

One Pakistan or Two?

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Special to The New York Times

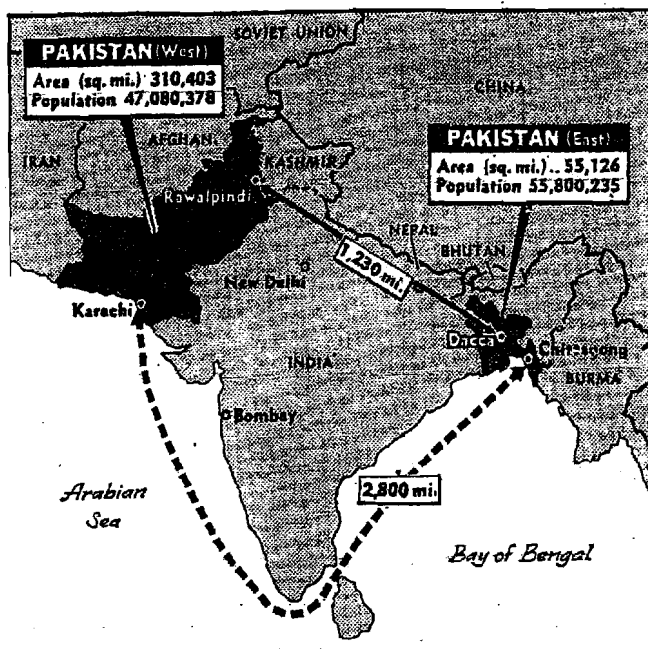
KARACHI, Pakistan, April 23—

In a world grown accustomed to minority problems, Pakistan finds herself faced with a majority problem. The 85-million East Pakistanis, who make up 55 per cent of Pakistan's population, are listening with growing interest to demands for a kind of local autonomy that Government officials say would split the nation in two.

There is no question that the Government of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan takes the autonomy movement seriously. The men who advocate home rule for East Bengal, as East Pakistan is also known, are labeled "disruptionists" who are preaching "treason" and "civil war." One of them, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was arrested, bailed out and arrested again within a five-day period this week.

Lending weight to fears in West Pakistan that a movement in East Pakistan for greater autonomy could easily turn into a drive for two nations is the fact that geographically, ethnically, linguistically and culturally the two wings of Pakistan are indeed not one but two distinct "nations."

East and West Pakistan are not at all like East and West Germany: an artificially divided entity. They have, on the contrary, an artificially created unity, based almost entirely on common adherence to Islam. To visualize a single "nation" created from mutually Catholic Spain and Poland, with all their differences of distance, language, culture and ethnic origins, is to begin to appreciate the problem a central Government has in holding the two parts of Pakistan together.



A DIVIDED LAND: Demands for autonomy in East Pakistan have created serious political problems for President Mohammad Ayub Khan. The two areas are separated by language, culture and nearly 1,000 miles of the Indian subcontinent.

Many Differences

Actually East and West Pakistan are more distant from each other than Spain and Poland, and in many ways their differences are even greater than those of the two European countries. 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. East Pakistanis are small, slender, tea-colored people nearly all of whom speak Bengali. West Pakistanis are tall, big-boned, often fair-skinned people who speak half a dozen languages, none of them Bengali.

It has long been a sore point with the Bengalis that the seat of Government has been in West Pakistan, that the bulk of senior civil servants call West Pakistan home, that the largest part of Pakistan's armed forces is recruited in the west, that nearly all ma-

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for business and industry is owned by West Pakistanis, and that, despite major efforts by the Ayub Government to build up the economy of the east wing, the area remains an economic stepchild.

East Pakistanis have long complained that while their jute exports account for most of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings, the hard cash is used by the Government in West Pakistan. Politically, many East Pakistanis are convinced that Pakistan's early gropings toward democracy were doomed eight years ago when West Pakistani military men saw that imminent general elections—which would have been the nation's first—would have resulted in a Parliament dominated by Bengalis.

But despite these historic gripes, which resulted in a chronic undertone of autonomy rumblings in East Pakistan, the movement did not begin to develop its current momentum until after the inconclusive three-week war with India over Kashmir last fall.

Bengalis generally make no secret of their lukewarm interest in the Kashmiri dispute, which has soured relations between Pakistan and India for the past 18 years, and many are now expressing bitter resentment over the war that left them feeling exposed and helpless.

As many East Pakistanis see it, while the bulk of the nation's army was used in West Pakistan to fight for the rights of 5-million

Kashmiris, 65-million Bengalis, all but surrounded by India and defended by only one division of Government troops, were left to fend for themselves.

Adding to the Bengalis' indignation has been the refusal of the central Government to consider restoring normal trade relations with India without Indian concessions on Kashmir. East Pakistan's economy, unlike that of West Pakistan, is linked closely with India. India normally supplies East Pakistan with seafood and mans the Indian-owned coastal freighters and river craft, and economic distress is growing.

Waiting for Ayub

But the big question in Pakistan is whether these irritations, added to the historic differences, are enough to turn the movement for autonomy into a drive for independence. Much appears to depend on what steps the Ayub Government takes to meet the pressure and Bengali reaction to those steps.

It is generally accepted that an independent East Bengal could survive with Indian cooperation, if it was buttressed with Western and Soviet economic aid. What is less clear, however, is how well West Pakistan would do as a separate nation.

At the moment that question appears to be largely theoretical, but West Pakistanis are keeping an anxious watch on developments in East Pakistan.

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