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**Bengal:**

**THE  
MURDER  
OF A  
PEOPLE**





Bengali victims in East Pakistan: "Civilized men cannot describe the horror that has been done"

## Bengal: The Murder of a People

*It seemed a routine enough request. Assembling the young men of the village of Haluaghat in East Pakistan, a Pakistani Army major informed them that his wounded soldiers urgently needed blood. Would they be donors? The young men lay down on makeshift cots, needles were inserted in their veins—and then slowly the blood was drained from their bodies until they died.*

*Govinda Chandramandl forgets who told him first, but when he heard that an amnesty had been pledged to all refugees, he immediately set off on the long walk home. With his two teen-age daughters by his side, Chandramandl trudged through monsoon-drenched swamplands and past burned-out villages. When he neared his scrap of land, soldiers stopped him. As he watched in helpless anguish, his daughters were raped—again and again and again.*

*He was about 3 years old, and his mother was still in her teens. They sat on ground made muddy by the steady drizzle of the summer rains. The baby's stomach was grotesquely distended, his feet swollen, his arm no thicker than a man's finger. His mother tried to coax him to eat some rice and dried fish. Finally, the baby mouthed the food feebly, wheezed—and died.*

Few people seem more alien to Americans than do the Pakistanis. When thousands of them perish in various natural disasters that regularly plague their country, the newspaper accounts of their suffering have a curious unreality. And yet today, no one can escape the nightmare vision of Pakistan's civil war: a quarter of a million Bengalis dead, an-

other 6 million or more driven into desperate exile as the result of a deliberate effort to terrorize an entire people. It is as if a city the size of Richmond, Va. had been obliterated and the population of New York made suddenly homeless. Even in a world jaded by war and atrocity, suffering on that scale still comes as a sickening shock.

And there is more to it than that. Far more horrifying than the prospect that Pakistan may destroy itself are the signs that its brutal civil war could spark yet another, wider conflict between Moslem Pakistan and its archenemy, Hindu India. Last week, Pakistan's President Mohammed Yahya Khan angrily declared that if India expands its surreptitious support of Bangla Desh, as the secessionist Bengal nation is known, "I shall declare a general war—and let the world take note." The world would have to. For should that happen, Pakistan's ally, China, and India's ally, Russia, would be hard-pressed to avoid involvement. And the United States could be faced with the dangerous necessity to choose sides.

Already, the realities of geopolitics have confronted the U.S. with the thankless task of choosing between strategic and humanitarian considerations. Straining to preserve its influence with Yahya's government, yet anxious to help the suffering Bengalis, America has succeeded only in embroiling itself in a bitter controversy (box, page 28). Last week that controversy was intensified when Sen. Edward Kennedy disclosed the contents of confidential messages from U.S. diplomats in Pakistan. "SPECTER OF FAMINE HANGS OVER EAST PAKISTAN," read one cable. "PROSPECTS FOR AVERTING WIDESPREAD HUNGER, SUFFERING AND PERHAPS STARVATION NOT RE-

PEAT NOT GOOD." Kennedy's clear implication was that the Nixon Administration was seeking to cover up the magnitude of the Bengali tragedy. And, not content with that, he went on to intimate that the U.S. had plans to send police teams to East Pakistan to help Yahya's Punjab soldiers suppress Bengali resistance.

### Two Divergent Cultures

Such a cold-blooded move, should it ever come to pass, would ensnarl the U.S. in one of the most intractable racial and cultural conflicts of modern times. Physically and politically, Pakistan is unique among the world's nations, between its rugged, relatively empty western region and its desperately overpopulated eastern region lie 1,000 miles of Indian territory. And more than space divides the two parts of Pakistan. It is a nation of two radically divergent cultures, of two totally different peoples who have despised each other through history. The lighter-skinned, aggressive Punjabis of West Pakistan scorn the Bengalis of the east as spiritless peasants or tricky tradesmen. And the Bengalis, whose rich rice land and lucrative jute crops have paid Pakistan's bills ever since the founding of the country in 1947, regard the Punjabis as barbarians—and, to make matters worse, oppressive barbarians who have monopolized Pakistan's government and army. Snapped one Bengali leader: "We have never

Fleeing the threat of violent death in their homeland, thousands of Bengali refugees in India have met a slower death in exile. The woman at right died from cholera on the way to the hospital.

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been anything but a colony of the west."

Chafing after decades of subjugation, the Bengalis responded with frenzied enthusiasm when their fiery, leonine hero, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, led them to the polls last December in Pakistan's first free elections after twelve years of military rule. Spurred on by the flamboyant oratory of Mujib (as his worshipful followers call him), the Bengalis voted in such numbers that Mujib and his Awami League won an absolute majority of seats in the country's new National Assembly. Suddenly it seemed that Bengal's time had come. But as it turned out, Mujib's platform of economic and diplomatic autonomy for the east was too great a threat to be endured by Punjabi leaders. Unwilling to play second fiddle to Mujib, West Pakistan's most popular politician, the left-leaning Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, refused to participate in the new Parliament. And in the end President Yahya abruptly postponed the opening of the assembly indefinitely.

### Plans for Slaughter

Within hours of Yahya's decree, Mujib proclaimed a general strike in East Pakistan. To this day, Pakistani officials maintain that Yahya personally appealed to Mujib for a compromise that would heal the nation's wounds. But most observers believe that Yahya had other plans all the while. Weeks before the Yahya-Mujib meeting actually took place, the President and his right-hand man, Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan, were already mapping out plans for Mujib's arrest, the dissolution of the Awami League and the slaughter of Bengali nationalists.

Known as "the bomber of Baluchistan" for his indiscriminate use of air and artillery strikes in crushing a local tribal revolt in 1965, Tikka Khan apparently persuaded Yahya to buy time for the army to build up its strength in Bengal. Accordingly, Yahya made his bid for discussions with Mujib. And while the two leaders talked—and Bengalis as well as the world at large looked for a compromise that might save Pakistan—the army pulled off a logistics coup. Flying the long over-water route around southern India (map, page 29) with Boeing 707s commandeered from Pakistan International Airways, the army doubled its troop strength in Bengal to 60,000 men. When Tikka gave the word that all was ready, Yahya flew out of Dacca. And that very night, the bomber of Baluchistan unleashed his troops.

Under instructions to strike brutally on the theory that a savage surprise attack would snuff out resistance quickly, the army obeyed its orders with a venge-

ance. Tanks crashed through the streets of East Pakistan's capital of Dacca, blasting indiscriminately at men and buildings. With cold ferocity, Punjabi soldiers machine-gunned clusters of citizens, while others set fire to slum hutsches throughout the city. Soon, the city was littered with bodies, and the campus of Dacca University—a hotbed of secessionism—was a bloody shambles.

Throughout that blood-drenched night and in the days and weeks that followed, the carnage continued. And the massacres were not limited to Dacca but were carried on throughout the countryside as well. After a desperate visit to his native village on the Indian border, a sobbing Bengali journalist told how the land had been devastated: "I passed



Loren Jenkins—Newsweek

### Mujib: From hero to martyr

through a dozen villages which had been burned and deserted, with bodies everywhere being eaten by crows. The smell! The horror! I kept praying it would not be like that at my village. But it was. The village was just a mass of charred rubble and corpses. My wife and child were missing. There was just one old lady alive and she could no longer talk. She just sat on the ground, shaking and moaning."

With the passing of time, the magnitude of the slaughter has diminished, but there has been no lessening in the brutality of the Pakistani Army. Last week, NEWSWEEK's Loren Jenkins, who was in Dacca the night that Gen. Tikka Khan's troops launched their campaign of murder, cabled the following report on conditions in East Pakistan now:

Four months after the first flush of bloodletting, East Pakistan still lives in fear. But instead of being the cowering,

groveling fear that the army sought to instill, it is a sullen fear tinged with quiet defiance and hate. It is a fear based on the appreciation of a very harsh reality, not a fear that marks people of broken spirit. Walking along a Dacca street recently, I met a journalist I had known before. Our eyes met and he nodded, but he appeared embarrassed. Clancing nervously all around, he muttered, "My God, my God. Civilized man cannot describe the horror that has been done." An hour later another friend explained: "We have been ordered not to talk to foreign journalists. We are scared. We live in terror of the midnight knock on the door. So many people have been killed. So many more have disappeared. And more vanish every night."

One who vanished in the night was Mujib, who is now reportedly held in prison in the western garrison town of Mianwali. A hero before, Mujib has now become a martyr. For all his conspicuous faults, he has become the symbol of Bengali patriotism. Yet Yahya, almost boastfully, told a recent visitor, "My generals are pushing for a military trial for Mujib and for his execution. I have agreed and the trial will be held soon." No policy could be more short-sighted or more likely to harden Bengali resistance. As one Western diplomat told me, "Yahya is simply out of his mind. He still doesn't even understand what the army has done. He thinks they can kill off a couple of hundred thousand people, try Mujib for treason, force a return to order and all will be forgotten. This is utter nonsense. These people will not forget."

### Guerrilla Resistance

Indeed, the minds of Bengalis are emblazoned with the memories of these months of terror. Despite the terror, signs of resistance to the army creep up everywhere. In Dacca, street urchins hawking the local papers slip mimeographed communiqués from the government-in-exile into the newspapers. On ferry boats in the countryside, where all passengers are under the watchful eyes of the army, strangers sidle up and whisper of massacres or point out areas in the dense Madhupur jungle where the "Mukti Bahini," or Liberation Army, is hiding. All over the country, the resistance is rapidly taking on the earmarks of a classic guerrilla war. And East Pakistan is ideal guerrilla terrain reminiscent of South Vietnam's Mekong Delta—a labyrinth of sunken paddies, jute fields and banana groves.

That the Mukti Bahini are capitalizing on their few assets is brought home daily. They have cut the key railroad to Dacca from the port of Chittagong and have also severed the parallel road. More than 60 per cent of the interior's food supplies moves over those routes and there is virtually no prospect of restoring them until peace is also restored. The rebels' recent coup in blowing up three power stations in Dacca has underscored the point that no city or village is

emptiness, pain and fright characterize the half-life of Bengal's refugees (left). Despite India's attempts to care for the refugees, thousands of them die each week from malnutrition, disease and exposure.



## THE POLITICS OF RELIEF

If some Americans are still only vaguely aware of the plight of the Bengali refugees, Beatles George Harrison and Ringo Starr intend to pound the message home this week. In their first public appearance together since the famous rock group split up, George and Ringo plan a benefit performance at New York's Madison Square Garden, with all proceeds to go to homeless Bengali children. And theirs is only one of many efforts—by the International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Services, UNICEF and Americans for Children's Relief among others—designed to stir the U.S. conscience over the genocidal civil war in Pakistan.

Many private citizens now involved in Bengali relief are veterans of similar operations during the Biafran tragedy two years ago. And most are dismayed that, unlike the rescue of Biafran children, which aroused such widespread sympathy, world reaction to the Bengali refugee emergency seems almost apathetic by comparison. Ironically, the sheer magnitude of the suffering in East Pakistan may, in itself, be partly to blame. "Bengali refugees must now form the largest group of displaced persons in the world," said Dr. Daniel L. Weiner, who recently returned from a fact-finding tour for the IRC. "It is a problem that has to be dealt with on an international scale; no private effort can possibly handle this load. Private agencies can only alleviate some aspects of the mess. But the very size of the problem seems to paralyze people—it's not so much a lack of interest as a feeling of helplessness."

**Busy:** To the extent that any organized international effort has been mounted to alleviate Bengal's misery, the U.S. Government can take credit. Washington has committed \$70.5 million to the aid of East Pakistani refugees in India (as compared with \$11 million from the Soviet Union). More than 360,000 tons of U.S. food grains are in the transport pipeline to East Pakistan. For the present, according to U.S. specialists, the threat of mass starvation in the region is not due to any lack of supplies but to poor distribution. Though the U.S. has given Pakistan \$2 million to charter relief ships, the Pakistani Army has used most of them so far to transport troops and ammunition. "They are so damned busy trying to re-establish their control over East Pakistan," snapped a State Department aide, "that they haven't looked beyond their own noses."



Airlift: Bengalis board Soviet plane for flight to refugee camp

Such complaints suggest that Washington has had little success in influencing President Mohammed Yahya Khan to moderate his policies. Yet the Nixon Administration has justified its aid to the Yahya regime mainly on the ground that such support will give Washington leverage over Islamabad. In the face of mounting domestic criticism of that policy, however, the U.S. has recently begun to waffle. In requesting a total of \$131.5 million in aid to Pakistan next year, the State Department recently promised Congress that the money would be held back until Pakistan begins to minister to its homeless millions. But skeptical observers recalled that the U.S. slapped a similar ban on military aid to Pakistan last April—only to have it emerge later on that Pakistani freighters were still hauling U.S.-supplied ammunition and spare parts, ordered before the ban took effect, back to Karachi. And last week, Sen. Stuart Symington charged that the ban was still full of holes. The Administration, said Symington, was guilty of "semantics, ambiguous statements on the public records without clarification and no effort to present the actual facts until pressed to do so."

**Strategic:** Privately, U.S. diplomats concede that, above all else, Washington is trying to maintain good relations with Pakistan out of strategic considerations. One U.S. diplomat warned against the end of an American role on the subcontinent. "If India and Pakistan bleed each other into impotence, and our influence has vanished," he argued, "the area could become a playground for the Soviet Union and China." Added a colleague with startling bluntness: "We are more interested in stability than morality at the moment . . . Right now

the chance for stability, slim as it is, seems to lie with Yahya."

Yet, the price of a cold geopolitical approach to the problem may itself prove to be unacceptable in the end. For one thing, Washington's calculated reluctance to bring added pressures on Islamabad by openly cutting off aid put it at odds with the World Bank and the other members of an eleven-nation consortium, all of whom have deferred development programs in Pakistan until the government in Islamabad works out a "political accommodation" with the eastern region. (Even the World Bank, however, has not been able to escape the controversy swirling around Pakistan. After World Bank president Robert McNamara tried to suppress a critical report drafted by a team of investigators who recently visited Pakistan, The New York Times got hold of the document and splashed it on its front page.) Subsequently, McNamara sent a letter to the Pakistani Government apologizing for the news leak.

Moreover, Washington's equivocation has already enraged India, where most officials are convinced that Yahya could not continue his policy of repression without outside help. "Supply of arms to Pakistan by any country in the present context amounts to condoning genocide in Bangla Desh," charges India's Foreign Minister Swaran Singh. "It could have an impact on Indo-U.S. bilateral relations as well." Thus, rightly or wrongly, the Administration's pragmatic stance on the Pakistani question has promoted an impression of official U.S. indifference to the human agony of a strife-torn land—an impression that is at odds with the traditional image of a concerned and compassionate America.



safe from their campaign to bring the economy to a halt. Most important, however, is the fact that the rebels now seem to be winning what every guerrilla needs—the support of the populace. Two months ago, villagers in Noakhali province pleaded with the Mukti Bahini not to blow up a bridge because it would bring army retaliation. Last week, those same villagers sought out the guerrillas and asked them to destroy the bridge.

To be sure, the guerrillas are no match for the federal army. While they have rallied some 20,000 Bengali fighters to their cause (and expect another 10,000 recruits to join them next month after clandestine training in India), the inadequately armed rebels still face 60,000 well-equipped professional soldiers. And despite its covert aid, India has cautiously hesitated to recognize the Bangla Desh government-in-exile. One reason for this restraint is the genuine and costly problem the New Delhi government faces in caring for the 6 million Bengali refugees now in India. NEWSWEEK's Tony Clifton, who has reported the anguish of the refugees since the beginning of Pakistan's civil war, filed this report last week from Calcutta:

The strain on India has become almost unbearable. The refugees are still swarming across the border in hordes ranging as high as 40,000 a day, and as P.N. Luthra, the former Indian Army officer in charge of the refugee program, told me, "I'm now responsible for the care of a small country." It is costing India \$3 million a day to feed, clothe, house and provide vital medicine for the

Bengalis, a financial drain that is crippling to the already marginal Indian economy. Worse yet, lack of available funds has meant a shortage of virtually everything in the refugee camps—and the inevitable result has been suffering, disease and death. To Luthra, the only conceivable resolution of the tragedy is for the world to put the utmost pressure on Pakistan to stop the carnage so the Bengalis will feel safe in going home.

Yet for all their suffering, the Bengalis themselves maintain their stoicism. It is the monsoon season in India, but the monsoon here is not like the great monsoons of Hollywood. Instead of roaring and thundering, the rain falls softly and steadily, dribbling through the canvas tents to soak the refugees, turn earth floors to mud and flood inadequate drains. But the refugees stand patiently, calf deep in stagnant water, eager to tell me their stories so I can tell others. I collect a notebook of horror—rape and murder and kidnapping. They tell me how they saw their children stabbed, their husbands or brothers executed, their wives collapse with fatigue or sickness. The stories are all new, and all the same. And I remember Luthra's plaintive question, "How can we think the human race is evolving to a higher level when it lets this go on?"

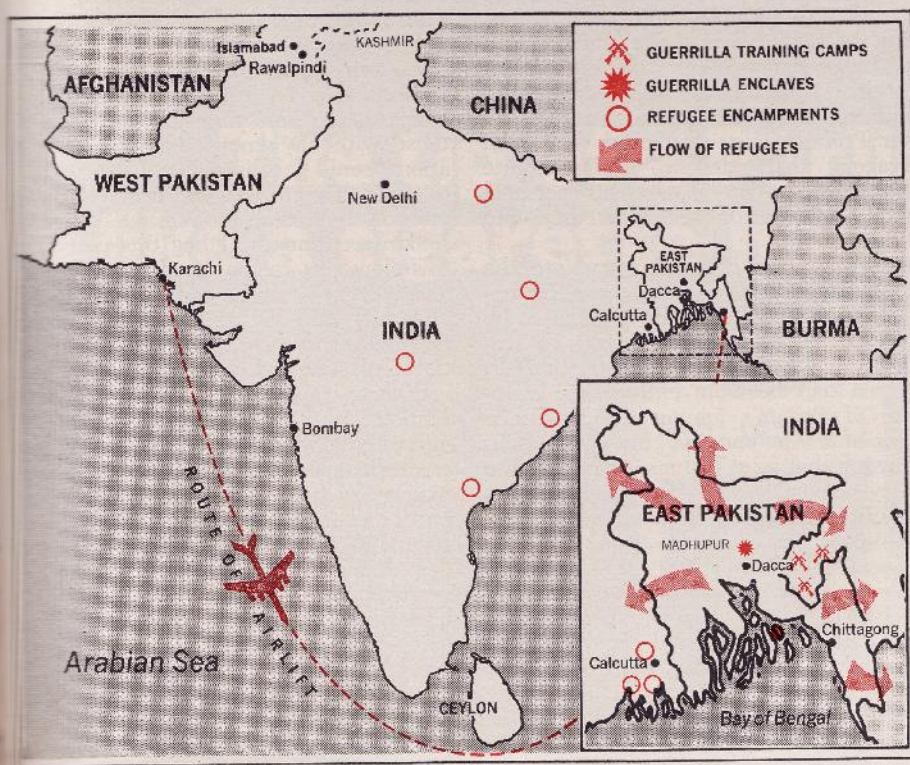
As the military repression and the guerrilla sabotage goes on, it poses an ever-increasing threat to the future of Pakistan itself. Already, experts say, the country's economy is a shambles. Since the fighting began, exports have plummeted, the vital jute crops that are Pakistan's biggest foreign exchange earn-

er rot unharvested, and the vast consumer market of the eastern region on which West Pakistan's factories lived has vanished along with the refugees and rebels. "In short, Yahya's government faces the genuine danger of bankruptcy," warns a Western economist in Dacca. Equally genuine is the danger of mass starvation. "Unless something is done soon," the same economist adds, "there is going to be a famine here that will make all the prior suffering look like nothing." But in the end, the greatest threat to Pakistan is the flaring hatreds that Yahya's army has spawned. "Pakistan died in March," says a Karachi editor. "The only way this land can be held together is by the bayonet and the torch. But that is not unity, that is slavery. There can never be one nation in the future, only two enemies."

### Threat of War

The area already has enemies enough. In recent weeks, Islamabad and New Delhi have traded insults and accusations at a dizzying rate and there is a real possibility that angry words may escalate into war. Indeed, some Indians even claim to see an economic motive for going to war; according to the Institute for Strategic Studies in New Delhi, it would be cheaper for India to fight Pakistan than to continue to care for millions of Bengali refugees. "It hasn't come to that yet," sighed one U.S. official last week. "But India has considered a military thrust, apparently very seriously." And Pakistan too has weighed the use of force against its neighbor in retaliation for India's support of the Mukti Bahini.

The gravest danger from any such



Pakistan at war with itself: Separated by more than space



Yahya Khan: Secret orders



Tikka Khan: Surprise attack



hostilities is the possibility that Communist China and Russia would become involved. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai has denounced "Indian expansionists" and has promised Yahya that Peking would support the Pakistanis "in their just struggle to safeguard their state sovereignty." And Chou could handily translate his pledge into action—by ordering Chinese troops stationed along the Indian border to provoke skirmishes, or by infiltrating "advisers" to reinforce the Pakistani Army. "Pakistan has some promises from Peking to take military action of its own should war begin," warns a U.S. diplomat, "and India is trying to extract some counterbalancing promise of military aid from Russia. That could lead to catastrophe."

### An Agonizing Choice

Any such involvement by the two Communist superpowers would confront the United States with a cruel dilemma. Pakistan, despite the undeniable brutality of its policy toward the Bengalis, is a long-standing American ally and a country that the U.S. is desperately trying to keep out of Peking's sphere of influence. At the same time, India is Asia's biggest nation with a democratic tradition, dating back to Gandhi and Nehru, and, as such, occupies a special position in the U.S. portfolio of friendly nations. To choose between the two would be agonizing. One U.S. analyst of foreign affairs, drafting a scenario for U.S. actions should a subcontinent war break out, remarked: "Our first move obviously would be to try to play the peacemaker much as Russia did at Tashkent in 1966 during the last Indo-Pakistani war. If that failed, the U.S. might be able to sit it out, so long as Russia and China were involved only as suppliers of the two combatants. But if they got directly engaged, it would then be almost impossible for Washington to remain aloof. We would have to gamble on one side or the other, give them at least the logistical aid they needed and hope we had chosen the winner."

Rhetoric and contingency plans aside, none of the world's three great powers wants to embroil itself militarily in the Indian subcontinent. But that does not rule out the possibility that they could become involved against their will. In the meantime, the future of Pakistan and, possibly, the lives of millions of other Asians, depend on Yahya Khan. And at the moment the Pakistani President remains determined not to relent—ignoring the fact that he may be creating out of nationalist guerrillas the core of a potential Communist insurgency. "The tragedy of Pakistan really is that Yahya is oblivious to what he is doing, oblivious to the cost of his actions," a diplomat in Islamabad remarked somberly last week. "There is only one man alive who could save Pakistan now, and that is Mujib. Yahya vows that Mujib must die. But the day he hangs by the neck, Pakistan will hang with him."

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