced first to Jessore, then to Comilla, then to the outskirts of the capital of Dacca, small children clambered over their trucks and Bengalis everywhere cheered and greeted the soldiers as liberators.

Thus last week, amid a war that still raged on, the new nation of Bangladesh was born. So far only India and Bhutan have formally recognized it, but it

ranks eighth among the world's 148 nations in terms of population (78 million), behind China, India, the Soviet Union, the U.S., Indonesia, Japan and Brazil. Its birth, moreover, may be followed by grave complications. In West Pakistan, a political upheaval is a foregone conclusion in the wake of defeat and dismemberment. In India, the creation of a Bengali state next door to its own impoverished West Bengal state could very well strengthen the centrifugal forces that have tugged at the country since independence in 1947.

The breakaway of Pakistan's eastern wing became a virtual certainty when the Islamabad government launched air strikes against at least eight Indian airfields two weeks ago. Responding in force, the Indian air force managed to wipe out the Pakistani air force in the East within two days, giving India control of the skies. In the Bay of Bengal and the Ganges delta region as well, the Indian navy was in unchallenged command. Its blockade of Chittagong and Chalna harbors cut off all reinforcements, supplies and chances of evacuation for the Pakistani forces, who found themselves far outnumbered (80,000 v. India's 200,000) and trapped in an enclave more than 1,000 miles from their home bases in the West.

There were even heavier and bloodier battles, including tank clashes on the Punjabi plain and in the deserts to the south, along the 1,400-mile border between India and the western wing of Pakistan, where the two armies have deployed about 250,000 men. Civilians were fleeing from the border areas, and residents of Karachi, Rawalpindi and Islamabad were in a virtual state of siege and panic over day and night harassment raids by buzzing Indian planes.

The U.N. did its best to stop the war, but its best was not nearly good enough. After three days of procedural wrangles and futile resolutions, the Security Council gave up; stymied by the Soviet nyets, the council passed the buck to the even wordier and less effectual General Assembly. There, a resolution calling for a cease-fire and withdrawal of Indian and Pakistan forces behind their own borders swiftly passed by an overwhelming vote of 104 to 11.

The Pakistanis, with their armies in retreat, said they would honor the ceasefire provided India did. The Indians, with victory in view, said they "were considering" the ceasefire, which meant they would stall until they had achieved their objective of dismembering Pakistan. There was nothing the assembly could do to enforce its will. There was considerable irony in India's reluctance to obey the U.N. resolution in view of New Delhi's irritating penchant in the past for lecturing other nations on their moral duty to do the bidding of the world organization. Similarly the Soviet Union, which is encouraging India in its defiance, has never hesitated to lecture Israel on its obligation to heed U.N. resolutions calling for withdrawal from Arab territories.

Hopeless Task

In any case, a cease-fire is not now likely to alter the military situation in the East. As Indian infantrymen advanced to within 25 miles of Dacca late last week and as reports circulated that 5,000 Indian paratroopers were landing on the edges of the beleaguered eastern capital, thousands fled for fear that the Pakistani army might decide to make a pitched stand. Daily, and often hourly, Indian planes strafed airports in Dacca, Karachi and Islamabad. Some 300 children were said to have died in a Dacca orphanage when a piston-engine plane dropped three 750-lb. bombs on the Rahmat-e-Alam Islamic Mission near the airport while 400 children slept inside. Earlier in the week, two large bombs fell on workers' shanties near a jute mill in nearby Narayan-ganj, killing 275 people.

Forty workers died and more than 100 others were injured when they were caught by air strikes as they attempted to repair huge bomb craters in the Dacca airport runway. India declared a temporary moratorium on air strikes late last week so that the runway could be repaired and 400 U.N. relief personnel and other foreigners could be flown out. It was repaired, but the Pakistanis changed their mind and refused to allow the U.N.'s evacuation aircraft to land at Dacca, leaving U.N. personnel trapped as potential hostages. The International Red Cross declared Dacca's Intercontinental Hotel and nearby Holy Family Hospital "neutral zones" to receive wounded and provide a haven for foreigners.

For its part, the Pakistani army was said to have killed some Bengalis who they believed informed or aided the Indian forces. But the reprisals apparently were not on a wide scale. Both civilian and military casualties were considered relatively light in East Bengal, largely because the Indian army skirted big cities and populated areas in an effort to avoid standoff battles with the retreating Pakistani troops.

The first major city to fall was Jessore. TIME'S William Stewart, who rode into the key railroad junction with the Indian troops, cabled: "Jessore, India's first strategic prize, fell as easily as a mango ripened by a long Bengal summer. It shows no damage from fighting. In fact, the Pakistani 9th Division headquarters had quit Jessore days before the Indian advance, and only four battalions were left to face the onslaught.

"Nevertheless, two Pakistani battalions slipped away, while the other two were badly cut up. The Indian army was everywhere wildly cheered by the Bengalis, who shouted: 'Jai Bangla!' and 'Indira Gandhi Zindabad! [Long Live Indira Gandhi!].' In Jhingergacha, a half-deserted city of about 5,000 nearby, people gather to tell of their ordeal. The Pakistanis shot us when we didn't understand,' said one old man. 'But they spoke Urdu and we speak Bengali.' "

Death Awaits

By no means all of East Bengal was freed of Pakistani rule last week. Pakistani troops were said to be retreating to two river ports, Narayanganj and Barisal, where it was speculated they might make a stand or alternatively seek some route of escape. They were also putting up a strong defense in battalion-plus strength in three garrison towns where Indian forces reportedly had encircled them. The Indians have yet to capture the major cities of Chittagong and Dinajpur. Neither army permitted newsmen unreserved access to the contested areas, but on several occasions the Indian military command did allow reporters to accompany its forces. The three pronged Indian pincer movement, however, moved much more rapidly than was earlier believed possible. Its success was largely attributed to decisive air and naval support.

Demoralized and in disarray, the Pakistani troops were urged to obey the "soldier to soldier" radio call to surrender, repeatedly broadcast by Indian Army Chief of Staff General Sam Manekshaw. "Should you not heed my advice to surrender to my army and □ alient□ to escape," he warned, "I assure you certain death awaits you." He also assured the Pakistanis that if they surrendered they would be treated as prisoners of war according to the Geneva convention. To insure that the Mukti Bahini would also adhere to the Geneva code, India officially put the liberation forces under its military command.

Pakistani prisoners were reported surrendering in fair numbers. But many others seemed to be fleeing into the countryside, perhaps in hopes of finding escape routes disguised as civilians. "In some garrison towns stout resistance is being offered," said an Indian spokesman, "and though the troops themselves wish to surrender, they are being instructed by the generals: 'Gain time. Something big may happen. Hold on.' " He added sarcastically that the only big thing that could happen was that the commanders of the military regime in East Pakistan might pull a vanishing act.

All week long, meanwhile, the Pakistani regime kept up a running drumfire about Pakistan's jihad, or holy war, with India. An army colonel insisted there were no Pakistani losses whatsoever on the battlefield. His reasoning: "In the pursuit of jihad, nobody dies. He lives forever." Pakistan radio and television blared forth patriotic songs such as All of Pakistan Is Wide Awake and The Martyr's Blood Will Not Go Wasted. The propaganda was accompanied by a totally unrealistic picture of the war. At one point, government spokesmen claimed that Pakistan had knocked out 123 Indian aircraft to a loss of seven of their own, a most unlikely kill ratio of nearly 18 to l. Islamabad insisted that Pakistani forces were still holding on to the city of Jessore even though newsmen rode into the city only hours after its liberation.

Late last week, however. President Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan's gov ernment appeared to be getting ready to prepare its people for the truth: the

East is lost. An official spokesman admitted for the first time that the Pakistani air force was no longer operating in the East. Pakistani forces were "handicapped in the face of a superior enemy war machine," he said, and were outnumbered six to one by the Indians in terms of men and materiel—a superiority that seemed slightly exaggerated.

Sikhs and Gurkhas

As the fate of Bangladesh, and of Pakistan itself, was being decided in the East, Indian and Pakistani forces were making painful stabs at one another along the 1,400-mile border that reaches from the icy heights of Kashmir through the flat plains of the Punjab down to the desert of western India. There the battle was being waged by bearded Sikhs wearing khaki turbans, tough, flat-faced Gurkhas, who carry a curved knife known as a kukri in their belts, and many other ethnic strains. Mostly, the action was confined to border thrusts by both sides to straighten out alient that are difficult to defend.

The battles have pitted planes, tanks, artillery against each other, and in fact both materiel losses and casualties appear to have run far higher than in the east. Most of the sites were the very places where the two armies slugged it out in their last war in 1965. Yet there were no all-out offensives. The Indian army's tactic was to maintain a defensive posture, launching no attacks except where they assisted its defenses.

Old Boy Attitude

The bloodiest action was at Chhamb, a flat plateau about six miles from the cease-fire line that since 1949 has divided the disputed Kashmir region almost equally between Pakistan and India. The Pakistanis were putting up "a most determined attack," according to an Indian spokesman, who admitted that Indian casualties had been heavy. But he added that Pakistani casualties were heavier. The Pakistanis' aim was to strike for the Indian city of Jammu and the 200-mile-long Jammu-Srinagar highway, which links India with the Vale of Kashmir. The Indians were forced to retreat from the west bank of the Munnawar Tawi River, where they had tried desperately to hold on.

Except for Chhamb and other isolated battles, both sides seemed to be going about the war with an "old boy" attitude: "If you don't really hit my important bases, I won't bomb yours." Behind all this, of course, is the fact that many Indian and Pakistani officers, including the two countries' commanding generals, went to school with one another at Sandhurst or Dehra Dun. India's commanding general in the east, Lieut. General Jagjit Singh Aurora, was a classmate of Pakistan's President Yahya. "We went to school together to learn how best to kill each other," said one Indian officer.

"To an outsider," TIME'S Marsh Clark cabled after a tour of the western front, "the Indian army seemed precise, old-fashioned and sane. The closer

you get to the front, the more tea and cookies you get,' one American correspondent complained. But things get done. Convoys move up rapidly, artillery officers direct their fire with dispatch. Morale is extremely high, and Indian officers always refer to the Pakistanis, though rather condescendingly, as 'those chaps.' "

Abandoned Britches

On a visit to Sehjra, a key town in a Pakistani salient that pokes into Indian territory east of Lahore where Indian troops have been advancing, Clark found turbaned men working in the fields while jets flew overhead and artillery sounded in the distance. "There are free tea stalls along the road," he reported, "and teenagers throw bags of nuts, plus oranges and bananas, into the Jeeps carrying troops to the front, and shout encouragement. When our Jeep stops, kids surround it and yell at us, demanding that we write a story saying their village is still free and not captured, as claimed by Pakistani radio.

"As we come up on the border, the Indian commander receives us. He recounts how his Gurkha soldiers kicked off the operation at 9 o'clock at night and hit the well-entrenched Pakistanis at midnight. I think we took them by surprise,' he says, and an inspection of the hooch of the Pakistani area commanding officer confirms it. On his bed is a suitcase, its confusion indicating it was hastily packed. There are several shirts, some socks. And his trousers. Nice trousers of gray flannel made, according to the label, by Mr. Abass, a tailor in Rawalpindi. The colonel, it is clear, has departed town and left his britches behind."

South of Sehjra, Indian armored units have been plowing through sand across the West Pakistan border, taking hundreds of square miles of desert and announcing the advance of their troops to places that apparently consist of two palm trees and a shallow pool of brackish water. Among the enemy equipment reported captured: several camels. The reason behind this rather ridiculous adventure is the fear that Pakistan will try to seize large tracts of Indian territory to hold as ransom for the return of East Bengal. That now seems an impossibility with Bangladesh an independent nation, but India wants to have land in the west to bargain with.

The western part of India is on full wartime alert. All cities are completely blacked out at night, fulfilling, as it were, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's warning that it would be a "long, dark

December." Air raid sirens wail almost continuously. During one 15-hour period in the Punjab, there were eleven airraid alerts. One all-clear was sounded by the jittery control room before the warning blast was given. The nervousness, though, was justified: two towns in the area had been bombed with a large loss of life as Pakistani air force planes zipped repeatedly across the border. Included in their attacks was the city of Amritsar, whose Golden

Temple is the holiest of holies to all Sikhs. At Agra, which was bombed in the Pakistanis' first blitz, the Taj Mahal was camouflaged with a forest of twigs and leaves and draped with burlap because its marble glowed like a white beacon in the moonlight.

The fact that India is not launching any major offensives in the western sector suggests that New Delhi wants to keep the war there as uncomplicated as possible. Though the two nations have tangled twice before in what is officially called the state of Jammu and Kashmir, neither country has gained any territory since the original cease fire line was drawn in 1949. There are several reasons why New Delhi is not likely to try to press now for control of the disputed area.

The first is a doubt that the people of Azad Kashmir, as the Pakistani portion is called, would welcome control by India; in that case, India could be confronted with an embarrassing uprising.

The second reason is that in 1963, shortly after India's brief but bloody war with China, Pakistan worked out a provisional border agreement with Peking ceding some 1,300 sq. mi. of Kashmir to China. Peking has since linked up the old "silk route" highway from Sinkiang province to the city of Gilgit in Pakistani Kashmir with an all-weather macadam motor highway running down to the northern region of Ladakh near the cease-fire line. Should Indian troops get anywhere near China's highway or try to grasp its portion of Kashmir, New Delhi could expect to have a has sle with Peking on its hands.

Constant Harassment Pakistan, on the other hand, has much to gain if it can wrest the disputed province, particularly the lush and fabled Vale, from Indian control. Strategically, the region is extremely important, bor dering on both China and Afghanistan as well as India and Pakistan. More over, Kashmir's population is predominantly Moslem.

Still, the war was also beginning to take its toll on the people of West Pakistan. " The almost constant air raids over Islamabad, Karachi and other cities have brought deep apprehension, even panic," TIME'S Louis Kraar cabled from Rawalpindi. "It is not massive bombing, just constant harassment — though there have been several hundred civilian casualties. Thus when the planes roar overhead, life completely halts in the capital and people scurry into trenches or stand in doorways with woolen shawls over their heads, ostrichlike. Be cause of the Kashmir mountains, the radar in the area does not pick up Indian planes until they are about 15 miles away.

"Pakistanis have taken to caking mud all over their autos in the belief that it camouflages them from Indian planes. In nightly blackouts, the road traffic moves along with absolutely no lights, and fear has prevailed so com pletely over common sense that there has probably been more bloodshed in traffic accidents than in the air raids. The government has begun urging motorists

only to shield their lights, but peasants throw stones at any car that keeps them on. In this uneasy atmosphere, Pakistani antiaircraft gunners opened up on their own high-flying Sabre jets one evening last week. At one point, the military stationed an antiaircraft ma chine gun atop the Rawalpindi Inter continental Hotel, but guests convinced them it was dangerous."

Soviet Airlift In New Delhi, the mood was not so much jingoism as jubilation that India's main goal — the establishment of a government in East Bengal that would en sure the return of the refugees — was ac complished so quickly. There was little surprise when Prime Minister Gandhi announced to both houses of Parliament early last week that India would become the first government to recognize Bangladesh. Still, members thumped their desks, cheered loudly and jumped in the aisles to express their delight. "The valiant struggle of the people of Bangladesh in the face of tremendous odds has opened a new chapter of heroism in the history of freedom movements," Mrs. Gandhi said. "The whole world is now aware that [Bangladesh] reflects the will of an overwhelming majority of the people, which not many governments can claim to represent."

There was little joy in New Delhi, however, over the Nixon Administration's hasty declaration blaming India for the war in the subcontinent, or over U.N. Ambassador George Bush's remark that India was guilty of "aggression" (see box). Indian officials were also reported shocked by the General Assembly's unusually swift and one-sided vote calling for a cease-fire and withdrawal of troops.

Call for Armaments

Meanwhile, there was still the danger that other nations could get involved. Pakistan was reported putting pressure on Turkey, itself afflicted with internal problems, to provide ships, tanks, bazookas, and small arms and ammunition. Since Turkey obtains heavy arms from the U.S., it would be necessary to have American approval to give them to Pakistan. There was also a report that the Soviet Union was using Cairo's military airbase Almaza as a refueling stop in flying reinforcements to India. Some 30 giant Antonov-12 transports, each capable of carrying two dismantled MIGs or two SAM batteries, reportedly touched down last week. The airlift was said to have displeased the Egyptians, who are disturbed over India's role in the war. For its part, Washington stressed that its SEATO and CENTO treaties with Pakistan in no way bind it to come to its aid.

If the Bangladesh government was not yet ensconced in the capital of Dacca by week's end, it did appear that its foundations had been firmly laid. As Mrs. Gandhi said in her speech to Parliament, the leaders of the People's Republic of Bangladesh—as the new nation will be officially known —"have proclaimed their basic principles of state policy to be democracy, socialism, secularism and establishment of an egalitarian society in which there would be

no discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex or creed. In regard to foreign relations, the Bangladesh government have expressed their determination to follow a policy of nonalignment, peaceful coexistence and opposition to colonialism, racialism and imperialism."

Bangladesh was born of a dream twice deferred. Twenty-four years ago, Bengalis voted to join the new nation of Pakistan, which had been carved out of British India as a Moslem homeland. Before long, religious unity disintegrated into racial and regional bigotry as the autocratic Moslems of West Pakistan systematically exploited their Bengali brethren in the East. One year ago last week, the Bengalis thronged the polls in Pakistan's first free nationwide election, only to see their overwhelming mandate to Mujib brutally reversed by West Pakistani soldiers. That crackdown took a terrible toll: perhaps 1,000,000 dead, 10 million refugees, untold thousands homeless, hungry and sick.

The memories are still fresh of those who died of cholera on the muddy paths to India, or suffered unspeakable atrocities at the hands of the Pakistani military. And there are children, blind and brain-damaged, who will carry the scars of malnutrition for the rest of their lives. As a Bangladesh official put it at the opening of the new nation's first diplomatic mission in New Delhi last week: "It is a dream come true, but you must also remember that we went through a nightmare."

Economic Prospects

How stable is the new nation? Economically, Bangladesh has nowhere to go but up. As Pakistan's eastern wing, it contributed between 50% and 70% of that country's foreign exchange earnings but received only a small percentage in return. The danger to East Bengal's economy lies mainly in the fact that it is heavily based on jute and burlap, and synthetic substitutes are gradually replacing both. But if it can keep all of its own foreign exchange, as it now will, it should be able to develop other industries. It will also open up trade with India's West Bengal, and instead of competing with India, may frame joint marketing policies with New Delhi. India also intends to help with Bangladesh's food problems in the next year.

One of the main conditions of India's support is that Bangladesh organize the expeditious return of the refugees and restore their lands and belongings to them. The Bangladesh government is also intent on seeking war reparations from Pakistan if possible.

What of West Pakistan? The loss of East Pakistan will no doubt be a tremendous blow to its spirit and a destabilizing factor in its politics. But the Islamabad regime, shorn of a region that was politically, logistically and militarily difficult to manage and stripped down to a population of 58 million, may prove a much more homogeneous unit. In that sense, the breakup could

prove to be a blessing in disguise. Both nations, moreover, might be expected to get considerable foreign aid to help them back onto their feet.

Leadership Vacuum

Last week Yahya announced the appointment of a 77-year-old Bengali named Nurul Amin as the Prime Minister-designate for a future civilian government, to which he has promised to turn over some of his military regime's power. Amin figured in last December's elections, which precipitated the whole tragedy. In those elections Mujib's Awami League won 167 of the 169 Assembly seats at stake; Amin, an independent who enjoyed prestige as an elder statesman, won one of the two others. But he is essentially a figurehead, and former Foreign Minister Zulfikar All Bhutto was appointed his deputy, which means that he will probably have the lion's share of the power. That may come sooner than expected. There were reports last week that Yahya's fall from power may be imminent. Bhutto is a contentious, pro-Chinese politician who was instrumental in persuading Yahya in effect to set aside the results of the election and to keep Mujib from becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Bangladesh's main difficulty is apt to come from a leadership vacuum should Yahya refuse to release Mujib, the spellbinding leader who has led the fight for Bengali civil liberties since partition. All of the Awami Leaguers who formed the provisional government of Bangladesh in exile last April are old colleagues of Mujib's and have grown accustomed to handling responsibilities since he went to prison. But running a volatile war-weakened new nation is considerably more difficult than managing a political party. The trouble is that none of them have the tremendous charisma that attracted million-strong throngs to hear Mujib. The top leaders, all of whom won seats in the aborted National Assembly last December by overwhelming margins, are: — Syed Nazrul Islam, 46, acting President in the absence of Mujib, a lawyer who frequently served as the Sheik's deputy in the past. He was active in the struggle against former President Ayub Khan, and when Mujib was thrown in jail, he led the party through the crisis.

Tajuddin Ahmed, 46. Prime Minister, a lawyer who has been a chief organizer in the Awami League since its founding in 1949. He is an expert in economics and is considered one of the party's leading intellectuals. — Khandakar Moshtaque Ahmed, 53, Foreign Minister, a lawyer who was active in the Indian independence movement and helped found the Awami League.

The most immediate problem is to prevent a bloodbath in Bangladesh against non-Bengalis accused of collaborating with the Pakistani military. Toward this end. East Bengal government officials who chose to remain in Bangladesh through the fighting are being inducted into the new administration and taking over as soon as areas are liberated. Actually, India's recognition came earlier than planned. One reason was to circumvent a charge reportedly budding in

the U.N. that India had joined the battle to annex the province to India. Another was to enable the Bangladesh government to assume charge as soon as large chunks of territory were liberated by the army. Since New Delhi does not want to be accused of having exchanged West Pakistani colonialism for Indian colonialism, it is expected to lean over backward to let the Bangladesh government do things its way.

The Walk Back

Is there any chance that the Pakistanis may yet engineer a startling turn of the tide, rout the Indians from the East and destroy the new nation in its infancy? Virtually none. As Correspondent Clark cabled: "Touts who are betting on the outcome between India and Pakistan might ponder the fact that two of the TIME correspondents who were visiting Pakistan this week [Clark in the West, Stewart deep in the East] were there with Indian forces."

And so at week's end the streams of refugees who walked so long and so far to get to India began making the long journey back home to pick up the threads of their lives. For some, there were happy reunions with relatives and friends, for others tears and the bitter sense of loss for those who will never return. But there were new homes to be raised, new shrines to be built, and a new nation to be formed. The land was there too, lush and green.

"Man's history is waiting in patience for the triumph of the insulted man," Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel-prizewinning Bengali poet, once wrote. Triumph he had, but at a terrible price. With the subcontinent at war, and the newborn land still wracked by bone-shattering poverty, the joy in Bangladesh was necessarily tempered by sorrow.

*Pakistan claimed the plane was India's. Some Bengalis and foreign observers believed it was Pakistani, but other observers pointed out that the only forces known to be flying piston-engined aircraft were the Mukti Bahini, the Bengali liberation forces.

Monday, Dec. 20, 1971

The U.S.: A Policy in Shambles

THE Nixon Administration drew a fusillade of criticism last week for its policy on India and Pakistan. Two weeks ago, when war broke out between the two traditional enemies, a State Department spokesman issued an unusually blunt statement, placing the burden of blame on India. Soon after that, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations George Bush branded the Indian action as "aggression"—a word that Washington subsequently but lamely explained had not been "authorized."

Senator Edward Kennedy declared that the Administration had turned a deaf ear for eight months to "the brutal and systematic repression of East Bengal by the Pakistani army," and now was condemning "the response of India toward an increasingly desperate situation on its eastern borders." Senators Edmund Muskie and Hubert Humphrey echoed Kennedy's charges.

The critics were by no means limited to ambitious politicians. In the New York Times, John P. Lewis, onetime U.S. A.I.D. director in India (1964-69) and now dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, wrote: "We have managed to align ourselves with the wrong side of about as big and simple a moral issue as the world has seen lately; and we have sided with a minor military dictatorship against the world's second largest nation." In Britain, the conservative London Daily Telegraph accused Washington of "a blundering diplomatic performance which can have few parallels."

Since March, when the Pakistani army staged a bloody crackdown in East Bengal, murdering hundreds of thousands of civilians and prompting 10 million Bengalis to flee across the Indian border, the U.S. has been ostentatiously mild in its public criticism of the atrocities and of Pakistan's military ruler, President Yahya Khan—a man whom President Nixon likes. Washington wanted to retain whatever leverage it had with the Pakistanis. Moreover the Administration was grateful for Islamabad's help in arranging Presidential Adviser Henry Kissinger's first, secret trip to China last July. India was shaken by Washington's sudden gesture toward its traditional enemies, the Chinese, with whom it had fought a brief war in 1962. Behind the scenes, many State Department officials urged in vain that the Government take a harder line toward Yahya, for humanitarian as well as practical political reasons.

In the past five years, China has displaced the U.S. as Pakistan's chief sponsor. India, increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union for military aid, finally signed an important treaty of friendship with Moscow last summer. The U.S. was not solely responsible for driving the Indians into the Soviet camp; but its

policy of not being beastly to Yahya convinced the Indians that they could not count on the U.S. for moral support. The result of the treaty: U.S. influence in India was virtually neutralized.

The Administration's current anger, however, stems from a more recent incident. During her trip to Washington last month, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi led President Nixon to believe that her country had no intention of going to war. Later, when the Indian army made what appeared to be a well-planned attack on East Pakistan, Washington officials concluded that Mrs. Gandhi's trip had been a smokescreen for massive war preparations. Richard Nixon was furious, and was behind the initial Government statements branding India the aggressor. -

Last week, in an attempt to justify U.S. policy, Presidential Adviser Kissinger held a press briefing. (The remarks were supposed to be for "background use" only until Senator Barry Goldwater blew Kissinger's cover by printing a transcript of the briefing in the Congressional Record.) Kissinger insisted that the U.S. had not really sided with Pakistan, but had been working quietly and intensively to bring about a peaceful political solution. Indeed, at the time of the Indian attack, he claimed, U.S. diplomats had almost persuaded Yahya Khan and the Calcutta-based Bangladesh leadership to enter into negotiations. New Delhi had precipitated the fighting in East Pakistan, Washington believed, and refused to accept a ceasefire because it was determined to drive the Pakistani army out of East Bengal.

It can be argued, however, that Washington was guilty of an unfortunate naivete by believing that a political solution was possible after the passions of the Indians and Pakistanis had become so aroused. Given the continued existence of a power vacuum in East Bengal, it may have been as unrealistic to expect the Indians to refrain indefinitely from dealing their archenemy a crippling and permanent blow as to have expected the Israelis to halt their 1967 advance in the middle of the Sinai.

It is true that the new U.S. policy toward China has further restricted Washington's room for maneuver with the Indians, but this hardly explains or excuses the Administration's handling of recent affairs on the Indian subcontinent. Because of blunders in both substance and tone, the U.S. has, 1) destroyed whatever chance it had to be neutral in the East Asian conflict; 2) tended to reinforce the Russia-India, China-Pakistan lineup; 3) seemingly placed itself morally and politically on the side of a particularly brutal regime, which, moreover, is an almost certain loser; and 4) made a shambles of its position on the subcontinent.