

AYUB RULE FOUGHT IN EAST PAKISTAN

Growing Autonomy Demand Causes a Grave Political Crisis for Government

By JACQUES NEVARD

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DACCA, Pakistan, April 19—

Growing pressure for full autonomy in isolated East Pakistan has confronted the Government of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan with a grave political crisis.

East Pakistan, separated from West Pakistan by language, culture and nearly 1,000 miles of Indian territory, has about 65 million people, or 55 per cent of Pakistan's population.

Some leaders in East Pakistan, which is known also as East Bengal, are gaining public support for proposals that would limit Pakistan's central Government to control over only two fields: defense and foreign affairs.

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President Ayub and the men around him contend that these Bengali leaders want independence, not autonomy. Their demand has been called treasonous on the ground that its achievement would destroy Pakistan.

Leaders of the autonomy drive insist that their demands need not lead to a thrust for independence if the Ayub Government is prepared to be "reasonable."

Observers here said the problem facing the central Government in far-off Rawalpindi was that there appeared to be little it could do to prevent the formation of a breakaway regime if that was what the Bengalis decided they wanted. There are relatively few Government troops in the province—most of their officers do not speak Bengali—and the building up of troop strength would require either India's permission for military flights or a 3,000-mile air or sea trip by way of Ceylon.

Compounding the problem is the possibility that concessions to Bengali demands would be interpreted in West Pakistan as a sign of the regime's weakness. The Government has been widely criticized in West Pakistan for the "weakness" it showed by agreeing to a cease-fire with India last September without getting a settlement of the Kashmir question.

The advocates of East Pakistan's autonomy insist that they want neither the destruction of Pakistan nor independence, but only a restoration of full political rights for the part of Pakistan where most Pakistanis live.

"We are fed up with being treated as an occupied province," a Bengali politician said. "We were exploited for 200 years by the British before independence, and for the 18 years since independence we've been exploited by West Pakistan."

The Ayub Government says that while this was true under previous regimes, including those headed by East Pakistanis, East Pakistan has enjoyed as much political freedom as West Pakistan and a growing share of national economic development funds since Marshal Ayub came to power in 1958.

A senior official of the Ayub Government said this week that East Pakistan had more autonomy than the American states and that there was no chance that it would get more.

As East Pakistanis describe it, their autonomy consists of a Governor appointed by President Ayub and responsible only to him and a set of administrative officials responsible only to the Governor, with popular representation limited to an indirectly elected rubber-stamp legislature.

The call for real autonomy has been a persistent undertone in East Bengal almost from the day Pakistan received independence from Britain in 1947, but the clamor had never reached the current level.

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Much more separates the two parts of Pakistan than Indian territory. East Pakistan is Southeast Asian, a rice-eating, perpetually humid river delta land. West Pakistan is Middle Eastern, a wheat-eating, often rainless desert land.

Virtually all East Pakistanis, a small, slightly built, tea-colored people, speak Bengali. The West Pakistanis, most of whom are tall, heavy boned and often fair skinned, speak half a dozen languages, none remotely like Bengali.

It is often said that the only readily apparent links between the two sections are a common belief in Islam and the fact that both were formed out of heavily Moslem areas of the former British Indian Empire.

According to Bengali political leaders, journalists and local officials, enthusiasm for autonomy has grown tremendously since early this year. They said the pressure arose from the feeling of complete isolation from, and utter dependence on, West Pakistan that gripped East Pakistan during the war with India over Kashmir last fall.

Almost all the fighting took place along the border between West Pakistan and India, but East Pakistanis feel that because they had only one division of troops in a province surrounded on three sides by India they were at the mercy of the Indians throughout the war.

"While West Pakistan was using its American tanks and American planes to fight India for the precious 5 million Kashmiris, 65 million Bengalis were left to fight with their bare hands if the Indians had attacked us," an East Pakistani said.

At the front of the current drive for autonomy is Sheik Mujibur Rahman, president of the moderately socialist East Pakistan Awami People's League. Publication by Mr. Rahman of a six-point demand for autonomy, called "Our Right to Live," brought charges by the Ayub Government that he is a "disruptionist" bent on wrecking the "integrity" of the nation.

Mr. Rahman's demands are these:

¶ A federal parliamentary government with a popularly elected legislature as the supreme power should be established.

¶ The government should control only defense and foreign affairs, with all other powers remaining with the federating states.

¶ The "flight of capital" from East Pakistan to West Pakistan should be stopped. Either separate currencies or separate fiscal policies should be established.

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¶ The federal government should share in state taxes for meeting its expenses but would have no taxing power.

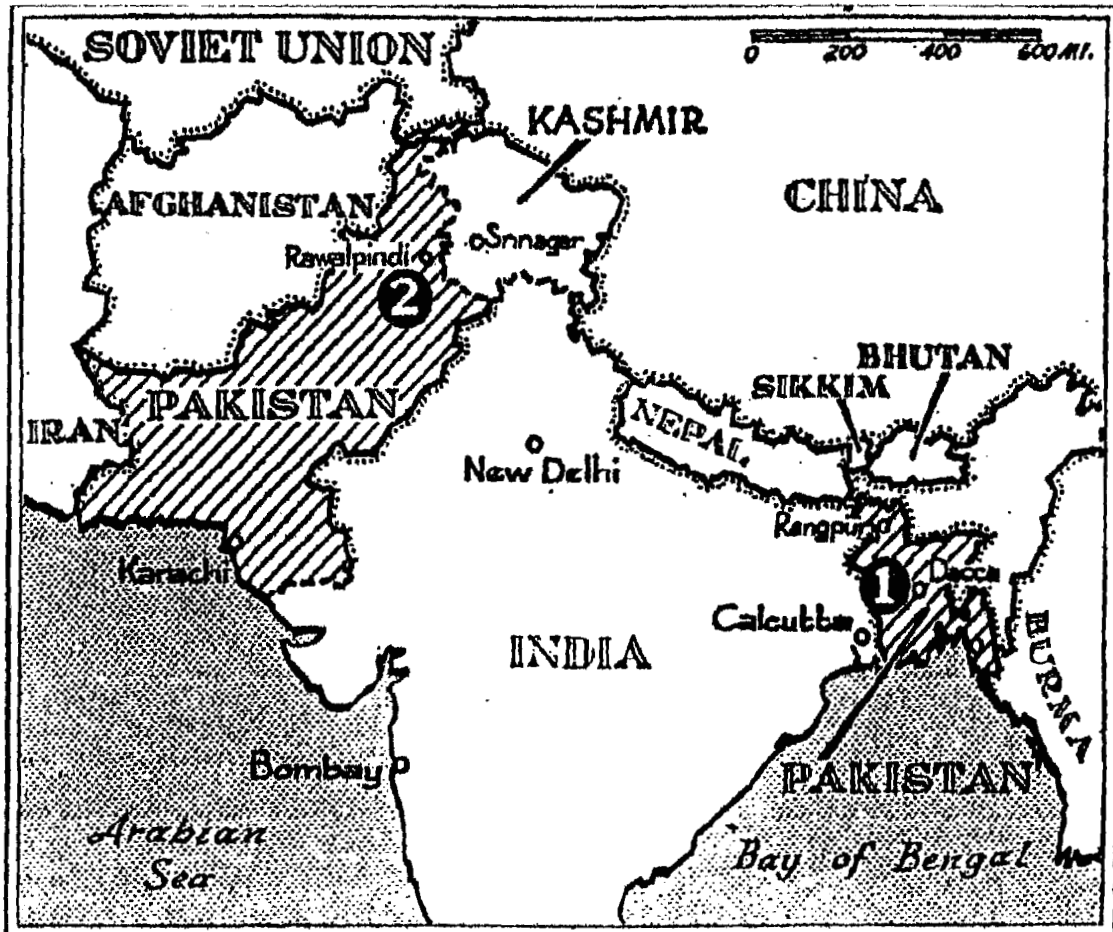
¶ Each of the federating states should engage in foreign trade on its own account and have full control over its earned foreign exchange.

¶ A militia or paramilitary force should be established in East Pakistan.

In its first efforts to counter the demands of Mr. Rahman and other Bengali leaders with similar proposals, the Government tried to stress that the autonomy movement was a lunatic fringe and without popular support. Now, however, the official line is that the drive is an Indian plot financed by the United States.

Bengali leaders concede that the province's economy is heavily interrelated with that of India and that Bengalis have lost heavily because of the refusal of the central Government to re-establish normal trade relations with India. But they deny any political links with the Indians.

Ayub's Rule Is Combated by the East Pakistanis



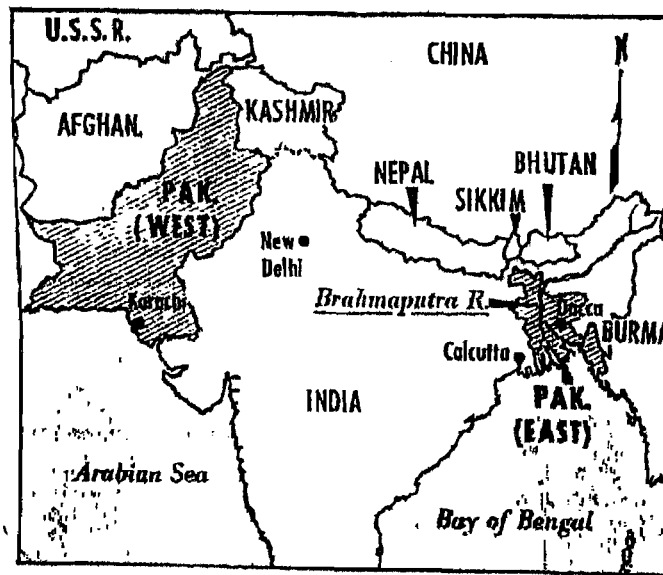
The New York Times

MMRJALAL (4)

April 21, 1966

Pakistan (diagonal shading) is facing a political crisis because of increasing pressure in East Pakistan (1) for autonomy from the central Government in Rawalpindi (2).

Unrest in the East May Split Pakistan



The Washington Post

April 24, 1968

By Cyril Dunn

The London Observer

DACCA, East Pakistan, April 23—Pakistan is in danger of splitting in two.

Convinced that their vulnerable land was left defenseless by their rulers in the West during last September's war with India, the Bengali politicians of East Pakistan are demanding the return of full Western-style democracy and a provincial autonomy that verges on total independence.

The gravest view of this crisis is being taken by President Ayub Khan himself. Speaking here in his eastern capital this week, Ayub said that if the Bengal "disruptionists" were allowed to have their way they would bring about "the doom of the nation."

On Monday, the police arrested Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, president of the East Pakistan Awami League and signatory of a six-point formula. The autonomy campaigners have always set out their case as a series of points from the time the provincial assembly voted unanimously for autonomy, long before Ayub seized power in 1958, and Ayub spokesmen have shrugged them off as "the points wallahs."

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Gaining Support

But today the points wallahs seem to command growing public support. Sheikh Mujibur and his Awami League argue that only by running her own affairs and controlling her own resources can East Pakistan hope to stand against external threats.

The line wins audiences because for 17 days last September, East Pakistan was practically isolated from the world. Except for a barely passable hill frontier with Burma and a useless outlet to the sea through the mouths of the Ganges, the province is entirely surrounded by India. For the duration of the war she was cut off from West Pakistan, her only source of military and civil help, by more than 1000 miles of hostile Indian territory.

It is true that when the fighting began there was a great upsurge of patriotic fervor among the Bengalis. Posters still survive here in Dacca showing the initial letters of West and East Pakistan conjoined to form a massive "we" across the Indian gap. But since then it has dawned on the people of the East that if the war had lasted for 17 months they could scarcely have survived.

Anxious for Separation

Realizing this, Bengalis seem anxious to separate themselves, not only from their rulers in the West, but also from the Western opposition to Ayub.

They do not seem as eager as their Western comrades are to renew the battle for Kashmir, where there are fewer Muslims than in the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal. They have refused to join the Western opposition in a campaign against the Tashkent peace agreement with India, and they appear less fervent than most West Pakistanis are about a provocative friendship with Communist China.

Sheikh Majibur was let out on bail soon after his arrest. He is 45, born of a land-owning family and obviously hard-driven by Bengali patriotism. He has the electric vitality of his people, backed up by a powerful physique and handsome face. Considering his delicate situation, he spoke with astonishing boldness and was not restrained by his aides' efforts to slip in modifying clauses.

He has a way of identifying himself with East Pakistan, on a "l'etat, c'est moi" basis. "I do not like to be a colony of anyone any more," he said. "Our government is fighting for a referendum in Kashmir. Let it have a referendum here on the six points, and it will find 85 per cent of the people behind me."

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Denies Independence Aim

Like many others here, Majibur believes the Bengalis of the East are being run, to their detriment, by the Punjabis of the West. But he flatly denies that his aim is independence. He points out that his formula seeks precisely the same kind of provincial autonomy for West Pakistan. The sole functions left to a federal government would be foreign affairs and defense, but even this authority would be diminished if the Awami League had its way; its formula also demands for East Pakistan a militia of her own.

A high official of the Ayub regime said angrily that this can mean nothing but a demand for total provincial sovereignty, the division of Pakistan into two separate states.

But some people here believe President Ayub is wildly exaggerating this threat to Pakistan's integrity and say he was "badly advised" when he delivered his ominous speech about civil war. They say the opposition leaders are still as deeply divided as they were in the bad old days, when, in President Ayub's view, they brought chaos and anarchy to the state.

They say that while Bengali nationalism is strong it is not stronger than East Bengal's adherence to the Muslim religion. They agree that public feeling has lately crystallized behind Majibur's six points, but say the general aim is simply to enforce new concessions to Bengali interests.

Yet the President and his aides still seem to take this current crisis in East Pakistan seriously. They may feel that if anyone in East Bengal chose to follow Rhodesia's course and make a unilateral declaration of independence, the rulers in the west could do little or nothing to thwart it.