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A HISTORY OF BANGLADESH

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CHAPTER 10

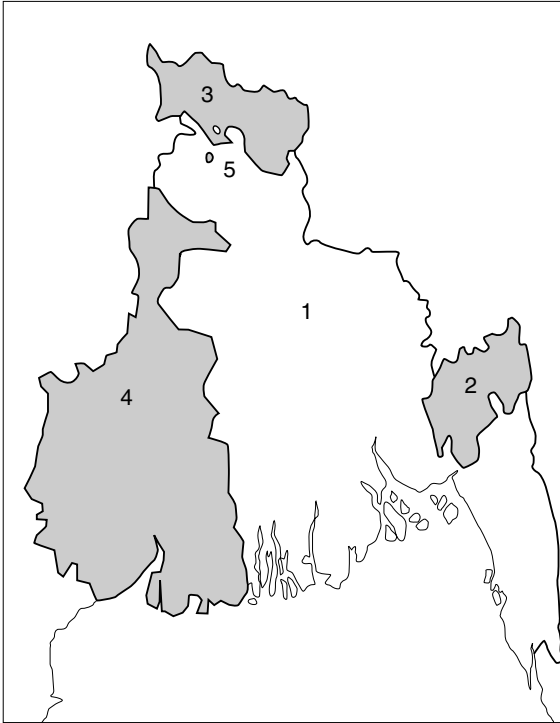
Partition

In the early 1940s, the Bengal famine had played havoc with the delta's social fabric. Now, in 1947, the Partition of India tore that fabric asunder. Without an understanding of Partition and its effects, it is not possible to make sense of contemporary Bangladesh. True, the shock of 1947 is no longer a living memory for the vast majority of Bangladeshis – but it created economic facts, historical myths and political mindsets that continue to haunt society today.

The Partition of India was a geographical solution to a political fiasco. The partitioner's knife cut through three provinces (Bengal, Assam and Punjab) and through innumerable trade routes and family ties. It created two long borders and left the partitioned societies in shambles, ruining millions of lives and upsetting cherished social arrangements. Many of the effects were unintended, unanticipated and long term.

The province of Bengal bore the full brunt: it was divided between the two new states. It is usually assumed that Bengal was cut in two. The reality is far more complicated: it was cut into no fewer than 201 pieces (Map 10.1). Pakistan received the largest part of the province's territory (64 per cent) and the majority of its population (65 per cent). Smaller sections to the west, north and east joined the new Republic of India, and the two states divided 197 tiny enclaves between them (see box 'Lives in limbo').

Pakistan's territory was augmented by the addition of most of Sylhet, a district that had been administered as part of Assam. The combined territory was generally referred to as East Pakistan (although from 1947 to 1955 its official name was East Bengal). It shared a 4,000 km-border with India. When East Pakistan seceded from Pakistan in 1971 to become Bangladesh there were no changes to its territorial shape. In other words, the geographical unit that we now know as Bangladesh was fashioned in 1947, well before anybody could imagine an independent Bangladesh.



Map 10.1. The 201 parts of partitioned Bengal. 1, East Bengal (sixteen districts of Bengal that joined Pakistan in 1947); 2, The Princely State of Tripura that joined India in 1949; 3, North Bengal (two districts that joined India in 1947, and the Princely State of Cooch Behar that joined India in 1950); 4, West Bengal (twelve districts that joined India in 1947); 5, 197 enclaves.

Lives in limbo

One of the most bizarre outcomes of the Partition of India was the creation of 197 enclaves in north Bengal. For some people in the northern borderland, Partition meant the end of effective citizenship. Although they were in every respect similar to their neighbours, these people happened to be living in villages that were now – for quirky historical reasons going back to the precolonial period – distributed to India and Pakistan, even though they were completely surrounded by the territory of the other state. Thus in a band of some 100 km there were 123 Indian enclaves that lay surrounded by Pakistan and 74 Pakistani enclaves that lay dispersed in Indian territory. To make matters worse, India and Pakistan were not on good terms and refused to let each other's officials cross their territory to reach the enclaves. As a result, state presence in the enclaves came to an end. There was no taxation, but also

no police, schools, health services, land registration, banks, postal services or road maintenance. Neither India nor Pakistan was happy with this unanticipated situation and soon talks were underway to exchange the enclaves. It proved impossible to agree, however, and today little has changed, except that the Pakistani enclaves have become Bangladeshi.

The inhabitants of the enclaves are forced to lead shadowy lives. They must break numerous laws as they go about their daily business. For example, imagine you are Abdul Bari, a young inhabitant of the Bangladeshi enclave of Nolgram, surrounded by the territory of West Bengal (India) (Plate 10.1) When you visit your uncle or go to market in the next village (there are no markets in the enclaves), you cross an international border (between Nolgram and India) without a proper passport or a visa, and without permission to take across whatever you buy or sell, or indeed to use Indian currency. You are a non-citizen, an illegal entrant and a smuggler.

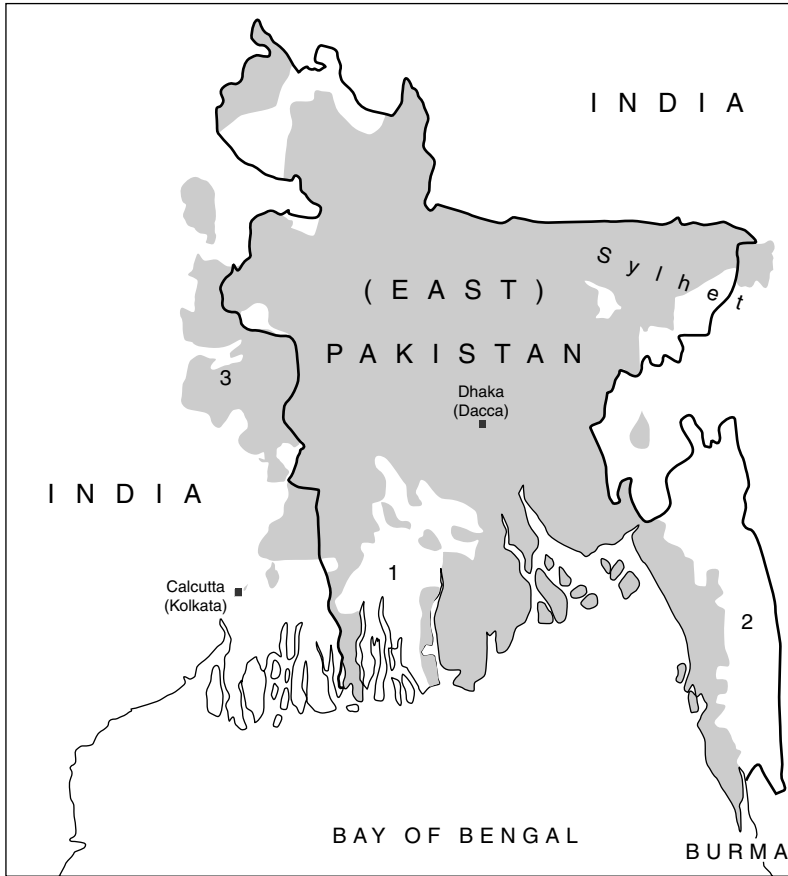
Abdul Bari may be a Bangladeshi citizen but only in the most tenuous sense: he has never had any dealings with Bangladeshi officials (who cannot visit the enclave and who are unaware of his existence), and he does not possess any documents to prove his identity. He has been effectively stateless since his (unregistered) birth. His siblings cannot go to school or see a doctor



Plate 10.1. People and border pillar in Nolgram, a Bangladeshi enclave surrounded by Indian territory.

without giving a false (Indian) identity. And who will protect him and his possessions against robbers? There are no police in Nolgram and the Indian police cannot enter there.

To cope with this absurd life thrust upon them by bureaucratic caprice and political stalemate, enclave people have developed their own local institutions, such as enclave citizens' committees, land registration systems or some semblance of public works through *corvée* labour. These differ from one enclave to the next but all enclave people share a sense of pride in their resilience after sixty years of living in limbo: 'We people of the enclave can cope with anything.'¹



Map 10.2. The Partition border and Muslim (grey) and non-Muslim (white) majority areas in 1947. 1, Khulna; 2, Chittagong Hill Tracts; 3, Murshidabad.

Map 10.2 shows that it was not easy to translate the idea of a homeland for Muslims into a geographical reality. The Boundary Commission allocated considerable non-Muslim-majority areas to Pakistan (for example Khulna in the south-west and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the south-east) and, conversely, allocated Muslim-majority areas such as Murshidabad to India. The members of the Boundary Commission never explained or justified these anomalies. Historians assume, however, that one reason for Murshidabad – whose population was 57 per cent Muslim – to be awarded to India was an attempt to keep the port of Kolkata linked to the

Ganges/Bhagirathi river system serving its hinterland. Similarly, the Chittagong Hill Tracts – whose Muslim population was a mere 4 per cent – went to Pakistan to keep the port of Chittagong connected with the Karnaphuli river system. Border-making threw up many other anomalies, surprises and ambiguities, and these led immediately to recrimination between India and Pakistan. Over time quite a few points of disagreement were sorted out, but today India and Bangladesh still bicker about numerous territorial issues. These frictions show up in frequent border incidents, often with casualties, all along the partition border.²

Some parts of the new international border followed old divisions between lowland and hills or pre-existing administrative borders between districts – but other stretches of the new border lopped off parts of districts and necessitated their rearrangement.³ Thus Pakistan received half of Dinajpur and Nadia (renamed Kushtia) and other districts gained territory (for example Rajshahi) or lost it (for example Jessore, Sylhet). When the dust of Partition settled, East Pakistan had sixteen districts. In 1969 that number rose to eighteen when two more districts were created: Tangail was carved out of Mymensingh and Patuakhali out of Barisal (Map 10.3).

The point of Partition was to create a homeland for Muslims. In Bengal, Islam had become a mass religion in the Mughal period, when the fertile eastern delta was brought under the plough. It was no surprise, therefore, that East Pakistan's centre of gravity was the active eastern delta and that its population was overwhelmingly rural. Dhaka, the city now chosen to be the provincial capital, was the very one that the Mughals had built up to control the marshes and riverscapes of what they had called 'Bhati' and the British later referred to as 'Lower Bengal'.

For the first time in its history, the Bengal delta was encased in a modern international border, a phenomenon that its inhabitants had no previous experience of whatsoever. The new border encircled most Muslim-majority areas of Bengal and in that sense East Pakistan became the homeland of most of Bengal's Muslims. But millions of Bengali Muslims were now in Indian territory and millions of non-Muslims continued to live in East Pakistan. No less than 42 per cent of the total *non-Muslim* population of undivided Bengal found that they had become Pakistani citizens; they made up one fifth of East Pakistan's population. This ensured that the political fiasco that had prompted Partition in the first place – the inability to overcome communalist politics – was set to carry on under the new dispensation. In Bengal, it took a course that



Map 10.3. Districts of East Pakistan, 1947–71.

differed from the one in Punjab where a swift, bloody and almost complete exchange of Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants occurred in the months around Partition. The scenario in Bengal did include massive population exchange, but it was a much slower, longer and complicated process.⁴

Intaz the fivefold citizen

Intaz Ali was born in 1947 and he grew up in a Muslim family in Chor Madhobpur, a rural community on the south bank of the Ganges. When he was an infant Bengal was partitioned and his village became part of the territory of East Pakistan. Intaz became a Pakistani boy. Soon the villagers learned that the new states of India and Pakistan were quarrelling over them. India claimed possession of Intaz's village and of many others on the banks and islands (chor; *car*) of the Ganges (Plate 10.2). There were border skirmishes and conferences, but to no avail. Not being able to resolve the issue themselves, the governments of India and Pakistan decided to go for arbitration. They set up an international tribunal and promised to abide by its decision.

When Intaz was in primary school, he and his fellow villagers learned that the Bagge Tribunal – named after its Swedish chairman – had awarded their village to India. What to do? Were they Indians or Pakistanis? More to the point: should he now go to high school in the nearest town in Pakistan or in India? It was a hard decision to take because nobody knew whether the tribunal's verdict was going to be implemented. It was now unclear to them whether their community was still in Pakistan or had become part of India. In late 1959 Intaz's father could wait no longer, He made up his mind and sent Intaz to a high school on the Indian side. He also changed his son's citizenship to Indian so that he could attend that school. But three years later anti-Muslim disturbances broke out in Intaz's village, and his father sent him across to Pakistan for safety. It was there, in the nearby border town of



Plate 10.2. On a Ganges river island, near the Indian border.

Rajshahi, that Intaz completed his high school and eventually became a Pakistani citizen again. A few years later, however, East Pakistan broke away from Pakistan to become Bangladesh. Now Intaz made the fourth 'nation-switch' of his twenty-four-year life. A fivefold serial citizen, he had become something of a record holder – from British Indian to Pakistani to Indian to Pakistani to Bangladeshi.

The states of India and Pakistan set out to demarcate the border and take control of their sides of the new borderland.⁵ Meanwhile, those who lived there realised only gradually what had happened. At first the vivisection of their social world seemed unreal and many thought that Pakistan and India would reunite after some time. As the irreversibility of Partition sank in, however, they had to come to terms with the fact that geography was destiny: they were now assigned the citizenship of one of a pair of distinct – and squabbling – states (see box 'Intaz the fivefold citizen'). A new state, Pakistan, took charge of the territory and the people of eastern Bengal. It built up institutions and set in motion new processes, many of which would survive the demise of Pakistan in 1971.

Now even the wings have ceased to flap.

SEEDS OF CONFLICT

It took them [Bengalis] 24 years to realise that they did not achieve independence in 1947 when Pakistan came into existence.

KABIR UDDIN AHMAD

Birth of Bangla Desh

In my view they were fully justified in being dissatisfied with this state of affairs.

PRESIDENT YAHYA KHAN

Broadcast to the nation, July 28, 1969

I have been told by some of my erstwhile friends in Karachi that introspection suggests to them that the tragic events which have irrevocably rended the fabric of the country could never have been had the Muslim League remained true to the concept of its original demand. Pakistan, as a separate homeland for the Muslims of British India, had first been conceived as two independent states within one polity on either side of the Indian subcontinent. The historic Lahore Resolution of 1940, moved by a Bengali, A.K. Fazlul Huq, long regarded as the Lion of Bengal, required that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in the majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.

The good sense of this arrangement answered the challenges of geography. But it did not conform to the ambitions of the landlord class and the Muslim elite who dominated the League. Six years later the plurality was condemned as a clerical error and suitably amended to the singular. The seeds of inner conflict were sown. Muslim League historians will probably be wrathful of this simplification of a key moment of their history. But it is not inconsistent with the realities, and the fact remains that until the 25th of March,

1971, the overwhelming majority of the Muslims of East Bengal had been endeavouring to restore the original concept of plural states, admittedly in diluted form, as the only means of preserving the Pakistan entity.

This, in essence, was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's six-point demand. But from the start it was not intended to be. Instead, the disparate economic and cultural entities in the east and west, separated by 1,000 miles of Indian territory, were sought to be welded together by constitutional, administrative and economic contrivances. The essential ingredient, however, was equal partnership. And this was missing. The chauvinism of the West Pakistani leadership would never accept it. So the integration measures served only a centrifugal purpose.

Bengali sensitivity about the "colonialism" of West Pakistan is grounded on four major points of discontent. They are: denial of their full role in the decision-making process; denial for many years of a national status for the Bengali language; the absurd denigration of the piety of the Muslims in the east wing by those in the west; and the economic disparities which amounted to strangulation. This last is the sum of the others and will be dealt with separately. For the present I shall confine myself to a quick look at the first three causes.

No Partnership. In the eight and a half years it took to write Pakistan's first constitution there was an unceasing effort by the West Pakistani leaders to demolish the superior political influence of the numerically larger masses in East Bengal by reducing their representation in the central legislature. Admittedly, this was sometimes done under the aegis of Bengali leaders, notably Prime Ministers Khwaja Nazimuddin and Mohammad Ali Bogra. But the sad events of the 1950s show that these unfortunate men were captives of the powerful Punjabi establishment and maintained in office for political expediency.

Advancing his formula for popular representation, the first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, proposed a bicameral legislature at the centre in which East and West Pakistan would have equal representation. The formula gave the two

wings 200 seats each in the lower house and 60 each in the upper. It also ignored the fact that the eastern region then accounted for 56 per cent of the total population. The unspoken reason underlying the idea was the presence of 1,50,00,000 Hindus in East Pakistan. It was argued that if this sizeable minority group was discounted the Muslims living in that part of the country would be fewer than those living in the western region. The Liaquat formula was stoutly resisted by East Bengal and finally abandoned when the Prime Minister was assassinated at a public meeting in Rawalpindi in circumstances not satisfactorily explained by the subsequent official inquiry.

Khwaja Nazimuddin, who was elevated to prime minister-ship, advanced a similar proposal in 1952, with the same reaction from the east. When he was removed from office two years later by the Punjabi establishment, which found no further use for him, a third formula was put forward by the new Prime Minister, Mohammad Ali Bogra. On the surface, the Bogra proposals, gave the desired weightage to East Bengal representation in the lower house. But this was more than offset by the complexion of the upper chamber, in which East Bengal had only minority representation. This formula suffered the fate of the other two when Mohammad Ali Bogra was in turn forced out of office.

Agreement on representation was finally reached on the basis of "parity"—equal membership for east and west in a unicameral legislature. But the price of East Bengal's concurrence was also equal representation in the administrative structure. Although the parity formula was incorporated in the 1956 and 1962 constitutions, that price was never paid. East Bengal's share of the senior administrative posts never exceeded 36 per cent, and even as late as 1969 President Yahya Khan could find on his staff only three Bengalis among 19 officers of secretary rank. Bengali representation was immeasurably less in the military services. In 1970 there was only one Bengali lieutenant-general in the Pakistan army. No Bengali has ever held an equivalent rank in the air force or navy.

This under-representation would not have been so pernicious were it not for the fact that since the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan Pakistan has been ruled by a Punjabi-dominated bureaucratic-military oligarchy. Students of contemporary politics have underscored this fact any number of times. Behind the facade of democracy, a small coterie of civil servants, officers-turned-politicians backed by the army and, lately, ambitious army officers themselves have for two decades exercised decisive power at the level of policymaking. Mohammad Ayub, Associate Professor of Pakistani Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, has quoted a study by Karl von Vorys to show that between 1947 and 1958, when Pakistan ostensibly had a parliamentary form of government, the national legislature was in session for only 338 days, or on an annual average only 30 days. In this period the legislature passed 160 laws whereas the Governor-General/President issued 376 major ordinances.

These circumstances underscore the obvious justification for Bengali resentment. It must be said to his credit that President Yahya Khan did at first attempt to undo the wrong. He scrapped the parity formula in favour of popular representation on a numerical basis. He also increased the Bengali presence in the civil services. But by then Bengali disenchantment had become pervasive in the face of economic strangulation. And President Yahya's own efforts were overtaken by the army's other more destructive action on a national level.

The Language Issue. The Bengali language has always been a prime target for West Pakistan chauvinism—and the issue got an early start. The Bengalis got their first taste of colonial practice less than a year after the creation of Pakistan. The Quaid-i-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, dogmatically declared on his one and only visit to the eastern region in February 1948 that "Urdu and Urdu alone" would be the state language of Pakistan. This insistence on Urdu was despite the fact that less than 10 per cent of the population had any knowledge of the language and that the provinces

of Pakistan, including millions of Bengalis, had their own languages.

Quaid-i-Azam's words came as a cold shower to the Bengali Muslims, whose support for Pakistan had been the fundamental factor in its success. It provoked a never-ending series of resistance movements. As the language agitation developed, student and other demonstrators were arrested. One of them was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who got his first experience of jail. Others were felled in the streets by police brutality.

This in turn gave rise to new forms of grievance. Bengali members of the Constituent Assembly were denied permission to speak in their mother tongue. When they protested, the country's Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, replied: "Pakistan is a Muslim state and it must have as its *lingua franca* the language of the Muslim nation. . . . It is necessary for a nation to have one language, and that language can only be Urdu."

The language agitation reached a climax in 1952 when the central government gave grudging acceptance to Bengali—with the Urdu script. Several people were killed in the resultant clashes with the police. Ultimately, the government was forced to accept the Bengali demand and the language was placed on par with Urdu and English as the official languages of the state.

Islam. Liaquat Ali Khan's assertion that Urdu was the "language of the Muslim nation" betrayed a curious ideological contortion. Arabic, not Urdu, is the language of the Koran. The anti-Muslim or non-Muslim innuendo implicit in his statement did not apply to Baluchi, Sindhi, Punjabi or Pushto spoken in the provinces of West Pakistan. It was directed solely at Bengali. There no apparent rationale for his argument, only blind prejudice.

Even the ludicrous suggestion that Bengali had a Hindu connotation because of its association with the sizeable Hindu minority of East Bengal holds no water. Punjabi is also spoken by vast numbers of Hindus, as it is by the Muslims of West

Punjab. Yet it has never been damned the way Bengali has been by the Establishment, which made no secret of its prejudice over the years.

Denigration of the piety of Bengali Muslims has also been manifest in similarly curious ways. Malik Feroze Khan Noon, the Punjabi Governor of East Bengal in 1952, was reported to have once remarked that the Bengalis were "half Muslims" and accused them of not bothering to *halal* (kosher) their chickens. This insult provoked a counterblast from the venerable Maulana Bhashani. "Have we to lift our *lungis* (loincloths) to prove we are Muslims?"

I found on my visit to the 9 Division Headquarters in Comilla Punjabi officers unceasingly questioning the loyalty of the Bengalis to Islam. They denounced them as Kafirs (unbelievers) and Hindus, their real sin being support of Bengali nationalism against West Pakistani domination. This denigration is an absurd travesty of the truth. Dacca, unlike any urban area of West Pakistan, can justly claim to be a city of 1,000 mosques. Even tourist posters proclaim this. I have not only found Bengali Muslims as pious as the best Muslim communities anywhere else but also perhaps a little more devoted to orthodox practice than their coreligionists in the main cities of West Pakistan.

Prohibition is enforced more rigidly in the east. Unlike any city in East Bengal, off-licence liquor shops in Islamabad, the Pakistan capital, remain open and do a brisk trade on Friday, the Muslim sabbath. Salacious films and cabaret acts which flourish in Karachi and Lahore would immediately draw irate public protest should they be displayed in Dacca or Chittagong.

In the month of Ramzan I have found the fast to be more rigidly observed by the affluent in the urban areas of East Bengal than by equivalent groups in the west wing. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman fasted every day of the lunar month despite the strenuous election campaign in November 1970. I know this from personal experience when I visited his home in the Dhanmandi suburb of Dacca. I had a vastly different experi-

ence when I visited some other political friends in Rawalpindi and Karachi the week before. I had lunch with one, drinks with another. Yet Mujib and his people have been damned as Kafirs. This gratuitous denigration of Muslim piety in East Bengal has never been an issue as such. But it did cause grievous insult and certainly was a prime factor in alienating the sensitive Bengalis.

THE ECONOMIC FACTOR

... in a family, eating by one member does not fill the stomach of another. So how and with what conscience do you call us selfish for demanding our share . . . you who are not only enjoying your own share but devouring the share of your brothers also ?

SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN
Our Right to Live

Any review of the crippling economic disparities between West and East Pakistan brings the layman, I among them, up against an overpowering mass of facts and figures—statistics trundled out with appropriate references to bulletins, study groups and the experts who first threw light on these shortcomings. I suppose there is every reason for this. After all, the expert must communicate in the currency of his expertise. For the economist what better coin than statistics?

The big issue—economic disparity—in the East-West Pakistan relationship is crowded with them. Pakistan, like many debtor nations, has always been subjected to the searching glare of American, European and Japanese concern. Understandably these countries are anxious about Pakistan's ability to meet its debt obligations. So there has always been the most detailed assessment of the economic and financial realities obtaining in Pakistan.

In recent months Bengali economists, Rehman Sobhan and

Kabir Uddin Ahmad among them, and a group of three Harvard economists, Edward S. Mason, Robert Dorfman, and Stephen A. Marlin, have separately marshalled evidence in imposing documentation of the manner in which East Bengal has been kept a colony of West Pakistan. The revelations are startling.

They include:

(1) The per capita income in West Pakistan in 1969-70 was 61 per cent higher than in East Pakistan and double what it was ten years earlier.

(2) In 1950-55 East Pakistan received only 20 per cent of development expenditure and West Pakistan 80 per cent. In 1965-70, despite the many promises of the central government, East Pakistan received only 35 per cent of development expenditure. West Pakistan got 65 per cent. This despite the fact that East Pakistan has 54 per cent of the total population.

(3) In recent years between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of all West Pakistan exports have been sold to a captive market in East Pakistan. That province has been used as a dumping ground for shoddy, highpriced goods produced by inefficient industrial units in West Pakistan.

(4) East Bengal's export surplus with the outside world has been utilized by the central government to finance the deficits of West Pakistan, resulting in a net drain of real resources from east to west. The total transfer of resources in this manner in the 20 years ending 1968-69 has been computed at Rs 31 million, or 2,100 million dollars at the open market exchange rate.

(5) Contrary to official arguments justifying a slower income growth rate for the east wing, East Pakistan has had a slower rate of population growth than West Pakistan. East Pakistan's population rose from 41 million in 1949-50 to 53 million in 1959-60 and 69 million in 1969-70, registering an annual increase of 2.9 per cent in the first decade and 3 per cent in the second. In West Pakistan population increased from 32 million in 1949-50 to 45 million in 1959-60 and 59

million in 1969-70 for an increase of 4 per cent in the first decade and 3.1 per cent in the second.

These assertions undoubtedly substantiate Awami League charges of economic strangulation and give some idea of West Pakistan's exploitation of East Bengal. But it must also be admitted that outstanding economists among the apologists for the Yahya regime, notably the President's Economic Adviser, M.M. Ahmad, have been able to produce a presentable economic picture of their own to justify the claim that the present regime has tried to turn back the tide of economic disparity. The statistical thrust and parry, however, only serves an argumentative purpose. It gives no proper idea of the immense human misery, nor does it put the painful realities in the required human frame. These are entirely on the side of the suffering people of East Bengal.

Even a casual visitor from West Pakistan, which is not by any means a land of milk and honey, is dumbfounded by the poverty he finds in East Bengal. In the 20 years I lived in Karachi I made eight visits to East Bengal. I have travelled throughout the province, down to the broad beaches of Cox's Bazar in the far south. In this period I also made more than three dozen professional and holiday trips to Rawalpindi, Lahore and Peshawar in the north, to Quetta and Ziarat in the west, and to Hyderabad and Sukkur in the adjacent Sind area. I have been to the Frontier Forces' outpost at Wana in the tribal area of the North-West Frontier and, on one memorable occasion, to Hunza and Gilgit in the snowclad Karakorams.

On my visits I travelled by air, train, car, mini-bus and, in East Bengal, by boat, making the spectacular journey down the River Meghna from Chandpur to Khulna. Looking back, I have no hesitation in saying that nowhere in West Pakistan did I find such incredible poverty as I saw in East Bengal. The Pathan tribesmen living in caves in the North-West Frontier areas near Peshawar came very close to it. So did the Hari tenant farmers of Sind where the Governor, Lt.-Gen. Rakhman Gul, was astonished to find families of eight to

ten people living on an annual "income" of six to 14 bags of wheat. While the misery of these people would shame any society, it is in terms of Pakistan confined to relatively small groups. It is hardly comparable with the unrelieved poverty of the people one finds on such an immense scale in East Bengal.

Unlike West Pakistan, the poverty in the east is manifest in equal measure in the towns and in the countryside. The wheezing cycle-rickshaw man in Dacca who sleeps in the shelter of his rickety vehicle at night and looks 40 but is probably only in his early twenties is as haggard and worn-out as the fisherman in Barisal, the dockworker in Chittagong, the farmer in the ricefields of Comilla and the man selling pineapple by the roadside in Sylhet. Malnutrition is endemic. So are tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases and stomach complaints.

Nothing like this can be seen on a comparable scale anywhere in West Pakistan. Clothing in the east consists of a lungi and a soiled or tattered vest for the men. The women make do with only a saree used to cover both breast and loins. The poorest village woman in West Pakistan would have at least three garments—salwar, kamiz and dopatta. And she would invariably wear some ornaments. In East Bengal the women wear flowers.

Food is often a single meal consisting of a pan of boiled coarse rice topped with lentils or a piece of fish. Meat and dairy products are seldom come by, whereas in the west the villager may not always get meat, but he does somehow manage a daily quota of milk or *lassi* (buttermilk).

The people of West Pakistan are undeniably poor. But they appear to live more happily than the Bengalis, who appear to be crushed by their problems. An important psychological factor, perhaps, is that in the west they have more opportunities and the hope of a better life. In East Bengal my brothers were faced with diminishing opportunities and appeared to have given up the struggle. The spectacle of vast numbers of men beaten by life is one I shall never forget.

The denial of opportunity is manifest in many ways. You find it in the scramble for jobs when several hundred college graduates have been known to apply for a post of *chaprasi*, the office boy who remains a lifelong professional. You also get a dramatic insight into East Bengal's grievance—economic strangulation—by even a casual survey of Dacca, Narayanganj, Khulna or Chittagong. The shops are full of goods—80 per cent of them from West Pakistan. You hardly notice East Bengal products on the shelves of shops in the west wing.

A striking pointer to the outrageous imbalance in trade that East Bengal suffers in its dealings with West Pakistan is the fact that the current struggle for independence in the east wing has had only a marginal effect on consumer availability in West Pakistan in terms of direct supplies from East Bengal. The main items affected are tea, matches, some brands of pharmaceuticals and newsprint. These were East Bengal's major contribution to the West Pakistan consumer market. The opposite is the current experience of people in the eastern wing, where most consumer goods are imported from West Pakistan. Hence the shortages go down the line.

Evidence of economic strangulation is also available in the profusion of West Pakistani business houses. Big business is almost exclusively West Pakistani, the tentacles of the 22 families that monopolize the wealth of Pakistan. They do the major business in East Bengal, controlling factories, tea gardens, jute presses, imports and exports, banks and insurance, even car assembly plants.

In recent years the bigger offices in Dacca have sported sizeable numbers of Bengalis at the top. But the establishments themselves remained branch or zonal offices tightly controlled by headquarters in West Pakistan, notably Karachi. Even the second line of lucrative business houses and the best shops are in West Pakistani, mostly Memon and Khoja, hands. These hardheaded businessmen, who have made Karachi their home, are only infrequently found operating in Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Lahore or other Punjab towns.

But they proliferate in Hyderabad, the Sind capital, and in almost all the cities and towns of East Bengal.

It would be unfair to deny these trading communities the rich fruit of their initiative and investment. But it is also understandable that the Bengali should complain when he finds himself constantly having to seek out "West Pakistani outsiders" for the job he wants, the clothes he wears, the goods he must buy in the market and the money he must borrow (Marwaris from Calcutta and Pathans are the moneylenders). Even the burra sahib he must see in a government office is not unusually a civil servant from the west wing or a Bihari refugee from India. And why must he always be in the position of having to salute first to this pervasive "outside" presence? Colonialism is not the word for it. A thousand statistical tables would not reflect this Bengali frustration.