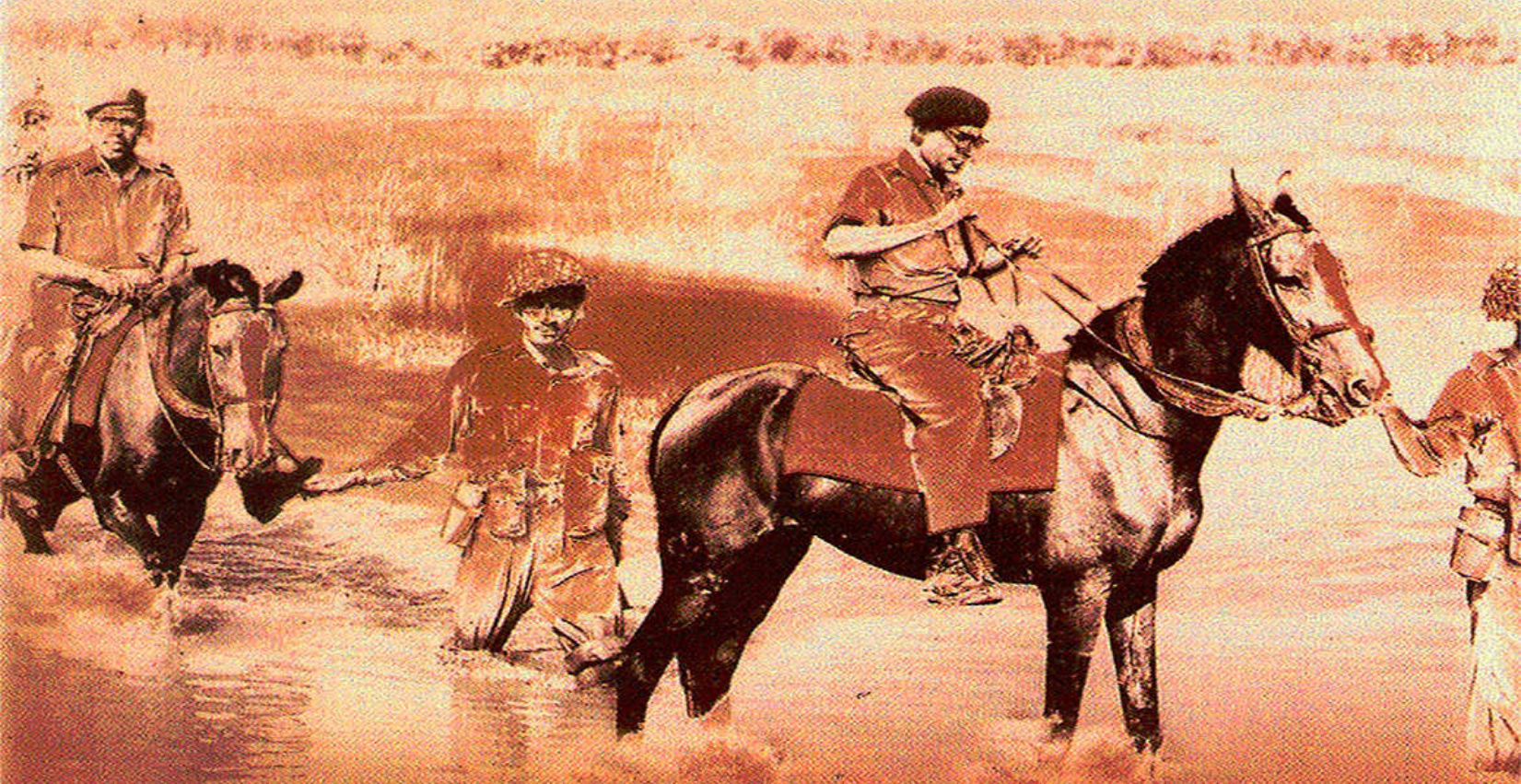
EAST PAKISTAN THE ENDGAME

An Onlooker's Journal 1969–1971



Brigadier A. R. Siddiqi

OXFORD

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BRIGADIER

ABDUL RAHMAN SIDDIQI

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FOREWORD

I have known Brigadier Abdul Rahman for quite some time but it was only during the Martial Law regime (1969-1971) that I came to know him well. This was primarily because in the execution of our responsibilities during the Martial Law period, it was an essential requirement for me (as Brigadier in-charge of Civil Ministries) to be kept informed of developments, as well as public and foreign reactions to the Martial Law administration, particularly with respect to the situation in the eastern wing of the country.

Abdul Rahman was Director Public Relations, and was responsible for collecting, collating, and analysing information/reactions, both domestic and foreign, for the Martial Law government in general, but more particularly with regard to East Pakistan. In those difficult days of l971, when disturbances in East Pakistan were at their peak, Abdul Rahman had the most difficult task of continuously monitoring and analysing infomation coming from East Pakistan and, above all, dealing with foreign correspondents from all over the world.

Rahman's assessments and forecasting of events in East Pakistan were most objective, constructive, and unprejudiced. Because of his amiable nature, he was able to mix freely with both Bengali intellectuals and professionals. He could thus gauge the situation prevalent in those troubled days of early 1971 quite accurately, and these he reported to the authorities in a forthright manner, as is reflected in this book.

This book gives a detailed record of the psychological gap that existed and progressively intensified with each passing day, between the Bengalis and the West Pakistan civil and military personnel, right before the army crackdown. From the dissolution of the cabinet, which consisted of some notable and competent East Pakistanis, until the final fateful days of 1971, the President hardly had any contact with East Pakistani politicians. He was mostly briefed on ongoing matters by West Pakistani officials of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate and by Major-General Ghulam Umar, the National Security Chief.

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ENTER YAHYA

ON 18 February 1969, I was in Karachi on an official visit to call on the Naval Chief, Admiral Syed Mohammad Ahsan, meet with senior newspaper editors, and my own Karachi- based staff. The Round Table Conference called by Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, the President of Pakistan, to discuss and resolve the constitutional crisis had been inconclusive. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (leader of the Pakistan Peop1e's Party) and Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (leader of the National Awami Party) had boycotted it. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, had been invited and he had agreed to attend the conference if given parole. He was booked on the Pakistan International Airlines flight from Dhaka to Rawalpindi via Lahore on l5 February. While in Lahore on my way to Karachi that day, I happened to see Air Marshal Asghar Khan in the VIP lounge of the airport waiting for Mujib to arrive from Dhaka. The flight came, but without Mujib. The next day, all newspapers carried the report that Mujib would be coming but only as a free man.

Earlier on, Mujib, in a face-to-face meeting with Major General Muzaffaruddin, General Officer Commanding l4 Infantry Division and Martial Law Administrator East Pakistan, had agreed to join the Round Table Conference in Rawalpindi on parole. However, an unfortunate episode in the army detention camp at Kurmitola made him change his mind. What had happened was that Sergeant Zahurul Haque of Pakistan Air Force, a detainee in the camp for his involvement in the Agartala conspiracy case, was shot and killed in what was said to be an in-house brawl. It was widely rumoured that the man had been assassinated by army authorities, as part of a wider conspiracy to eliminate Mujib and others involved in the Agartala faux pas.

The story triggered a furious public reaction. Mujib's Dhanmondi residence, where he had been under house arrest, was mobbed, and he

was forced to either cancel his trip to Rawalpindi or to go there only as a free man and not on parole. The federal government (alternatively referred to as 'centre'), was thus forced to release Mujib together with the other accused, and drop the Agartala case altogether. Mujib would subsequently go to Rawalpindi to attend the Round Table Conference as a free man rmed with his six-point manifesto. Smarting from the agony of an unjust and unwarranted trial and intoxicated by his unconditional release, Mujib barged into the Round Table Conference like a bull in a china shop. Bhutto and Bhashani, having boycotted the conference, had left the political platform free for Mujib to exploit it to his best advantage. Except for Ayub's cronies in the Convention League, practically all other West Pakistani participants had been, by and large, supportive of Mujib's case for allowing full provincial autonomy to East Pakistan, if not exactly of his six-point manifesto. The manifesto was expected to be negotiable, once the underlying demand of provincial autonomy, in word and deed, was accepted.

Reportedly, Mujib, while in Rawalpindi, also made a discreet helicopter jaunt to Lahore for a meeting with the Army Chief, General Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan, who was spending his Eid-ul-Azha holidays over there. The meeting had been arranged by Yusuf Haroon, Mujib's noted patron and employer. In the course of their one-to-one talk, Yahya was said to have assured Mujib of the army's strict neutrality and non-intervention in politics. Whatever might have been the underpinnings and nuances of the points discussed in the course of their meeting remains without an authentic record. However, Yahya's only message to Mujib was that he could go ahead with his (anti- Ayub) campaign without any let or hinderance from the army. In other words, the army would not come to Ayub's rescue to upset the opposition's (East Pakistan's) apple cart.

On the second day of my stay in Karachi, I was due to call on Admiral Ahsan at 12 noon at his office in the Naval Headquarters. At about 10 a.m. I received a call from Brigadier Ghulam Umar, Director Military Operations at the GHQ, advising me to return to Rawalpindi that very afternoon. At about the same time I was also called by the admiral's private secretary to see him immediately, since the Admiral was urgently required to be in Rawalpindi for a meeting of the chiefs of the three armed forces. About 12 o'clock that day on 19 February, I met the admiral at his office. After a brief exchange of courtesies, the admiral said, 'Is Ayub going to do his Johnson (President Johnson had just then refused to run for a second term in the forthcoming elections)

or is he going to hang on?' I replied that I did not know exactly what he might really be up to. Then our conversation drifted off to the prevailing law and order situation and the looming prospect of martial law. I said that it would be better to avoid martial law if we could, People had already had a poor experience of one martial law regime and were quite fed up with the experiment. I suggested that perhaps a national government could be formed to prepare the ground rules for the first national elections on the basis of adult franchise. On hearing this the admiral smiled. 'Siddiqi', he quipped, 'it appears that you are against martial law'. 'I am pro my orders and pro myself, sir,' I said. The admiral laughed. I then took his leave telling him that I had also been summoned to Rawalpindi. 'So have I,' the admiral replied. 'My friend Yahya Khan wants me to be there. Nur Khan is also coming.' 'Where will you be staying, sir?' I asked.

'General Yahya insists that I should stay with him. Much as I would prefer to stay at the EME Mess, he will just not hear of it. You know how hospitable he is! And once you are his guest, he wants you to join him for a drink. This goes on until late into the night. Too much drinking is not good for my stomach ulcers.'

'That is right sir,' I said.

It must have been past 12 noon.

The admiral looked at his watch, 'I must rush home to change. Are you not also leaving by the 1.30 flight?'

'Yes sir', I replied.

'See you on the plane,' he said, as he started down the stairs.

I had a first class ticket but as the plane was said to be full in that class, I was accommodated in the tourist section. Before the take-off, however, a steward came to tell me, 'Sir, you have been upgraded to first class. Admiral Ahsan is waiting for you.' I moved into the first class and sat next to the admiral. There was not much talk during the flight except for stray comments about the prevailing situation and how it had been going from bad to worse with each passing day. The admiral wished somebody would persuade President Ayub to step down. He was apprehensive that if that did not happen soon, there would be trouble-even to the extent of imposition of martial law. He did not evidently relish the prospect of martial law, and was of the view that the armed forces should be left out of politics. Charming, elegant, and intelligent, Ahsan abhorred the very idea of martial law and the consequent involvement of the armed forces in politics. The sands of time were, however, running out for the president, and he had

to make up his mind in order to pull the country back from the edge of the precipice.

The rest of our journey was rather uneventful, interrupted only by desultory talk. At Rawalpindi's Chaklala airport, Major Jalal, ADC to General Yahya, was there to receive the admiral and drive him straight to the Commander-in-Chief's house. I said goodbye to the admiral as he got into the waiting car. I was met at the airport by Major Qasim, my deputy. He told me to ring up Ghulam Umar first thing after reaching home. Umar was 'happy' to have me back in Rawalpindi and would see me at 6 p.m. in his office, I drove straight to my Peshawar Road residence in the staff car. My wife, Arifa, waiting for me in the porch, hastened to convey the same message from Umar. I had a cup of tea, chatted a little with my wife and children-Masud, Jolly, and Anis-and then drove off to the GHQ. I went straight to Ghulam Umar's office. His G-1 said that the brigadier would be there any moment. And so indeed he was. He ushered me into the room and shut the door after us. 'Look, old boy, I am not trying to tell you anything. But you know things are deteriorating. Law and order has gone to the dogs. Everyone seems to have gone mad. One talks of jalao' (burn) while the other of 'gherao' (besiege), The old man (President Ayub) has already put his hands up. He is ready to quit. So where do we go from here? What are you going to do about it...?'

I paused, trying to read his mind as best as I could. Before I spoke, he lit a cigarette, offered me one, and ordered tea. His large eyes looked somewhat glazed as he puffed out clouds of smoke. He looked at me quizzically-obviously waiting for an answer.

'Sir, are you suggesting martial law?' I asked.

'I am suggesting nothing,' he retorted somewhat brusquely. 'You know how we work in this armyl'

Inhaling the cigarette smoke, he said, 'We have to do our staff work and think ahead on a D-plus and D-minus basis. No one could be more averse than me to the very word "martial law". But the army can't just sit on its haunches while the whole country burns. Ayub and Altaf Gauhar are up to all sorts of tricks. You just go and talk to Maulvi Farid. I meet him practically every day. The politicians can never make it. I haven't seen a more divided 1ot.' 'That's right, sir,' I said, 'but martial law is hardly the answer. Let's have general elections, now that agreement has been reached on the fundamentals,

'What agreement? he retorted sharply. 'What agreement? The two Bs (Bhutto and Bhashani) are out on a rampage and everybody else is pulling in a different direction. We have to do something about it. We have to be prepared. I know the chief hates it, He fears another martial law may well be the end of the country. It may turn Pakistan into another Iraq. But we cannot be too complacent about the whole damned thing, can we?'

'In that case,' I answered, 'let it be a quick, surgical strike. Let's not prolong the operation and perpetuate ourselves.'

'Of course not. It's only to put the administration back on the rails, restore law and order, hold fair elections and quit', he replied.

I watched the brigadier as he went on to spell out his thesis. His large lusterless eyes seemed to be groping into the future already. For a moment perhaps he wasn't mentally there. 'It's going to be a purely interim arrangement,' he went on to add, 'a temporary affair. In fact, the chief is not even thinking of shitting to the president's house. He will continue to function from the GHQ. He doesn't aspire to the highest office in the land. But Ayub must step aside, anyhow. There is no question of helping him to stay on. People are simply sick and tired of him. If we come, that is if we move in at all, he gets out. Let there be no doubt about that, whatsoever…'

His words gave me a gnawing sense of foreboding-were we planning a coup against Ayub already? I was afraid, nervous, upset.

'What are my orders, sir,' I asked with a sinking feeling.

'You're to write the first draft of the Chief Martial Law Administrator's (CMLA) address to the nation. It should be short, simple, and forthright. You know the chief well enough-so go ahead.?

'Could you give me a guideline, some idea about aims and objectives?'

'I have already told you all that I know. So go ahead.'

'What about the Constitution?'

'What about the Constitution? he repeated the question thoughtfully. 'Well, what do you think?`

I paused for a while. 'Please don't abrogate it. It has become much too common a thing. Let's make a fresh beginning. The Constitution stays. The speaker of the National Assembly takes over as the acting president and the CMLA proceeds with his reforms and gets back to the barracks as soon as the job is done?

'You may be right. But how would you reconcile the Constitution with martial law? It's either one or the other.'

He had a point there. I suggested that the Judge Advocate-General at the GHQ be consulted for a legal opinion. 'It's a question of phraseology. There is nothing that human ingenuity cannot improvise?

'That is right. Why don't you try to find out a substitute for abrogation?'

'I will try.'

'Ok, go ahead with the draft'

I asked for his stenographer.

'Out of the question. This is all top secret. I tell you it may never happen. This is only part of staff work in strict confidence' I asked for a typewriter and proceeded with my hunt-and-peck method. The main points in the draft were as follows:

The aim of martial law would be:

(a) to restore law and order,
(b) to cleanse and organize the administration and put it back on the rails,
(c) to create a climate conducive to the holding of fair and impartial elections, and
(d) to complete the task and quit as soon as possible.

Further, the note said:

(a) the C-in-C would continue to function as the CMLA only, while the speaker would act as the president.

(b) the Constitution would be 'held in abeyance'.

The note ended with an appeal to the nation to cooperate, etc.

I took about an hour and half to produce three foolscap sheets. Umar went through it and looked quite satisfied. He also approved the expression 'held in abeyance' in respect of the Constitution. 'I will put it up to the chief,' he said and went on to talk about the general situation. It was obviously deteriorating. Jalao, gherao were the order of the day. In East Pakistan, the wheels of industry had come to a grinding halt. At Parbatipur in the Rangpur district-the stronghold of Bhashani-people's courts had been set up and public hangings were ordered. The politicians had failed to reach a compromise. There was complete chaos.

The next day, 20 February, I was called by Umar again. The chief had seen the draft, approved it in principle, and told him to hold on to

it. The same clay, or the day after, the three services chiefs-Yahya, Ahsan, and Nur Khan~called on the president, as well as the home minister, retired Admiral A.R, Khan, and defence adviser, Syed Ghiasuddin Ahmad, and reportedly urged them not to drag the armed forces into the mess. The law and order situation came in for a detailed critical assessment. Ayub was in favour of imposing 'selective martial 1aw', i.e. only in those areas where the situation had gone beyond the control of the police and the civil authority. He named Dhaka and certain other areas of East Pakistan like Rangpur and Natore. He also mentioned Lahore, Multan, and Hyderabad in West Pakistan.

Except for Yahya Khan, others were said to be in agreement with the president, Yahya was reported to have maintained a stolid silence until Ayub addressed him personally for his views on the situation. 'Well, sir," he is reported to have said, 'I would rather keep the army out of this civilian mess. However, if you think that martial law alone is the answer, then I am not for selective martial law. It is either all or nothing. How can you run the country under two different sets of law...'

Yahya's words and body language were enough for Ayub to realize that his time was up. For once, the army chief, the main pillar of his strength, had taken a view different from his; the matter was already way beyond argument.

Ayub went on air to address the nation on 22 February. He acceded to a parliamentary form of government and adult franchise. He also announced his decision not to seek another term. Ayub's decision met with general acclaim and there was high praise for the restraint exercised by Yahya and the armed forces,

On the 26 or 27 February, I was told by Umar that the 'exercise' had been called off. There was to be no martial law and thank goodness for that! The operational instructions, which had been issued to the various field formations earlier regarding the declaration of martial law, were withdrawn. Instead, a signal was sent congratulating the commanders and troops for their devotion to duty, and for their restraint and discipline. There was a sense of relief. The private secretary to C-in-C, Brigadier Ishaque said, 'The world blames him (Yahya) for nothing. Everyone thinks he is ambitious. Now you have seen for yourself how he hates all that. , .'

General Gul Hassan, Chief of the General Staff, at his Weekly meeting told us that Asghar Khan, Mumtaz Daultana, and others had sent letters and telegrams to the chief congratulating him for his patriotism. 'We have told the politicians to behave. If things do not improve, the army will come in a big

Way!' He directed me to let the public understand that the army entertained no political ambitions and would stay clear of the mess as far as possible. All this, however, was to be done in a discreet manner without directly involving him or the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate. Accordingly, I put up a note to Gul Hassan, on 'Extended PR' about the role played by the army in averting martial law, detailing that the army had no political ambition. Its only job was the defence of the country, hence it had chosen to stay out of politics despite all the provocations and opportunities. Gul Hassan approved the paper and forwarded it to the chief who concurred.

I returned to my normal work. There was not much contact between Umar and myself after our February encounter. It appeared as if the worst was over. The army had, after all, decided to stay clear of the political mess. The law and order situation, however, continued to deteriorate and the politicians were still at each other's throat. The Democratic Action Committee (DAC)-a conglomerate of the rightist parties comprising Council League, Awami League (Nasrullah Group), National Democratic Party (NDP), Jama'at-i-Islami (JI), and Jamiat-i-Ulema Islam (JUI)-were at daggers drawn with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the National Awami Party (NAP-Bhashani). The Awami League, now riding the crest of the populist wave in East Pakistan after Mujib's unconditional release, would settle for nothing less than a political settlement on the basis of its six-point programme. Bhashani went on with his agitational gheraojalao politics.

Reports from East Pakistan showed a complete breakdown of law and order, and mounting agitation against Governor Munim Khan. Ayub's announcement that he would not be participating in the next general election, had aggravated the situation by raising expectations of an early transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people. Everyone-whether an individual or a political party-plunged headlong into the power game. The political horizon which seemed to have cleared up after Ayub's withdrawal decision and the army's reluctance to impose martial law, was clouded once again. I did not know what was happening behind the scenes inside the GHQ. But rumours about an imminent imposition of martial law began to circulate again. The home minister held daily press conferences on the law and order situation mainly related to East Pakistan. Some smelt a rat. A senior journalist, Syed Najiullah, quoted Mashiur

Rahman of the National Awami Party as saying that martial law was just around the corner. Ishaque directed me to give an estimate of the losses suffered in East Pakistan as a result of gheraos. The general atmosphere was one of deep suspense and foreboding.

On 14 March, I got a call from the Adjutant-General, Major-General S,G.M,M. Peerzada. 'If you aren't too busy,' he said, 'come and see me.' I reported to his office immediately. Having served as military secretary to President Ayub, Peerzada enjoyed a reputation of being a competent officer at any level. His personal assistant, Bokhari, who was waiting for me, showed me in immediately into the general's office. He received me with unconcealed warmth, offered me a seat, and ordered tea.

'How are things'?'
'Not too good!' I said. He nodded in agreement. Tea was served as we talked of the situation in general.
'Look,' he said assuming a more business-like air, 'tell me if the general staff have taken you into confidence at all?' 'Yes, sir,' I answered, 'only to the point of the CMLA's first broadcast to the nation?

'I have seen the draft. It's alright, but weak."

'Sir, my job was only to produce the draft according to the given guideline," I said.

'That's all right,' he said, 'but the situation has changed drastically since then. Look, I am not giving you any ideas. But the army may be forced to act after all. We can't allow things to get completely out of hand.'

I listened quietly.

'I sincerely hope,' he continued somewhat apologetically, 'it doesn't come to that; but as things stand, martial law seems inevitable. We should be mentally prepared for that. You know what I mean.'

'Yes sir.'

'Once again,' he warned me, 'this is strictly between us. Nothing has been decided as yet. I have got to consult the Judge Advocate- General, Major-General Kazi. He should be coming to see me any moment now. Before he comes, tell me what the general reaction is going to be in case we have to act'

'It is difficult to accurately predict the public reaction. However, the way things stand, people are already expecting this to happen. I mean the general feeling is that martial law is inevitable.'

'Is that so?' he responded, looking somewhat perturbed. 'Give me one good reason why they should have been thinking like this?'

'There is more than one reason, sir,' I went on to explain. 'Firstly, the fast deteriorating law and order situation; secondly, the failure of the politicians to come to any agreement among themselves. Everyone is speaking for himself and for his party. And, last but not least, the daily briefings by the admiral (Horne Minister A.R. Khan) on the East Pakistan situation.'

'What do these briefings have to do with the general feelings about the imminence of martial law?'
'You know how the public mind works-sometimes very intuitively. Besides, there is such a credibility gap between the people and the government. The people are sceptical about the moves of the government. They think that the briefings are being given only to pave the way towards martial law. Actually, things in East Pakistan are now getting better. Why then should the minister have to paint such lurid pictures. ..?'
'Oh, that. . ,! Mind you, all this is in strict confidence. Not a word is to go out, I may tell you more about it when necessary.'
That was the end of our meeting. I took my leave and drove back to my office. Three days later, he called me again. This time he was less circumspect about the subject.
'I am afraid it is going to happen. Events have made it inevitable. The army has to act. Much as the chief (Yahya) would hate to get the army involved in the damned business. You see martial law is not a halfway house~we either go the whole hog or forget about it.'

Then after a pause, he went on to spell out the main features of the action to be taken under martial law. The National Assembly would have to be dissolved and the Constitution abrogated. The question of the speaker of the National Assembly assuming the presidency, even temporarily, did not arise. Any military-civilian partnership or collaboration in such a situation would be simply untenable. He quoted the example of the Ayub~Iskander Mirza combine and the short period for which it lasted.

So the die was cast. It was only a matter of fixing the D-Day. The general appeared rather apprehensive about public reaction. He seemed particularly concerned about how Asghar Khan might react. I could not quite understand why he should have been so worried about Asghar Khan, and I told him so. The general feared that the air marshal might

exploit his service connections; he might even offer himself for arrest to embarrass the military regime.

'It's your job to see that none of his statements criticizing martial law should appear in the press. You are our Jim Haggerty (President Lyndon B. Johnson's press secretary). You will have whatever powers you may want. Only make sure that there is no adverse criticism in the press."

He sounded quite naive to me. I knew that neither the press nor the air marshal were going to be a problem. Then he asked me whether press censorship would be necessary and I replied in the negative. Instead of censorship, there should be self-censorship for the national press and no censorship at all for the foreign press; for there was nothing to prevent them from writing what they wished to. It had to be a deliberate and calculated risk. Also the foreign press would never support martial law-no matter how hard we might try to convince them of its inevitability in the supreme national interest. However, in a dire national contingency, reactions and opinions of anybody including foreigners, should hardly matter.

I was still sceptical about the wisdom of imposing martial law, The situation, by and large, had started to improve by then, I asked the general if it had finally been decided to impose it. 'It appears so,' he said.

'In that case, I'd suggest," I said, 'let it be a sharp and quick surgical operation. The longer stay in this damned business, the worse it would be for the country and for us.'

He agreed with me and repeated how reluctant the chief had been all along to resort to it, 'but he has his duty to do as a soldier? He advised me to make my own plans and be prepared for D-Day. I would know of it as soon as the exact date and time were finalized. That was the end of the meeting.

The atmosphere outside was one of a lull before the storm. It had been ominously quiet. The two governors-Munim Khan in East Pakistan and General Musa in West Pakistan-resigned. Around 21- 22 March, the GHQ sports ground became the venue of unusual activity. High-powered wireless transmitters and antennas were strung across the skyline. Preparations for D-Day were afoot. 23 March was Pakistan Day. The traditional military parade scheduled for the occasion was cancelled and Monday, 24 March was declared a public holiday in lieu of Sunday.

On the morning of the 24th, around 10 a.m., Brigadier M. Rahim Khan called me. He wanted to see me forthwith at the adjutant general's (AG) office.

I reported to the AG's office and found Brigadier Rahim waiting for me, along with another brigadier whom I did not know. He was introduced to me as Brigadier Iskander-A1-Karim. Rahim told me that D-Day was the next day-25 March. Operational instructions to Various formations were to be issued that very day and he wanted me to prepare the press part of it as the chief press adviser to the CMLA (Yahya Khan). The chief would address the nation on the morning of the 26th. His talk was to be recorded on the 25th and the tapes flown to Dhaka and Karachi the same evening by special couriers. I was to prepare a complete plan for D~Day and draft the 'annexure', carrying a guideline to the press to be issued along with the operational instructions.

Back home, I drafted the instructions in pencil in my own hand to ensure secrecy. After lunch, I reported back to the GHQ, and handed over the draft to the brigadier, He examined and approved it, with minor amendments. The principle of self-censorship, in the case of the national press and non-censorship, in the case of the foreign press, was approved. It was also agreed that government servants would avoid personal publicity. I was to function as the chief press adviser to the CMLA, effectively in charge of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

I was told to exercise the greatest care about the recording of the CMLA's address to the nation and to see that the tapes reached Karachi and Dhaka the same evening for broadcast on the national hook-up.

The recording of the CMLA's speech was scheduled for 7 p.m. at the C-in-C's secretariat. Altaf Gauhar was to be there, along with Director-General Radio Pakistan, Syed Munir Hussain Shah, and other concemed staff The drill was to be as follows: First, I was to contact the radio station and tell the staff to report to the C~in-C's secretariat at 6.30 p.m., i.e. half an hour before the recording. Second, I was to contact Altaf Gauhar at 3.30 p.m. and tell him to confirm arrangements about the recording and to make sure that the unit was there on time. And thirdly, inform Peerzada at 5 p.m. that everything was in order and under control.

Meanwhile, the press release about my appointment as the chief press adviser was drafted, approved, and cyclostyled. The rest of the day was comparatively quiet for us. A number of pressmen dropped

by with long faces and still longer questions written across their faces. Martial law was no longer a secret. The wireless antennas on the grounds facing the GHQ told the story. In addition, rumours came crowding in thick and fast. I kept a stolid silence and was as evasive as I could be. I was waiting for 3.30 p.m. to make my first contact with Altaf Gauhar. When I rang him up at the stroke of the hour, his servant said that he was asleep. I told him to wake up the Sahib and he complied. Presently, Altaf Gauhar was on the telephone. I told him about the drill for the evening. He was to be at the C-in-C's secretariat along with Munir Hussain at 7 p.m. The CMLA's address would be recorded and the tapes flown to Karachi and Dhaka immediately afterwards. He would be met at the GHQ gate by Colonel Qasim, who would take him to the C-in-C's office. Altaf Gauhar confirmed the arrangements.

Around 6.30 p.m., a drizzle set in which developed into a heavy downpour. By the time I went to the GHQ, it was raining hard. The radio staff were there fiddling with their wires, points and plugs, getting the recording outfit ready for the CMLA's address to the nation. I reported to Ishaque. He had just broken his fast and was popping peanuts into his month. He returned my greeting warmly. 'This is how history is made, Abdul Rahman,' he said.

'Yes sir,' I replied.

Earlier on, on the afternoon of 25 March, President Ayub had gone on air to announce his decision to resign and hand over power to the defence forces. He said:

This is the last time I am addressing you as your president...lt is being proposed that the country be divided into two parts, the centre be made weak and helpless, the defence forces be paralysed completely and West Pakistan's political position be ended. . .I cannot preside over the destruction of my country. It is impossible for me to preside over the destruction of our country,

He went on to tell the people that all government institutions had become victims of coercion, fear, and intimidation. Then came the piece the generals were waiting to hear:

The whole nation demands that General Yahya Khan, the commander-in- chief of the Pakistan Army, should fulfil his constitutional responsibilities,

Ayub ended his broadcast by saying, 'In view of this, I have decided to relinquish today the office of the president.'

A day earlier, on 24 March, President Ayub addressed a letter personally to Yahya, requesting him to take over the country. Analysing the rapidly deteriorating law and order situation throughout the country, he noted in a key paragraph:

I am left with no option but to step aside and leave it to the Defence Forces of Pakistan, which today represent the only effective and legal instrument, to take over full control of the affairs of this country, They are, by the grace of God, in a position to retrieve the situation and to save the country from utter chaos and total destruction. They alone can restore sanity and put the country back on the road to progress in a civil and constitutional manner.

At 7 p.m. sharp, Altaf Gauhar accompanied by Munir Hussain, arrived at the C-in-C's secretariat. I received them at the door and showed Gauhar to Ishaque's office. He greeted the brigadier, who responded coldly and asked him to have a seat. Inside Yahya's office, the radio boys were plugging in the equipment. I went to Yahya's office to see if everything was under control. Munir was there. I asked him if he knew everything about the drill, The CMLA's message was to he broadcast on the national hook-up the next day, 26 March, at 12 noon. The text of the tapes, in addition to being transmitted to Karachi by telephone, was also to be physically couriered to Karachi and Dhaka, as a precautionary measure against a technical breakdown or foul play (Altaf Gauhar and the Ministry of Information being suspect).

At 7.30 p.m. sharp, Yahya entered the office together with Generals Abdul Hamid Khan, Peerzada, and Gul Hassan. Yahya said hello to everybody and took his seat behind the table where the recording equipment had been set up. Altaf Gauhar suggested an audition. Yahya tapped the mike to make sure that it was on and ready for the recording. An audition, he said, might not be necessary and started to speak in his characteristic, strident, and peremptory voice; he looked incandescent as he spoke.

Yahya barked into the mike like a sergeant major at a parade ground, and the opening words, 'Fellow countrymen', sounded quite distinctly as 'Hello countrymeni This greeting was to cause a good deal of embarrassment afterwards.

My sole aim in imposing Martial Law, [he declared] is to protect life, liberty and the property of the people and put the administration back on the rails. My first and foremost task as the Chief Martial Law Administrator, therefore, is to bring back sanity and ensure that the administration resumes its normal functions to the satisfaction of the people. We have had enough of administrative laxity and chaos and I shall see to it that this is not repeated in any form or manner. Let every member of the administration take a serious note of this warning.

Fellow countrymen, I wish to make it absolutely clear to you that I have no ambition other than the creation of conditions conducive to the establishment of a constitutional government. It is my firm belief that a sound, clean and honest administration is a prerequisite for sane and constructive political life and for the smooth transfer of power to the representatives of the people, elected freely and irnpartially on the basis of adult franchise. It will be the task of these elected representatives, to give the country a workable Constitution and find a solution of all other political, economic and social problems that have been agitating the minds of the people. I am, however, conscious of the genuine difficulties and pressing needs of various sections of our people. Let me assure you that my administration will make every endeavour to resolve these difficulties.

As the recording went on, Hamid batted and blinked his eyes behind a thick cloud of cigarette smoke. Peerzada could not have looked happier. Gul was lost in thought. His look might have been one of 'suspended animation', I thought to myself The recording went off well and was played back to everybody's satisfaction. A couple of slips here and there, Munir Hussain hastened to assure us, would be taken care of, and there would be no need for a re-recording. Finishing with his broadcast, Yahya gave Hamid an impish wink and smiled. Hamid smiled back from behind the dense cloud of cigarette smoke. Then, he suddenly looked at me. 'Look,' he said, addressing everybody, 'here is one of my officers just promoted (Lieutenant-Colonel to Colonel) and I haven't even congratulated him.'

He beckoned me to come over to him, shook my hand, paused, and then turned to Altaf Gauhar,

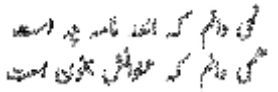
'This is not a martial law promotion, is it'?,' he went on to ask. 'No sir, it is an old case which has just come through? I was mighty pleased with myself.

As I left the C-in-C's room, peons were bringing in wicker baskets, full of bottles and glasses tinkling merrily. They were already celebrating the occasion. Altaf Gauhar and Munir Hussain were told

to stay back and join the party. The celebration was somehow out of place with the general somberness and gravity of the occasion. The tapes of the broadcast were transmitted to Karachi by telephone and also couriered to Dhaka and Karachi. Brigadier Iskander-Al-Karim flew off to Karachi, Lieutenant-Colonel'K.M. Arif to Dhaka.

On 26 March, the CMLA went on air at 12 noon. That he did not greet his listeners with the traditional Assalam-Ale/cum was noted. Surprisingly, however, the speech was well received. Yahya Khan succeeded in impressing the nation with his transparent sincerity and anxiety to transfer power to the chosen representatives of the people. The much dreaded Air Marshal Asghar Khan did not utter a word. Reactions from East Pakistan were not too bad either. Old Bhashani virtually welcomed martial law. The generals were happy with so successful a completion of the exercise.

Later in the day, after the broadcast, I called on Umar in his office. Brigadier Osman, Director Staff Duties was also there and the two could not have been more depressed. They felt like LoBs (left out of battle!). The appointment of Peerzada as the Principal Staff Officer to the CMLA was a disappointment to both of them. 'He is a sick man,' Osman said. Umar smoked incessantly. His eyes were large and vacant. He was obviously shaken up. He recited verses in his usual fashion. One of the verses was:



I know nothing about the contents of the letter
All I see is that the heading is written in blood

The next four days saw us attending to the essential staff work involved in assigning duties to various officers posted at the HQ CMLA. After Peerzada, the three senior-most, namely, Brigadier M. Rahim Khan, Brigadier Iskander-Al-Karim (Bacchu), and Colonel A.R. Siddiqi (myself) were designated, in that order, as Brigadier MI, Brigadier Civilian Affairs, and Chief Press Adviser to the CMLA, Practically all the central ministries were placed under the effective charge of Karim, while the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was placed under my control for all matters of higher policies.

On 31 March, the CMLA assumed the presidency 'for reasons of protocol', since he had to deal with ambassadors, receive their credentials, sign pacts, etc., and conduct all such vital functions of the state which he could not perform as CMLA. The 1962 Constitution was duly amended and adopted to provide a legal framework (Continuance of Laws in Force) to the administration. I took the documents to the Army House for the CMLA to sign. An ADC met me at the reception, collected the papers, and presently returned with the papers duly signed and sealed. I had expected to be summoned by the chief but I was not.

On 3 April, the CMLA called a meeting of secretaries to the government at the Circuit House. He came and made a brief speech outlining his favourite concept of jaza and saza (reward and punishment) and spoke at some length of his plan to put the administration back on the rails and clean it up, He also said that it was a matter of shame to have martial law every ten years and stressed his own anxiety to return to barracks as soon as possible. His delivery was forceful though somewhat halting and rambling. He looked more fearsome than serious. He said, 'I wear four hats-as the C-in-C, CMLA, supreme commander and president-strictly in that order. And let there be no mistake about it, gentlemen.'

He accorded the lowest priority to the presidency, which he said was a mere formality, a makeshift arrangement for purpose of legitimacy and protocol to enable him to perform his normal duties as the head of the state. When the defence secretary (Syed Ghiasuddin Ahmad) stood up to ask him, 'Sir, how should I be dealing with you'?'

'In your case,' the president replied, 'I will put on my last hat.'

Qudratullah Shahab, the education secretary, raised certain questions about the scope and likely duration of martial law. Shahab himself had been a pillar of Ayub's martial law regime before the rise of Altaf Gauhar. A question like that from him sounded somewhat strange. Shahab was a very poor speaker and his English was hardly intelligible to those who did not know him well, He elaborated his points without appearing to make much sense. The president was obviously annoyed, Peerzada and Hamid looked uncomfortable. M.M. Ahmad, the senior- most civil servant present, stood up to put in a word for Shahab and, in turn, told him to sit down.

About a week later, we shifted to the President House, where I had a room to myself. My first and foremost task was to arrange a press conference for the president to let him tell the world about the

circumstances leading to the extreme act of proclaiming martial law. Altaf Gauhar was still the secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. He was in favour of holding a large press conference to be attended by both the national and foreign press. I was against the inclusion of the foreign press and the consequent risk of overexposure of someone as blunt and forthcoming, above all as untutored, as Yahya, in handling press conferences.

My reasons were as follows:

(a) the president was not a politician and might well get himself involved in controversies best avoided;

(b) martial law can never be used as a plank for favourable foreign publicity;

(c) awkward questions may be asked-even planted»-about his personal life (Yahya was known to be fond of wine and women);

(d) it would address the national press' oft-repeated complaint of step-motherly treatment vis-d-vis the foreign press. It was time they were accorded preferential treatment.

Although Peerzada was somewhat half-minded, the two brigadiers supported me and the foreign press was not invited.

Peerzada told me to prepare a draii of the president's statement at the press conference. I wrote my draft and put it up to him for approval. Except for certain parts, the text of the final draft was, however, totally different from mine.

Invitations were issued, and by the evening of 9 April, all the invitees from East and West Pakistan were in Rawalpindi. The East Pakistani complement included such luminaries as Abdussalam of the Pakistan Observer, Zahur Chowdhry of the daily Shangbad, S.G.M. Badruddin of Morning News, and Tafazzul Hussain (Manik Mian) of the influential Ittefaq. The conference was held at the GHQ lecture hall. I ushered the president in, 'Gentlemen, the President of Pakistan! '

He greeted everybody with a resounding 'Salaam', and then read out his text reiterating his pledge to restore democracy, cleanse the administration, stamp out corruption, and solve the many problems facing students and the working classes. He reiterated that he had no political ambitions. He was a soldier and would get back to the barracks as soon as possible. His was an 'interim' government but he hastened to add, people should not expect him to accomplish in days what others had failed to achieve in years.

The conference went off extremely well for Yahya. Everyone, even the cynical doubting thomases were impressed by his sincerity. He stood in such contrast to the arrogance of his predecessor-Ayub would brook no awkward questioning-anything even close to a criticism of his policies would be gall and wormwood to him. On the contrary, Yahya was so frank and friendly that he did not look for words to make a point for fear of being caught on the wrong foot. He was forthright, and suffered from no complexes, Everyone was pleased with his performance.

Yahya had made a grand debut. It must have given him ideas about his own ability to deal with the press. There was nothing he could not do, from soldiering to building cities (Islamabad, as Chairman, Capital Commission-1959-62) to running a whole country. At tea, after the conference, he mixed freely with the press, cracked jokes, and laughed. People noticed the absence of Altaf Gauhar and most of them were happy.

Hopes were, however, somewhat dampened by the number and complexity of the tasks the president set his martial law regime to achieve. 'While it need not, and indeed must not, take us years to do this job,' he stressed, 'it would be unfair to expect that we should complete it in days.'

He went on to talk of the 'possibility' of civilian participation, the framing of a 'workable constitution' by representatives of the people, problems concerning the student community, the labour and the peasants (a fair wage and the whole range of educational problems), reasonable pricing of essential commodities, social justice and planned economic development, narrowing the wide gap between the rich and the poor, measures against the 'building up of a privileged class to the detriment and disadvantage of others...' And so on.

He described his decision to assume the office of the president and revive 'ceitain portions' of the abrogated Constitution as 'operational necessities'. He went on to repeat his promise for the holding of elections on the basis of adult franchise after creating a sound base of discipline to withstand the rough and tumble of active politics and electioneering when these came into play.

I had invited the editors to lunch at the Rawalpindi Club. They joined me in my office on their way to the club, and were full of praise for the president. The press conference was a great success, and this is what gave Yahya his first idea about his own ability and

competence to handle the affairs of the state in a manner he deemed fit.

During lunch there was a great deal of discussion about the six- point programme of the Awami League, provincial autonomy, and the new Constitution. The East Pakistanis were in favour of a quick restoration of democracy through general elections under the 1956 Constitution. Manik Mian was forceful in his advocacy for the restoration of the 1956 Constitution as an interim measure with the provision of one-man one-vote and parliamentary system. He was of the view that the six points were not 'sacrosanct'. They were definitely negotiable and well within the framework of full provincial autonomy, and where necessary, could be suitably modified to ensure a strong and viable centre.

The leftists of the Bhashani group were not so optimistic about the results of the elections. They feared that the elections would return the same capitalist-bourgeois clique that had ruled the country ever since independence. It was amazing how easily everyone had accepted the military rule as well as Yahya Khan. Ayub had been overthrown and that was enough.

One of my own major contributions as chief press adviser had been the preparation of a paper on the pitfalls of excessive personal publicity and propaganda. The paper was examined carefully by Yahya and his comment was: 'I have read the paper in its entirety and I am in full agreement with Siddiqi'. The paper was in the nature of a warning against excessive praise by the sycophants for which I had used the Urdu expression of
Amongst several other factors hastening Ayub's downfall had been the euphoric and useless publicity by his PR boys to promote his 'Decade of Development.'

My first official assignment was to set up and chair a committee to disband the infamous National Press Trust (N PT). The NPT comprised a number of major national dailies like the English language The Pakistan Times, The Morning News, the Urdu language Immze, Mashriq, and the Bengali Dainik Pakistan along with other publications taken over by Ayub's goverrunent under martial law regulations. The dissolution of the NPT had, in fact, been my own idea accepted by Yahya and Peerzada. It was the first and the best opportunity to get rid of the infamous Trust~lost due to my own inability to make use of my authority under the martial law. I also fumbled in my choice of an adviser; Peerzada took strong exception to Mazhar Ali Khan, a known leftist and the former editor of The Pakistan

Times. 'Have a heart,' he said using one of his pet phrases, 'how could you even think of handing the paper over to a committed communist like him!' That is where the matter slipped out of my hands and into those of Sher Ali Khan Pataudi, a member of the Council of Ministers, and Minister of Information and National Affairs, and his secretary, Syed Ahmad, a Bengali. They would exploit the NPT to strengthen their hold on the media and through that, on national affairs.

In April, a tornado hit the suburbs of Dhaka and the president flew to East Pakistan. That was his first visit to Dhaka as president. I accompanied him. It turned out to be a most successful trip from all aspects. Except for Bhashani, who could not, or would not see him, owing to 'indisposition', all other leaders of importance including Mujib and Ataur Rahman Khan, met him. They were all equally impressed by his sincerity and transparent anxiety to transfer power and restore full democracy. While addressing the civil servants, he repeated his abhorrence of martial law being imposed every ten years. lt was a disgrace, he said, and told the civil sen/ants 'to pull up their socks' and put the administration back on the rails.

Yahya visited the tornado-affected area of the industrial estate at Demra outside Dhaka. He spoke to the people and exhorted them to pray and work hard. During a meeting with the local editors at the President House, he reiterated his strong distaste for martial law and his pledge to restore democracy. He had a way of his own to tackle political questions by stressing that he was a soldier and was there only to cleanse the administration and create a climate conducive to the holding of fair and impartial elections. But he wamed them that although his government was 'interim', it was not 'all that interim'. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the talks he had had with the politicians. None of them seemed to look eye-to-eye with each other and each tended to hold his own party and parochial interests above those of the country and the nation. It was difficult to see what they were really after.

The Press was impressed and played up his press conference. I issued the authorized version of the president's statement and everybody published it as it was. Yahya's first trip to East Pakistan, despite the havoc played by the tornado, went off extremely well. He impressed everybody with his frankness and sincerity. At the airport, he let the pressmen get physically close to him against normal security rules, and talked to them without the slightest touch of arrogance and officiousness, which had marked Ayub's words and body language.

While in Dhaka, I met Mashiur Rahman (of the National Awami Party) at Hanif Sahib's (my wife's uncle and a Dhaka businessman) house. He was quite sceptical about the measures being adopted by the government for the restoration of democracy. He believed that the elections would bring forth the same old reactionaries to power. He wanted the Constitution to be framed on the basis of 'class representation', and felt that a referendum should be held on that basis. Making the Constitution an election issue was bound to throw open the floodgates of political controversy. The National Assembly was to function as a legislature and not as a Constituent Assembly.

Yahya's drift into politics, though slow, was inexorable. It is natural for a man on horseback to look down upon the lowly pedestrian. Elated by his eminence he tends to forget that no matter how humble the pedestrian may seem, he has his feet planted firmly on the ground with very little risk of the dramatic fall that threatens the rider. The smart military turnout and the impact of the uniform as a symbol of collective strength beguiles the commander into believing in his own infallibility. Despite his inherent intelligence, Yahya too, would ultimately succumb to the lure of absolute power.

Ironically enough, East Pakistan served as a breeding ground for military commanders-turned-military dictators. Ayub and Yahya had both served as GOCS in East Pakistan. This had afforded them the time to think, and wait for the opportunity to strike and take over the country. In the official warrant of precedence, GOC Dhaka was placed next to the governor, above all senior civil servants. He was, for all practical purposes, treated as the man next to the governor and a notch above the provincial premier (chief minister).

It was in East Pakistan that Yahya began to think of himself as one who could wield the 'iron rod' better than anyone else. The apparent docility and softness of the Bengalis went to the head of the West Pakistani rulers. The military commander enjoyed the most privileged position there and was both admired and feared by the people.

I would now like to give a broad-brush picture of the political scene in East and West Pakistan based on my personal observations and contacts with a number of eminent people-journalists and politicians. The political parties were at each other's throat. A most unseemly controversy had arisen between the rightists and the leftists. The Jama'at-i-Islami branded those with socialist leanings as kafirs (non-believers) claiming that even the nikah (marriage contract) of a socialist married to a Muslim woman, would be null and void, In

others words, the husband and wife would live in a state of sin if they were unable to, or refused, to part ways. The leftists, in turn, branded the rightists as imperialist agents.

At that time, there were only two strong parties in East Pakistan- the Awami League and the National Awami Party. Dhaka was the Awami Leagnie stronghold but the peasant-dominated countryside and the labour-dominated (mainly railwaymen) northern districts of Rangpur and Saidpur, were dominated by the National Awami Party. It was a 60:40 ratio. The National Awami Party had a deep dislike of the Awami League; it thoroughly distrusted and loudly denounced Mujib. That Mujib had been an agent of the Alfa Insurance Company owned by the West Pakistan 'Haroon' family was not forgotten by the Bengalis. I met Inayatullah Khan, editor of the Holiday. His distrust and dislike of Mujib and his party was profound. According to him, Mujib simply sought to replace the twenty-two affluent West Pakistan families with twenty-two East Pakistan families. His assumption of power would lead to merely substituting one bourgeois, middle class dispensation, with another. His forte was Bengali chauvinism as embodied in his six-point programme. The National Awami Party was aware of that and knew that in a straight election, the chauvinist-bourgeois combine would sweep the polls.

The National Awami Party suffered from organizational chaos and lack of discipline. There were deep intra-party divisions and polarization between the extreme left represented by Toha, Allauddin, and Abdul Matin, and the moderates like Mashiur Rahman. The student organization, East Pakistan Students' Union (EPSU), was equally divided between Rashid K. Menon (pro-Beijing) and Mrs Motia Choudhry (pro-Moscow) groups. Bhashani himself remained evasive on vital issues. He would simultaneously condemn and uphold the military regime. He condemned it for its anti-democratic character and upheld it for his lack of faith in electoral and constitutional politics. 'Bread-before-vote' was his main slogan. He was of the view that a poor country like Pakistan could ill-afford the luxury of elections.

The Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) was third in the order of importance. lt had a number of big names to boast oil such as Nurul Amin, Abdus Salam, Mahmood Ali, Ataur Rahman Khan, and others. But they had very little following, It was an entirely personality-based party-all generals and no privates. Each one of them might have won the elections on the basis of his own personality but not necessarily on the basis of the party.

The Muslim League was a house divided against itself~the Convention faction of Ayub Khan under Abdus Sabur Khan had dominated the Council faction led by Khawaja Khairuddin and others. The third faction, the Qayyum League, was yet to emerge. The Muslim League (Convention) had, however, ceased to be a force to reckon with. In fact, it was the most hated of the parties for all its association with Ayub's one-party system.

The Jama'at-i~Islami was the most well organized party after the Awami League. It had a sound structure and a committed band of devoted workers. It stood for Muslim solidarity and the adoption of an Islamic Constitution. The political scene, by and large, was peaceful and tranquil. Martial law had apparently brought peace to an otherwise strife-tom country.

Back in West Pakistan, it was a somewhat different story. Here there was a lot more sound and fury than an issue-oriented debate. Bhutto had made a policy statement identifying three fountainheads of power-the armed forces, the politicians, and the bureaucracy. It was for the first time that a public leader had formally and openly recognized the armed forces as a part of the power triangle. The rightist parties spoke only of Islam and, quite surprisingly, demanded the restoration of the 1956 Constitution as the best way to ensure the Islamic character of the state. The Convention Muslim League (of Ayub K_han's days) was in complete disarray after the freezing of its funds under a Martial Law Order. The National Awami Party (Wali group) did not have much to say; and for a while the political scene in West Pakistan was dominated equally by the Council Muslim League and the Pakistan People's Party. In fact, the Council Muslim League claimed to have an edge as the successor to the All-India Muslim League, and thus the party of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

The government had adopted a posture of complete neutrality. This created a peculiar situation and encouraged fissiparous and divisive tendencies. It was a strange sort of a martial law administration, which either by design or default, allowed political argument to develop in a political vacuum created by its own absence, sort of a strategic withdrawal Rom the political scene.

The National Awami Party (Bhashani group) held a convention in June 1969 at Toba Tek Singh in Faisalabad. It was a workers' and peasants' rally organized with much fanfare. Speeches were made criticizing the capitalist, colonial, and feudalist systems prevalent in the country, and branded the promise for an early restoration of

democracy as a hoax. Mashiur Rahman denounced Yahya as traitor, and demanded an immediate lifting of martial law. He was arrested and produced before a military court for trial. This was the beginning of the government's partisan involvement in politics.

The government had begun to make and accept its own appraisal of national politics thereby losing much of its earlier impartiality and disinterest in the process. After his one-to-one meeting with all the major political leaders, Yahya had formed an extremely poor opinion of them as a body, and would not hesitate to express his views before a select gathering of officers. At a reunion of the Baluch Regiment (his own) in Abbottabad in May, Yahya addressing his regimental 'buddies' of the rank of lieutenant-colonel and above said:

Gentlemen, we must be prepared to rule this unfortunate country for the next 14 years or so. For I simply can't throw the country to the wolves. And if and when I am relieved of my command, I would hand over to the next senior, like one guard commander replacing the other.

He then went on to express his bitter disappointment over the quality of leadership of the political parties and the calibre of the politicians. They were a little more than a 'pack of jokers'. Using his inherent histrionic gift, he went on to narrate his encounter with Bhashani and Mujib without naming them.

The one with the flowing white beard tells me, 'Shir', please don't transfer power to Muzib. He is a traitor.

'But Maulvi Sahib,' I say, 'lt's for you as a fellow politician to talk to Mujib. I am a simple soldier, what can I do about it?'

And do you know what his answer was?

'Shir,' he says, 'I am an agitator, my job is to agitate. You're an administrator and your job is to administer...'

The disclosure and the mimicry accompanying it, drew loud guffaws from the select audience.

Another major development during this period was the retirement (premature and compulsory due to no fault of the officer) of the two services chiefs-Ahsan and Nur Khan, from their commands and their appointment as governors and martial law administrators, of East and West Pakistan respectively. Nur Khan was becoming difficult for Yahya to handle. His visit to Delhi to attend the funeral of the Indian President, Dr Zakir Hussain, had brought him into international

limelight. There he met the Russian premier, Aleksei Kosygin, and was described as the number two man in the country. A Pakistani journalist, H.K. Burki, ran a story about the invitation extended to the Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin by Nur Khan on behalf of Yahya, much to the latter's annoyance. Yahya was highly displeased with the premature disclosure and wanted the journalist to be punished, but I intervened and was able to save Burki from Yahya's wrath.

Nur Khan, it was said, dragged his feet when told to step down from his command. He argued that if it was necessary for him to step down, Yahya should follow suit. That was the last thing Yahya would consider but in order to appease Nur Khan, he found a convenient scapegoat in the naval C-in-C, Admiral Ahsan, who too was made to relinquish his command, The two new chiefs-Vice Admiral Muzaffar Hassan and Air Marshal Abdur Rahim Khan were too junior and weak to be a nuisance to the boss. Besides, each one of them had gotten a double jump from Commodore and Air Commodore to Vice Admiral and Air Marshal respectively, and had been appointed service chiefs. Their quick promotions placed them under personal obligation to Yahya.

The man closest to him was his old friend Hamid. I have yet to see a man who matches Hamid's qualities of personal loyalty and self- effacernent for the sake of a friend. Yahya placed complete trust in him, and he could not have made a better choice. But ultimately, Hamid's unflinching loyalty to his friend would lead to the undoing of them both. Had Hamid been even a little more firm, perhaps things would not have come to such a pass as indeed they did.

With the exit of Nur Khan and Ahsan, Yahya was in full control of the armed forces. He issued Martial Law Regulation No. 50 to institute proceedings against the 303 civil servants charged with misuse of their official positions, bribery, corruption, and maladministration. The measure was a tremendous success. The national press hailed it as the first example of justice and fair play. They played on the number 303 and called it Yahya's 303 double-barreled gun against corrupt officials. By July, Yahya was firmly in the saddle. But a whispering campaign against Yahya and his administration had begun. He had not said a thing after I0 April, and people rightly began to wonder as to what he was really up to. They were beginning to have second thoughts about his sincerity.

Around the middle of May, Manik Mian, the influential editor came to Rawalpindi bringing me a gift of lychees and bananas. I invited him

to lunch at the club. The man had been very ill. He had suffered a heart attack some time back and still had difficulty in breathing which he suffered through bravely. We had a few drinks before lunch. Manik Mian's breathing was hard and short. I could see that he did not have much time left. Despite his obvious discomfort, he had a couple of gin-and-lime and seemed to enjoy his drinks. We talked of the Awami League and East Pakistan. He was for an immediate promulgation of the 1956 Constitution, which was based on adult franchise, one-man one-vote, and a parliamentary form of government. He was sure that the six-points were negotiable. It was not a programme for the dismemberment of Pakistan but only of provincial autonomy. Mujib, according to Manik Mian, would not be a problem. Although he had the Agartala halo around him, and was the most popular Bengali leader, he was not strong enough and his position would be eroded in a political vacuum. Only Bhashani and the extremists would gain in a constitutional hiatus.

So the constitutional process must not be delayed, nor martial law allowed to continue for a moment longer than necessary. Manik Mian's hold on Mujih was undeniable. His powerful paper and personal influence were a force to reckon with in the political and professional circles. It was amazing how little the Bengalis demanded at that stage, For the army in its West Pakistani perception, however, the 'little' might well have been a trap; a small step, to be followed by a giant leap, leading to an eventual separation.

I had a high regard for Manik Mian, When he said that the six- points were negotiable, I knew that he meant it. He was for the immediate convening of the Constituent Assembly under the 1956 Constitution, which could be amended and adopted by a simple majority, and elections to the national (legislature) assembly held under the amended Constitution. He was against any kind of delay and showed an almost morbid fear of Bhashani and his radicalism. That was my last meeting with Manik Mian, He died the very next day, on 8 May, in his hotel room.

On 28 July, however, Yahya all but overruled the revival of the l956 Constitution, even in a modified form, on the basis of one-man one-vote and a parliamentary system. He said: ..,..the decision must be with the people. The only requirement I would insist upon is that any Constitution or any form of government that the people of Pakistan adopt for themselves must cater to the ideology and integrity of the country...

This then was the thinner end of the wedge leading to the deepening involvement of his regime in the insane power game, and an inexorable drifting away from its original charter as an interim government.

On 4 August, while I was on a holiday in Murree with my family, the new Council of Ministers was announced and sworn in. The dormant officials, like Muzaffar Ali Qizalbash and retired Major- General Sher Ali Khan Pataudi, had come back to life. Sher Ali was given the infomation portfolio with the additional charge of national affairs, which the president had until then held himself In no time at all, Sher Ali was all over the place, making speeches, lecturing on Islam and the ideology of Pakistan. He spoke of his 'direct dialling' to Allah five times a day (five-fold daily prayers), and became more of a preacher than a minister of state. Sher Ali's advent into the ministerial chamber established the political and the ideological involvement of the administration. Until then, the administration had stood in a sort of splendid isolation from ideological disputations but now with one of its senior ministers talking of Islamic ideology all the time, it became unavoidably identified with a biased stance.

Sher Ali moved like a blithe spirit from one place to another, lecturing and sermonizing with missionary zeal. His principal motivation in the campaign was not the love of ideology but a hatred for Ayub Khan. Ayub, as the C-in-C, had had him superseded for the top army job in favour of General Musa. Sher Ali was a blue-bloodecl Sandhurst man and a princeling of the Pataudi clan to boot. Musa came from a modest tribal (Hazaras of Balochistan) background and had a humble rating in the service, having risen from the ranks. He was also junior to Sher Ali in commissioned service, having passed out from the first IMA (Indian Military Academy) course in 1935. Sher Ali, from the last Sandhurst course for Indian officers, had been commissioned in 1933. However, since Musa had his rank service counted in full, he became senior to General Sher Ali. Another Sandhurst-commissioned general officer, M.A. Latif of about the same seniority as Sher Ali, was also superseded by Ayub.

Sher Ali never forgave Ayub for the slight. Although he accepted various diplomatic assignments under Ayub, he remained his implacable enemy, Now that he had his opportunity he wasted no time in utilizing it. He chose the Urdu Digest, a periodical with strong Jama'at-i-Islami leanings, for his first exclusive interview. This was taken notice of by the other papers. Very soon, Sher Ali found himself locked in a political duel with Bhutto and his party, They justly

questioned his right to take sides politically, contrary to the neutral posture of the administration. Sher Ali was not an elected representative of the people; he had, therefore, no right to speak on their behalf But there was no way to shut the minister up. After all, he spoke only for Islam-what was wrong with that?

Sher Ali's lectures and ideological involvement might have been the unfolding of Yahya's own secret ambition to stall the transfer of power. Sher Ali's ideological stance fitted into the army's secretly- eherished, slowly emerging lan to retain a hold on the political situation in perpetuity. Meanwhile, Ghulam Umar came into the limelight. He was promoted to major-general in May 1969 and given command of the 23 Division in Jhelum, This division had, under its command, a brigade stationed in Rawalpindi. That would bring the GOC (Umar) to Rawalpindi every now and then on inspection visits. A little later, perhaps in July, when Umar had been in command of his division for barely two months, he was made the executive head of the National Security Council with Yahya's elder brother, Agha Mohammad Ali-a superannuated police officer-as his number two.

Eyebrows were raised at the formation of the National Security Council, People questioned the need for an interim government to have a security council. The only answer given was that it was an old project lying buried under files and the administration had simply revived it. Umar was given the rank and status of a federal secretary- a big jump for him.

Sher Ali and Umar were from the same Punjab regimental group. Umar was clever and calculating, Sher Ali enthusiastic and emotional; the two made a good working team. The stage for perpetuating the military was already set. Peerzada-an ardent supporter of military rule himself-was perturbed. He felt rather sidelined to find Umar and Sher Ali stepping into his shoes, the two together coming between him and the boss. Peerzada, despite being a highly intelligent staff officer, was never known for strong nerves and grit, but was more progressive than Sher Ali. Umar's rise was a direct challenge to him and a threat to his close equation with the president.

While talking to me once, Peerzada asked me about the situation in general. 'I am afraid,' I said, 'Sher Ali's utterances have deeply dented the administration's image of neutrality? He agreed with me. I asked him if the president realized what was happening.

'How can he? How can he ever, when he has three Punjabis as his intelligence chiefs." He then went on to name Major-General

Mohammad Akbar Khan (DG, ISI), Mr Rizvi (Director Intelligence Bureau), and Umar (NSC). He was very bitter about Umar. He asked me to make an analysis of the situation arising from Sher Ali's public utterances, and put it up to him. I produced an analysis based on newspaper reports and comments and submitted it to him. He summoned me to his house shortly. He said that he had spoken to the president about Sher Ali. While the president had agreed that the minister should talk less, he had found nothing wrong with his utterances. After all, he only spoke of Islam, and who would not? The president, he said, wanted positive proof of Sher Ali's involvement. He wamed me that I might have to face the president in this regard. Luckily for me it never came to that.

In November 1969, Bengali versus non-Bengali riots broke out in Dhaka. The traditional trouble spots, Mirpur and Muhammadpur- predominantly Bihari areas-had been the scenes of police firing. Later, the army was called in and the police withdrawn. The army was made up entirely of West Pakistanis while the police was East Pakistani. This caused much resentment and distrust amongst the Bengali police hierarchy and bureaucracy, and made yet another dent in the facade of martial law. Curfew had to be imposed despite the martial law as local and non-local feelings were aroused.

Peerzada rang me up one evening and asked me to proceed to Dhaka to personally assess the situation. I went to Dhaka and found things in a pretty bad shape. Despite the ban on political activities, politicians had made much of the incident. Two student leaders, Salim and Mantu, both of the Awami League, who had been the cause of the disturbances, and had been declared as proclaimed offenders under martial law, were arrested only to become heroes. The non-Bengalis (Biharis) were pretty demoralized. I retumed from Dhaka quite alarmed at the way things were shaping up. Within a matter of months, the grip of the martial law administration on the law and order situation had visibly loosened. Worse still was the equally obvious indifference of the centre towards East Pakistan, and a progressive loss of interest in its affairs. After promoting a number of East Pakistani bureaucrats to the level of federal secretaries and the formation of the Council of Ministers early in August, Yahya seemed to believe that he had succeeded in allaying the Bengalis' sense of deprivation and inequality regarding a fair share of power at the federal level. Little did he and his martial law coterie-Generals Hamid, Peerzada, Umar, and others-realize that cosmetic bureaucratic solutions would not provide

the answer to political problems, and would not change the traditional, mutually hostile Punjabi-Bengali mindset.

In West Pakistan, political issues had focussed more on ministerial wheeling-dealing, and clannish, tribal, feudal, or personal pursuit of power, In East Pakistan; on the contrary, party politics, no matter how personality-oriented or selfishly driven, had been the be-all and end- all of public life. Martial law had only driven politics and politicians underground, waiting to re-surface at the first available opportunity, Mashiur Rahman of the National Awami Party (Bhashani group) had already fired the first political volley by branding Yahya a 'traitor' at a Mazdoor-Kissan (worker-farmer) rally in Lyallpur (Faisalabad) as early as May 1969. The November flare-up leading to the imposition of curfew in Dhaka, besides exposing the simmering Bengali-Bihari conflict and the politics of the proactive East Pakistan Students' League (ESPL) politics, also allowed the re-surfacing of partisan politics suppressed under martial law, There was, however, little or no realization of this fact in the administrative echelons at the highest level in West Pakistan-the principal seat and repository of state power. Depoliticization under military rule only added to Islamabad's arrogance, and strengthened its determination to rule without the slightest concession to the opposition from the Bengalis. It also blinded them to the moral and legal imperative of transferring to the Bengalis a due share of state power commensurate with their numerical strength.

After careful thought, I have decided to adopt this fourth alternative, namely, to evolve a Legal Framework for holding elections to the National Assembly, As I had mentioned in my July Address, it became evident to me that the three main issues that face us as a nation in the constitutional field are firstly, the question of One Unit; secondly, the issue of one-man one-vote versus parity; and thirdly, the relationship between the centre and the federating provinces.

Announcing the dissolution of One Unit, he said:

One Unit was created by executive orders which, however, were subsequently approved by the Provincial Legislatures and the Second Constituent Assembly. In 1957, the West Pakistan Legislature had voted in favour of the dissolution of One Unit, If Martial Law was NOT imposed in 1958, One Unit might have been dissolved long ago.

Detailing his election programme, he said that he had decided to hold general elections in the country on 5 October l97O. The provincial elections would be held after the National Assembly completed its task of framing the Constitution. The assembly would be required to complete its work within a period of 120 days from its first sitting. He would be happy if they could finalize it even before the expiry of that period. If, however, they were unable to complete the task by the end of the stipulated period, the assembly would stand dissolved and the nation would have to go back to the polls.

The rnost troublesome point concerning the voting procedure was left to the elected assembly to 'evolve for itself'.

After the Assembly has completed its task and the Constitution made by it has been duly authenticated, it will assume the character of Pakistan's Constitution. The stage will then be set for the formation of the new Government.

Throughout these activities, Martial Law will remain supreme in order to give support to the programme of peaceful transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people.

He wound up his speech with the announcement that full political activity would be allowed in the country with effect from l January 1970. The martial law regulation prohibiting such activities would be duly cancelled.

2

YAHYA'S FIVE-POINT MANIFESTO

YAHYA's one positive response to the incubating political turbulence was to announce on 28 November 1969, a phased programme for holding the general elections, and transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people under a new Constitution to be framed by the National Assembly. The assembly would function both as a legislative and constituent body. In his analysis of the 'constitutional problems' facing the country, he outlined four possible alternatives whereby a legal framework for holding elections could be evolved, These were as follows:

One method could be to have an elected constitutional convention whose task would be to produce a new Constitution and then dissolve itself. This would have been a neat arrangement but then it had certain disadvantages; the main one being that it would have involved two elections, one election to the convention and the other to the National Assembly based on the Constitution made by such a convention. The other and more serious disadvantage of this procedure would have been that it would cause an unnecessary delay in the transfer of power.

The second alternative was to revive the 1956 Constitution, but there was widespread opposition to adopting such a method in both wings of the country because certain features of that Constitution such as 'One Unit and Parity' were no longer acceptable to the people.

The third alternative was to frame a Constitution and have a referendum on it in the country. This altemative too had certain practical difficulties as a simple 'yes' or 'no' by way of an answer, cannot possibly be given by the people to such a comprehensive document as a Constitution.

The fourth altemative was for me to evolve a Legal Framework for general elections on the basis of consultations with various groups and political leaders as well as the study of past Constitutions of Pakistan and the general consensus in the country. This proposal from me would only be in the nature of a provisional Legal Framework.

The proposal for revival of political activity was welcomed and l January was celebrated as a deliverance day. But deliverance would very soon prove to be the beginning of a new captivity-the captivity of popular acclaim and appeal. Political parties and their leaders turned into a wild, cacophonous mass and everyone became occupied with projecting and promoting his own and his party's agenda, cutting the other down to size. In the absence of any official restraint and the government's own non-involvement in the political processes, politics tumed into a free-for-all playing field.

In West Pakistan, it was the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) versus the rest, and in the East, the Awami League versus the rest. The splinter groups, however, had their own nuisance value and price. The rightists tried to forge a united front but failed, mainly because the Jama'at-i-Islami was opposed to a merger. It was certainly one of the most organized parties-perhaps only next to the Awami League in organizational soundness, but it had very little political wisdom, experience and appeal, especially for the younger people. The three Muslim Leagues-Council, Convention, and Qayyum-tried to join forces but strong personal prejudices of their respective leaders stood in the way of a merger. In East Pakistan, the Awami League started on a note of defiance~it denounced all its opponents as agents of the military junta, and would brook no opposition from the rival parties. On ll January 1970, the first meeting organized by the Jama'at-i- Islami in Dhaka was broken up by Awami League supporters. Maulana Abul Ala Maududi was barely able to escape alive from the meeting ground. The meeting ended in a fiasco.

The political drift in both the wings was inexorably towards the emergence of a one party rule in each wing. The splinter groups were in a state of disarray and did not have a structured programme. The Jama'at-i-Islami was an exception but it was losing whatever little political credibility it had due to its growing identification with the military government, specially with the Minister of Infomation and National Affairs, General Sher Ali. Sher Ali openly supported the Jama'at-i-Islami and in doing so, he probably enjoyed Yahya's tacit support.

Soon after the revival of political activity, the Jama'at-i-Islami extended its chain of newspapers in the two wings. The daily Jasarat appeared first from Multan and later from Karachi. From Dhaka appeared the Dainik Shangram (Jihad). It enjoyed full financial support and moral backing of the military intelligence. The DGISI, Major

General Mohammad Akbar Khan, recommended government advertisements for these papers. There was more talk about Pakistan's islamic ideology in government circles than one might ever have heard in a lifetime. The mask of neutrality which the administration had worn was beginning to wear thin. The religious factor was once again becoming the reason for political involvement. The Jama'at-i-Islami thrived on official patronage. It organized the Shangrarn Parishad in East Pakistan to counter the EPSL (East Pakistan Students' League), the EPSU (East Pakistan Students' Union), and other youth and student lobbies in that wing. The party papers assumed an increasingly aggressive tone.

The publication of the Legal Framework Order (LFO) on 31 March well and truly set the stage for the elections to the National Assembly. The absence of the word 'provisional' from the LFO was noted. Also noted was the juxtaposition of the provincial and national elections, which was contrary to the president's original plan of 28 November 1969. Elections to the provincial assemblies according to the presidential announcement of 28 November were to be held after the National Assembly completed the task of formulating the Constitution. The simultaneity of provincial and national elections was interpreted as a sop to Mujib and a rebuff to the leftists of the NAP (Bhashani). NAP's election strategy was to concentrate on the provincial elections in East Pakistan. They were not much interested in the National Assembly. The time gap between the national and provincial elections was their best channel to seize the political initiative.

They held the view that once in the National Assembly, the Awami League and Mujih would be preoccupied with the task of framing the Constitution, and would commit a lot of mistakes in the process. That would be Bhashani's chance to gain ground in the province and defeat the Awami League in the provincial elections. For the leftists, the province was the real base of power and they planned to concentrate on that. Bhashani's one dominant and passionate objective was to humiliate Mujih at all costs.

The salient feature of the LFO (Yahya's five-point manifesto) were:

(1) The National Assembly would consist of 300 elected members-162 from East Pakistan and 138 from West Pakistan. 13 seats were reserved for women, making the total number of seats 313.

(2) Elections for the general seats were to be held on the basis of universal adult franchise.

(3) The Constitution was to embody the following principles:

a. There was to be an Islamic Republic of Pakistan with federal form of government.

b. The Islamic ideology of the state was to be preserved.
c. The head of the state was to be a Muslim.
d. Adherence to fundamental principles of democracy was to be ensured.

e. While distributing powers between the federal government and the provinces, maximum provincial autonomy was to be provided. However, the federal government was to be given such powers as were necessary to preserve the independence and senatorial integrity of the country.

f. Disparities were to be removed within a specified period.

(4) The Constitution was to be framed within 120 days otherwise the National Assembly would stand dissolved.

(5) The president would retain the power to authenticate, amend, or reject the Constitution promulgated by the National Assembly.

The LFO was generally welcomed. There was some criticism of the clause regarding authentication of the Constitution by the president. This was interpreted as a serious curb on the sovereign character of the assembly. The official interpretation was that the assembly would become fully sovereign only after the framing and authentication of the Constitution, The character of the House and the type of voting procedure had also been left undefined in the LFO. These two issues were likely to generate much heat in the assembly and delay the task of framing the Constitution.

Before the publication of the LFO, the president addressed the nation on 28 March. He met the press on l April. Despite the noise about the authentication clause, the general reaction had not been too bad. [That was the time when the case for my promotion to brigadier was finalized. Peerzada informed me of the president's approval after the press conference. He said that it would give him much personal satisfaction if the case came through. That was indeed very nice of him.]

Meanwhile, the publication of the fourth Five-Year Plan generated much debate and heat. The East Pakistanis were particularly dissatisfied with the allocations made to their wing. ln any case, they argued that it was not the job of the martial law administrator-an interregnum-to involve himself in long-term plans. The job, in all

faimess, should have been left to the elected politicians and policy- makers. But the administration went ahead with the plan. I had a luncheon meeting at the Rawalpindi Club with some of my East Pakistani friends including Dr Rehman Sobhan and Inayatullah of Holiday. They did have reservations about the recently announced Five-Year Plan in view of the essentially interim character of the regime, but expressed general satisfaction with the administration's agenda for the transfer of power.

After Ayub's ten years of basic democracy, everybody, even progressive intellectuals like Rehman Sobhan and Inayatullah, seemed to see more than a ray of hope in Yahya's agenda for the transfer of power after general elections on the basis of one-man one-vote.

Political parties, in anticipation of the coming months of grueling pre-election confrontations, were already doing their physical fitness exercises. There had been efforts for joining forces on the basis of a minimum common programme. But as the parties were not more than personality cults in most cases, the efforts did not bear much fruit. In East Pakistan, Professor Muzaffar Ahmad of the National Awami Party (Wali group) was for an electoral alliance with the Awami League, but Mujib at his public meetings declared his intention to go it alone. He treated the forthcoming elections as a referendum on his six-point programme and was, therefore, against sharing the laurels with a second party. Mujib's main challenge came from Bhashani who was not interested in the elections per se. His call was for 'bread before vote' and for 'class struggle instead of elections'. His own party was in a mess, tom between the moderate and extremist factions. Mashiur Rahman was in favour of electoral politics on the basis of social classes but the radical group of Toha, Allauddin, and Abdul Matin considered elections a bourgeois conspiracy against the peasants and workers. '

Mujib made the most of National Awami Party's intemal squabbles. Some, however, thought that Bhashani's apathy towards the elections was part of a deliberate strategy to draw Mujib into the political killing zone and then to destroy him for good. Mujih, in Bhashani's analysis, represented only the urban middle class and the bourgeois. The best way to destroy him and the class he represented, therefore, would be to let him come to power, get himself entangled in the mesh of bureaucratic procedures, and expose his sheer inadequacy in solving the real problems facing the people. Law and order were anathema to the type of politics being pursued by Bhashani. He was for class

struggle and anarchy, out of which alone the popular people's forces would emerge. Bhashani's biggest mistake at this stage, however, was his failure to size up the strong and rising tide of the Bengali nationalism and act upon it. Only the Awami League was able to gauge the sentiment fully and they exploited it to their best advantage.

While Bhashani spoke the para-Marxist/Maoist jargon of unity and oneness of the suffering masses throughout the world and Pakistan, Mujib was parochial, pragmatic, and down-to-earth. He spoke only of the Bengalis as the victims of cold-blooded exploitation by the West Pakistani or the Punjabi bureaucracy. 'The streets of Karachi are paved with gold,' he said. The sense of deprivation, economic injustice, and social and class discrimination that were so deeply ingrained in the Bengali mind were the strongest weapons in Mujib's hand. He wielded them skillfully and with a good deal of precision. The people acclaimed him as the Messiah wherever he went.

Paradoxically enough, Mujib's growing popularity and unshared glory caused much panic and fear in the very middle class he was supposed to represent. These were the people in Mujib's own group- between the ages of forty and fifty. They knew him well enough to recognize his penchant for political absolutism. They realized that he was essentially mediocre-a prisoner rather than a true leader of his followers. They would almost shudder to think of the day when 'Muzib bhai' would be at the helm of affairs. Mujib would be all right if only there were other parties to counter-balance the Awami League politically, or else he would grow into an absolute dictator.

Mujib's critics, however, were immobilized by the vast multitude of the Bengali youth-the student community under Tofail of the EPSL-who gave their unstinted support to the leader and the party. These young men were mostly of the post-independence vintage, with little or no knowledge of the Pakistan movement. They were Bengalis first and Bengalis last, nourished and raised on a deep sense of exploitation, deprivation, and injustice at the hands of the West Pakistanis.

Ayub's decade of economic pragmatism, spawning the so~called twenty-two families-all from West Pakistan»-had only deepened the Bengalis' sense of economic injustice. The appearance of political stability under Ayub's strongman rule, proved a period of anarchist incubation as the deadly bacteria of political chaos flourished under the still and stagnating waters of Ayub's absolutism. The objective of 'Stability at all costs' served the country well economically, but ill-

served it politically. In East Pakistan, away from the corridors of power, all of which was in West Pakistani hands, it served to strengthen and feed Bengali chauvinism. In the absence of a collective national policy framing priorities for development, purely local prejudice and vernacularism flourished.

In West Pakistan, the growth and consolidation of vested interests led to a kind of phony nationalism in the name of Islamic ideology-a term so grossly misused that it ceased to have any meaning at all. Islamic ideology in politics became a tool in the hands of the obscurantist forces, to strangulate and stifle all opposition. Anything that threatened vested interests-Whether in business or in politics- would be declared to be offensive to the ideology of the country. This was the off shoot of the political and emotional void which marked the years of Ayub's rule and led to the deepening polarization between the two wings. Despite various public relation attempts to enhance national integration, the two wings continued to drift further apart.

Opposition to Ayub Khan assumed two distinct and mutually opposite forms in East and West Pakistan. In East Pakistan, it triggered a struggle for survival-for emancipation from the West Pakistani economic and political stranglehold-while in the West, it developed into a mock struggle for the revival of democracy of a type that nobody could clearly define. Every party had its own idea of democracy. The Muslim League visualised it- as a retum to the early days of Pakistan under J innah and Liaquat Ali Khan-under a Punjabi bureaucratic and political hegemony. The socialists, represented mainly by the National Awami Party, interpreted it as the dictatorship of the proletariat rooted in the various regions or provinces. For the Jama'at-i-Islami and other parties of that ilk-the Jami'at-i-Ulema-i~Pakistan (Thanvi group), the Jami'at Ahl-i-Hadith, etc.-it was a return to the days of the 'Khulafa-i-Rashideeni

For the Awami League, democracy stood mainly for the economic emancipation of the Bengalis and the right of Bengalis to rule the country on the basis of their absolute majority. The PPP in the West, captured the people's fancy with its slogan: Islam is our religion, socialism our economy, democracy our way of We. All power to the people! A quaint blend of the best of the two worlds. All other parties of the West were old and wom out, led by political fogies, who had already been tested, tried and discarded.

The revival of political activity and the publication of the LFO brought to the surface, the wide gulf between the two wings. They had

nothing in common except the national flag as the one shared symbol. As somebody pithily remarked, only two things linked the two wings- Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the PIA. But both links, in the course of twenty-three years of strife, intrigue, and exploitation, had been over-stretched and had become very tenuous.

The Jama'at-i-Islami, for a while emerged as a political colossus. Unfortunately, the colossus had feet of clay. In the first flush of success, it behaved arrogantly and instead of making friends, only made enemies estranging even like-minded parties, such as the Jami'at- i-Ulema-i-Pakistan (Thanvi group) and the Jami'at Ahl-i-Hadith. The chances of forming a rightist coalition consisting of the Council and Convention Leagues, the Pakistan Democratic Party, and the Jama'at factions against the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), failed largely because ofthe arrogance of the Jama'at-i-Islami. The 'Shaukat-i-Islam Day', staged by the Jama'at-i-Islami on 31 May, was denounced as a show of strength by the rightist groups. The Council Muslim League and the Thanvi Group dissociated themselves from the event even at the preparatory stage, Maulana Thanvi left for Darussalam to avoid the event, and Shaukat Hayat of the Council Muslim League denounced it as a one-party show.

The day was celebrated with much pomp and ceremony. No amount of money was spared. lt was designed as a challenge by the rightist faction to the PPP, but in the end only served to highlight the conflict within its own rank-and-tile. The main procession in Lahore was led hy Maulana Maududi with Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, Shorish Kashmiri, and General Sarfraz all astride on top of a garlanded truck. It made an altogether negative impression of a cheap burlesque rather than a demonstration of serious political purpose. The PPP undermined much ofthe impact by claiming that it would also organize a 'Shaukat- i-Islam Day', but in Kashmir. The event also served to expose the Jama'at-i-Islami to the charge of receiving fixnds from foreign powers, mainly America, as it apparently had all the money to throw away on such expensive tamashas (show/performance).

Mujib launched his campaign with the slogan that Pakistan had 'come to stay and no power on earth could destroy it'. He said that he stood for the political and economic emancipation of East Pakistan and not for its separation. Bhashani remained as mysterious as always. He had never been for parliamentary democracy but there was a sizeable group in his party that was. It was not quite clear yet whether or not his party would participate in the elections. Ataur Rahman Khan

formed his Pakistan Progressive League (PPL), later named the National People's League (NPL). His stand was for a secular Pakistan on the basis of the Lahore Resolution. For a while the National Awami Party in East Pakistan appeared to be doing well, The Awami League, despite its popularity, was not the only party. It could at best, hope to emerge as the largest single party but without a decisive majority. The National Awami Party in East Pakistan could not be lightly dismissed; it had its roots in the countryside and a band of devoted workers. It was the only progressive party with cadres in both the wings-the only truly national party, even if in a very limited sense. Its manifesto published in September promised full regional autonomy to East Pakistan, inter-wing economic parity, fair representation of East Pakistan in the defence services, shifting of the naval headquarters to East Pakistan, and posting of the army deputy C-in-C in Dhaka, etc. As far as' regional autonomy was concerned, each party, whether rightist or leftist, was completely committed to the concept. In the ultimate analysis, not much difference was discernable between the programmes of one or the other. The rightist parties used socialism as a form of 'Musawati-Muhamn1adi', to leave the future voter both confused and puzzled by the rabble-rousersk.

The Pakistan People's Party stayed out of ideological polemics. It made a clever detour, outflanking the other parties by speaking only of what the masses had been demanding-roti, kapra, aur makan (bread, clothing, and housing). The PPP was extravagant with its promises in the belief that it would never be called upon to redeem these, and would have a perfect excuse and opportunity to harass the other parties from the opposition benches. In the West, PPP ploughed its lonely furrow exactly in the same way as the Awami League in the East.

In June, alter the delimitation of the constituencies, the election campaign went into full swing. All political parties in West Pakistan, with the exception of the PPP, spoke of ideology. They declared socialism as kufr (infidelity) and patently un-Islamic, A fatwa was issued by a number of ulemas, declaring marriage with a socialist as haram (forbidden). The war between socialism and Islam generated much heat and ultimately benefited the PPP, The rightist parties expended all their energy on academic issues, divorced of any plans and promises for economic reforms 'Socialism versus Islam' only highlighted the emptiness of the political process at the national level, Political parties atrophied through years of inactivity, resorted to

polemics and gimmicks to gain popularity. To this was added a campaign of muckraking and character assassination, with each party and individual out to expose the other.

Sher Ali's pronounced pro-Jama'at-i-Islami leanings brought him into conflict with Bhutto. The neutrality of the government was irretrievably compromised. Sher Ali and Umar worked as a team. At the peak of electioneering, fears were voiced that the elections might never be held. It was claimed that forces were at work to upset the elections. The Urdu Digest of Lahore came out with an article reflecting adversely on the neutrality and sincerity of the government. It accused Yahya of favouritism in appointing his elder brother, Agha Mohammad Ali, as the number-two man in the National Security Council. 'It appears General Yahya is getting into the same morass (the actual Urdu word used was dal-dal [marsh]) of nepotism and favouritism as his predecessors!' Yahya was furious. Peerzada summoned me and informed me of the boss's extreme displeasure. He was for an outright ban on the journal. I opposed the ban arguing that an unconditional apology should be enough. Peerzada agreed in principle, subject to Yahya's approval. The editor, Altaf Qureshi, was summoned to Rawalpindi. He met me and agreed to tender his apology, handing it over in writing. I put it up to Peerzada and he had it approved by the president with certain amendments. The apology appeared in the next issue.

Much to my surprise Umar did not approve of the action. He called me one day to his office and spoke about it. He contended that the article had done much damage to the image of the president and his administration. I told him how I had saved the paper from a total ban and that there was nothing wrong about an apology. There was complete freedom ofthe press and the journal had done nothing wrong. Umar, however, felt that the country was under martial law and, despite all the freedom that the press enjoyed, martial law was the supreme law of the land and should be above all criticism. Criticism of the CMLA on a personal level was a serious offence. He feared a strong reaction if we allowed the press to get away with such incidents. Nothing, however, happened.

In the meantime, Yahya's own intentions and aspirations seemed to have undergone a sea of change and he did not seem to be in any hurry to transfer power. He had got his political allies in Qayyum Khan's Muslim League, Nurul Amin's Pakistan Democratic Party, Jama'at-i-Islami, etc. Moreover, he had been convinced by his

intelligence agencies that the elections were going to result in a multi- party parliament and only splinter groups would be thrown up with mutually conflicting plans and programmes. It would, therefore, be impossible for them to mobilize the degree of consensus essential for the adoption of the Constitution within the given time frame of 120 days. After the lapse of the mandatory period for the framing of the Constitution, the National Assembly would automatically stand dissolved and fresh elections would have to be held. This process, they hoped, would go on indefinitely, allowing martial law to remain in force.

Sher Ali was rapidly moving towards a head-on collision with Bhutto. Bhutto spared no opportunity to criticize him openly. Sher Ali called Bhutto a goonda (hooligan) and a 'demagogue'. He was all for his arrest. Once, on a Dhaka-Karachi flight when I was sitting next to him, he confided that he had often advised the president to arrest Bhutto and urged me to do likewise.

In October, the administration was actually ready to arrest Bhutto. In fact, Bhutto himself wanted to court arrest. He always liked to play the martyr and here was his opportunity. He made a speech in October at the Lahore Golbagh, criticizing the president. His arrest seemed imminent but Asghar Khan advised the goverment against such a course of action, given that arresting him would only make a martyr out of him. Based on Asghar Khan's and some other statements, I put up a note to the president through Peerzada, arguing against Bhutto's arrest. Peerzada supported my views and the arrest was not made.

In August and September, East Pakistan was hit by widespread monsoon floods. Yahya went to East Pakistan to assess the damage. During his stay he visited the affected areas, meeting people. He drove to the Sadar Ghat area in a jeep-himself at the wheel, with the governor, Admiral S.M, Ahsan, accompanying him. In Comilla, he sat on a bicycle rickshaw without a security guard. He was at his best behaviour; had he been an actor, he could not have given a better performance. He held talks with political leaders and announced the shifting of the election schedule from October to December. The postponement was generally welcomed and even Mujib was discreet in his criticism. Bhutto expressed his reservations but did not make an issue out of it. Yahya had the odds in his favour; human misery and suffering were on his side and he cashed in on that. Despite the postponement of the elections, his stock rose high in East Pakistan. Politics for the time being took a back seat.

However, the unusual silence was shattered by a stir caused by a book called Pakistan: Desh 0 Krishti (Pakistan: Land and Culture). It was a part of the high school curriculum in East Pakistan. The students protested against it and demanded its exclusion from the course because the book made no mention of such giants of Bengali literature as Rabindranath Tagore. They did not only want to leam about Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Allama Iqbal, when their own leaders and poets were ignored. The students hit the streets and organized protest rallies where they burnt copies of the book.

I talked about the book with my Bengali friends. They said it was a perfectly good book and should not be withdrawn. I conveyed their views to Peerzada. My own view was that the govemment should be fima since it was a martial law administration after all. Already, martial law was being followed more in breach than in observance. The president did not agree. He said that the book had unfortunately been written in a difficult language and had, therefore, to be withdrawn. The book was shortly withdrawn-a sop to the angry young men of the student community.

3

PRE-ELECTION FEVER AND THE CYCLONE

OCTOBER saw a heating-up of political tempers in West Pakistan. It was Bhutto's PPP versus the rest. He travelled from one end of West Pakistan to another, addressing large gatherings and rallies. In the same month, Mujih came to West Pakistan on his first, and what would tum out to be his last, campaign visit. He addressed a well-attended meeting at Nishtar Park. He said that his stand was for one Pakistan and that his six-points were only a program for full provincial autonomy. From Karachi he went to Lahore, where he addressed a public meeting at Gol Bagh. There was trouble during the meeting and Mujib got irritated. He said that he had not come to West Pakistan to beg for votes. It was generally believed that PPP workers were behind the trouble. Mujib cut short the rest of his tour and returned to Dhaka. His visit was no less than a political disaster in the context of the highly tense inter-wing relations.

The two largest political parties-the Awami Leagme and the PPP had their parishes confined to their respective wings only. There was no national party with a significant following in both wings. After the political eclipse of the Jama'at-i-Islami, Qayyum had emerged as the strongest contender in the rightist camp. He enjoyed the full support ofthe government. Although he was a national figure in his own right, he stood nowhere vis-ri-vis Bhutto, who cashed in on his penchant for making promises and conjuring up visions of heaven on earth. The youth followed him and political opportunists and fence-sitters jumped on his bandwagon.

Bhashani stayed sullenly quiet and stolidly distant throughout the pre-election activity, without exactly boycotting it. This was despite his tacit understanding with Yahya that his party would contest all or rather most of the rural seats against Mujib's. His problem was a

paucity of funds which the National Awami Party, being a poor man's party, neither had, nor could ever hope to mobilize. According to his assessment, he needed a sum of around two-and-a-half crores to meet the election expenses and to build a university at Santosh, his hometown.

The Intelligence Bureau chief; Mr Rizvi, being aware of Bhashani's dilemma, had obtained Yahya's approval in principle for the payment of the necessary amount. Subsequently however, the administration went back on its word leaving a very angry and bitter Bhashani. Unable to contest and upset with the government, Bhashani said goodbye to West Pakistan and announced his boycott of the elections. If Bhashani had continued to challenge Mujih in the elections, the overall electoral picture was bound to have been materially different and hardly to Mujib's advantage.

In November, East Pakistan's coastal belt and offshore islands were struck by a devastating cyclone. The disaster struck with such elemental force and suddenness that it was impossible to assess its real magnitude and intensity. Yahya got news of the disaster while on a state visit to China. On his way back, he made a stopover of two to three days in Dhaka. He flew over the stricken area in a Fokker Friendship aircraft and drank several cans of imported beer during the flight. He was not frightfully impressed by what he saw. In his view the extent of the calamity had been exaggerated and blown out of proportion. He left Dhaka two days later, authorizing Governor Admiral Ahsan to take the necessary steps for relief and rehabilitation of the people of the affected area.

However, Yahya had completely failed to size up the real magnitude of the disaster. Meanwhile, countries around the world started to react to the situation. The British despatched a naval task force to aid the relief and rescue operations while the Americans rushed food and clothing along with helicopters to help in efficiently transporting relief missions. In East Pakistan itself there was a furious uproar against the apathy of the central government towards the Bengalis. Mujib spoke bitterly of the situation, and complained about, among other things, the absence of helicopters to fly relief missions to the offshore areas.

For Mujib, the cyclone proved to be godsent in a political sense. Due to this incident, the gulf between the two wings became wider than before. Not one of the West Pakistani leaders, except Asghar Khan, bothered to visit East Pakistan during the crisis, People who had cried themselves hoarse for the sake of the 'ideology' and

'integrity' of Pakistan, stood exposed for their sheer apathy towards the Bengalis. Even the president had visited the disaster site only for a couple of days before flying off to Islamabad as he had more important commitments there. Out of the cyclone calamity, the Awami League emerged as a colossal entity.

I had been on recreation leave when the cyclone struck. The helicopter controversy and the failure of the army to aid the civil government had become burning issues of the time. I contacted the CGS, General Gul Hassan, drew his attention to the matter, and expressed my fear that the situation could get out of hand. He told me to cancel my leave and proceed to Dhaka immediately. A couple of days later I was in Dhaka. The situation was really alarming. The army had by then taken over the relief operations but it was already too late.

What had transpired was a standoff between the governor, Admiral Ahsan, and the military commander and martial law administrator, Lieutenant General Sahibzada Mohammad Yaqub-Khan. General Yaqub, responsible for the defence of the province against external invasion, was reluctant to spare troops for relief work. The governor called for help but the military commander would not respond in any significant way. The army was deployed in certain affected areas but it was hardly sufficient to deal with the situation given the scale of the disaster. Yaqub's plea was that his troops were deployed all along the border in full available strength to thwart any aggressive action by the Indian Army. Any move to switch even a small fraction of these troops, from field duties to relief operations to aid civil power, would 'put the cat amongst the pigeons' in Yaqub's own picturesque description.

It took Yahya a good seven to ten days to realize the magnitude of the disaster before rushing to Dhaka to re-assess the situation. Mujib had used the calamity to his best advantage. He drew the attention of the world press to Islamabad's callous indifference to the plight of the Bengali masses devastated by the cyclone. The world press was all for Mujib and the Bengalis, and implacably hostile to Islamabad and the military.

Yahya was an angry man when he landed in Dhaka. He was very rough with the senior civil servants lined up at the airport to receive him; he did not want any of the officers wasting their time at the airport when they had much to do in their offices and the affected areas. He poked his general's stick into the stomach of a waiting civil

servant and said angrily: 'Sir, you ought to have been rushing relief to the people'.

From the airfield he drove straight to the godowns where relief material had been stored. He examined things for himself and had the bags of foodstuff opened to check the contents. One miserable looking minion thought a particular bag contained rice but when the bag was ripped open, it turned out to be sugar. I had never seen an angrier Yahya, even if he were only play-acting, as he would often do. The frightened Bengali officials were impressed by the president's personal concern for the suffering of the people. Sher Ali told me: 'They just don't know how deeply he is interested in the well-being of the people and how deeply the plight of the East Pakistanis has moved him. I saw him cry. You should project that. People should know that...'

Yahya made a great impact at the airport. He was a military commander and the CMLA, and did not care for niceties. He flew over the offshore island of Bhola and Hatia; he went over to the coastal belt areas of Noakhali, and Majidi Court, spent a night there, supervised burials and took care not to cover his nose with his handkerchief while overseeing the mass burial of decomposed bodies. He was accompanied by the COS, General Hamid, the army commmander, General Yaqub, and the governor, Admiral Ahsan.

I flew by helicopter to a number of areas including Hatia, Bhola, Noakhali, Majidi Court, and Chittagong. The shoreline in Hatia was littered with blackened and bloated bodies washed up by the tide. It was a terrible sight. Amid the scene of death and devastation, what stood out prominently was the Awami League's election symbol- a boat riding the crest of a wave-all over the place, even in the remotest village and habitation. Big boats and small boats-just boats all over.

Back in Dhaka, the apathy of the common people towards the plight of their own kinsfolk was even more shocking. They went about their normal business unmindful of the disaster. Eid was approaching and shopping centres were busy. Blankets and tinned milk meant for the cyclone-affected people had already found their way into the open market. They were being sold openly. Beggars had practically disappeared from the streets of Dhaka. They had made a beeline for the relief camps set up for the calamity-affected people, collected all the relief goods-condensed milk, blankets, etc.-and had sold them.

The mishandling of the cyclone disaster was another factor which caused speculation about the fate of the elections, Some of the leaders

Brigadier Siddii as a young officer.

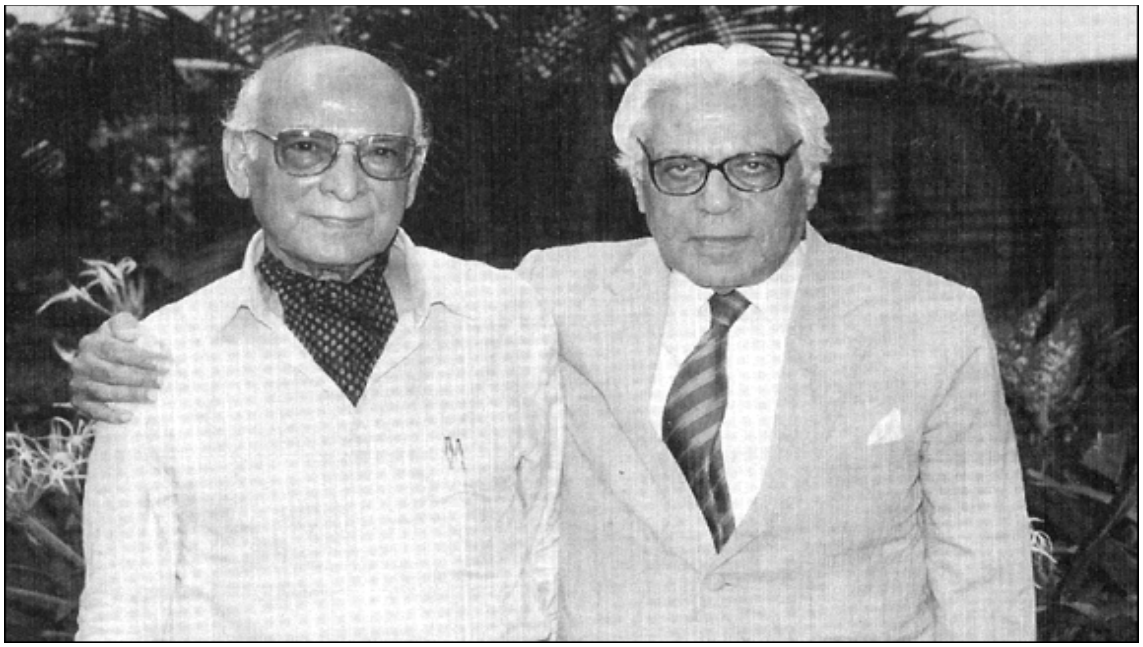
from West Pakistan, particularly those from the rightist parties, actually demanded a postponement of the elections. However, at a press conference, held at the Governor House on 27 November, Yahya finaly set at rest all such rumours. The elections, he said, would be held according to the announced schedule and that there was no possibility of postponement. He boldly fielded questions about the inability of his administration to help East Pakistan sooner than it had done.

'No government in the world,' he said, 'could handle a disaster of that magnitude single»handedly. My government has done its best. Let the new government do still better, when they come to power', He said that when the new government was formed he would not be there. He declared that martial law would continue until the Constitution was framed by the National Assembly, authenticated by him, and power was duly transferred to the elected representatives ofthe people. He parried questions about the six-point program and said that he had spelt out his own five-point program in the LFO. Yahya's press conference was a great success. Shortly afterwards, the chief election commissioner also announced that elections would be postponed to 17 January only in the cyclone-affected areas. Thus, in the midst of the disaster there was much relief.

The president stayed back in Dhaka for the Eid holidays. He returned to Islamabad on l December. In his message on the eve of the elections, he urged the voters to vote for the ideology and integrity of the country. The leftist parties interpreted this as a veiled attempt at influencing the minds of the voters in favour of the rightists parties, particularly the Jama'at-i~Islami. The administration still believed that there would be a fragmentation of vote. According to their assessment, the Awami League would not get more than 60 per cent of the seats in the assembly. The impartiality and non-involvement of the government, which had been somewhat compromised by the LFO, wore even thinner as the election date approached.

Umar's outfit had been busy throughout the election campaign, Their main aim was to weaken the Awami League's vote-drawing power. Lieutenant Colonel S.D. Ahmad-a Dhaka-based martial law officer-openly bragged that he had some Rs 5,000,000 to play with. He was Umar's principal staff officer in East Pakistan. The colonel had established his contacts with the Qayyum and Convention Muslim Leagues. He was close to Abdus Sabur Khan, Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, Nurul Amin, Khawaja Khairuddin, Maulvi Farid Ahmad etc., and boasted openly of having them at his beck and call. The

Riding through a water obstacle with Colonel Mohammad Attaul Ghani (M.A.G.) Osmuni. Deputy Director Military Operation in the deployment urea ofthe first East Bengal Regimenl. south of Lahore. after the ceasefire in l965, Cul. Osmani_ raised, trained and commanded the rcbel Mukti Bahini Force during the l97l civil war, On the emergence of Bangladesh, ln: was prmnoted full General and appointed Communder-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Armed Forces.



lskander-Al-Karim, an old lriend and colleague. Brigadier Siddiqi wears thc regimental lie, presented ln him by Lt-Gen Klmwaja WasiudtIin_ Culuitcl-in-Cl1xet` ot' the East Bengal Regiment.

rightist parties~Jama'at-i-Islami, Pakistan Democratic Party, and the Qayyum, Council, and Convention Leagues in East Pakistan~had decided not to contest against each other but were to put up joint candidates against the Awami League. Even after the cyclone when the Awami League had emerged practically as the sole challenger in the field, the administration still refused to come to terms with reality. There was even a suggestion to use the army actively 'as a show of force' during the elections. Mercifully, however, the suggestion was thrown out of the window.

As it happened the election results dashed all fanciful dreams to the ground. The rightist parties suffered a crushing defeat. Mujib and Bhutto emerged as the two most powerfull political figures-each in his own wing-with nothing in common between them except their frenzied passion for power. Of the total 300 elected seats in the National Assembly, the Awami Leagie won 160 out of the 162 seats for East Pakistan, whereas the Pakistan People's Party won 81 out of the total 138 seats allocated to West Pakistan.

The army was not happy with the results. Gul Hassan summoned me for a discussion after the election results were known. He was very annoyed with the intelligence agencies-civil and military-for their totally unrealistic appraisals and assessments of the situation. He said that my PR assessments were about the best- better than those of all the other agencies put together.

Bhutto gloated over his victory. In the course of a meeting with Gul, he boasted that 90 per cent of voters from the armed forces had exercised their franchise and voted for his party. Gul, however, did not agree with him.

'If at all,' he said, 'that would be true of the few who voted at all, belonging to odd static units.'

Nonetheless, he was impressed by Bhutto and his victory.

'Let`s back Bhutto,' he said

Back Bhutto? Why and for what reason? I asked myself without openly reacting to the suggestion. He also sent for the director military intelligence, Brigadier Iqbal Khan, and suggested that the two of us should put our heads together and analyse the situation. Mujib was no friend of the army and might seek a drastic cut in its size and power. That would disturb the status quo, Bhutto was nearer home in West Pakistan. He had won his biggest majority in the Punjab from where came 75 per cent of the army's rank and tile. He would, therefore, be more reasonable and would not touch the army.

The die had thus been cast in Bhutto's favour. The election results, unfortunately, all but wiped out the champions of Islamic ideology. The Islamic slogan appeared to have lost its mass appeal. People had voted for newer slogans and programmes, newer and fresher ideas. Islam, which till then was supposed to be the core to the concept and reality of Pakistan, became practically irrelevant.

The elections-the first ever direct elections in the history of Pakistan-thus delivered a severe blow to the Islam-pasand (Muslim religious) parties. They also swept away almost a generation of politicians who had been active in politics from the heyday of pan- Islamic idealism of the early l920s. The tenuous link of a common religion between the two wings, already overstretched through years of mutual rancour and recriminatiorn, had reached a breaking point. As for Pakistan itself, people had somehow gotten used to the name: it was like their identity card, their badge of sovereignty, their international passport, and they cared for it despite all the political ups and downs. They had learnt to live with it and were routinely, even if unemotionally, attached to it. It was, however, more of a symbol than a force to reckon with.

Between the administrators of the country and its people, a strange love-hate relationship started to grow in the inter-provincial context. In the provinces, i.e. the regions which emerged as all powerful components of the delicately-woven national fabric, Pakistan itself came down to a lower rung of priorities, but it survived nonetheless. The elections had created a political triangle with the armed forces as the base, and the Pakistan People's Party and the Awami League forming its two sides. At the apex stood Pakistan, uncertainly poised and dependent entirely on how well the two sides behaved and for how long the base provided support.

The president congratulated the leaders of the two majority parties on their outstanding electoral victories. The gesture was, however, a mere formality-an effort to keep up appearances. The election results could not have been farther from his calculations. The LFO, providing the framework for the elections, had been hopelessly and irredeemably compromised by the results. The five principles of the president, as embodied in the LFO, could not have had a hollower ring. Neither the PPP nor the Awami League had fought the elections within the given framework, While the former used socio-economic programmes and foreign policy as its chief vote-drawing instruments, the latter sought a referendum on the six-point programme for the economic and

political emancipation of Bengal. The Awami League-a predominantly regional party with a wholly regional programme- emerged as the single largest party at the national level. This created a most untenable situation. The right of a provincial-cum-regional party to frame the national Constitution and run the national government for the next five years, was not acceptable.

The mood in Dhaka after the elections could not have been a quieter and calmer one. It was the most relaxed city in the country and stood in sharp contrast to its earlier political temper and volatile attitude. Dhaka celebrated its electoral victory with remarkable sobriety and tranquillity. There were no victory parades, no rounds of self- congratulations, no insults for the vanquished. Mujib went to see his aged parents at their home village Tungipa in Faridpur, His post-election photographs reflected the softer lines of his face in contrast to the harsh, bloated image seen during the elections. The 'ugly' Mujib acquired a softer touch and a friendlier look than before.

The mood in West Pakistan on the contrary was one of simultaneous ecstasy and agony. The victors of the PPP were in ecstasy while the rightist factions and splinter groups presented a picture of agony, They were in complete disarray. Stalwarts like Miarr Mumtaz Daultana, Qayyum, and Shaukat Hayat managed to catch the victory train by the skin of their teeth. M.A. Khuhro and others were completely routed. Iama'at-i-Islami, the best-organized party, could not have been in a sorrier plight; it won only four seats, Maududi's ideological castle collapsed like a house of cards. It had been a most traumatic experience for the rightist factions. A new generation of leaders had emerged to take charge of the affairs of the country, Punjab voted massively for Bhutto's PPP. In the city of Lahore, Allama Iqbal's son, Dr Javid Iqbal, lost his seat to a labour worker; Asghar Khan lost to an ordinary lawyer, Khurshid Hassan Meer, in Rawalpindi. People had voted for their party rather than for an individual. The PPP got a great deal more votes than expected causing a sense of hubris in the party. Bhutto himself contested from four constituencies and won from three.

Within a fortnight of the elections, Bhutto flew to Lahore and received a hero's welcome. He addressed a rally in front of the provincial assembly building, waxingly eloquent about his victory, He spoke of the valiant people of Lahore and described Sindh and Punjab as the 'traditional bastions of power'. Earlier, in an interview with the London correspondent of the Times, Peter Hazelhurst, he spoke of a 'two prime ministers' arrangement. He was surely not going to

'dissipate his majorities' in the House by sitting in opposition for the next five years.

The 'bastion of power' statement of 20 December was highly resented by the Awami League's secretary-general Tajuddin. Reacting to the statement, he rebuked the PPP chief for harking back to the past. It was precisely for the purpose of doing away with the traditional bastion of power, he said, that the elections were held and the Awami League would not allow a return to the past. As the majority party of the country, it had every right to go ahead with the task of framing the Constitution, with or without the co~operation of the PPP.

Bhutto's statement on his party's position also drew much criticism from the minority parties. His blank refusal to allow the 'defeated elements' any significant place or standing in the post-election power play, was considered the worst example of monopolistic party politics. Bhutto and his party had even made intrusive contacts with the generals-Gul Hassan and others-to mobilize support against Mujib. The Awami League was not to be allowed, under any circumstances, to ride roughshod on the basis of their landslide electoral victory. 'Uncertain and divided for a while over their post-election strategy, the generals would soon rally around Bhutto as their hero and leader. Instructions issued by HQ CMLA to keep all sensitive political materials 'ready for burning' were withdrawn shortly. The implication was not too veiled. It was assumed that the pre-election status quo would continue and power would remain with the army at all levels. What measures were to be adopted to delay the restoration of a political order did not seem to matter as much as the emerging compulsion that it had to be deferred somehow. Bhutto would be backed to serve as a counterforce against Mujib.

Meanwhile, contacts between the president and Bhutto were initiated. With the leaders of the majority party sitting over a thousand miles away, these contacts acquired a conspiratorial overtone. Without overtly and directly reacting to the rounds of Bhutto-Yahya's téte-a- téte, the Awami League announced a meeting of its MNAS and MPAS on 3 January, at Dhaka's Paltan Maidan for a formal oath-taking. The meeting took place and all the parliamentarians took an Olympic-style oath to stand by the party programme. Although the party's six-point programme was not specifically mentioned, it was obvious that there could be no deviation from it.

The oath-taking ceremony was probably the biggest strategic blunder that Mujib made after the elections. Intended to serve as a

show of collective strength, it actually served to dilute his personal hold on the party apparatus and strengthened the hands of the syndicate dominated by Tajuddin, Nazrul Islam, Qamaruzzaman, Tofail, and the other hardliners. The oath-taking also provided a lever to the Pakistan People's Party against the Awami League and resulted in a hardening of attitudes against the Bengalis in the West Pakistani civil and military establishments, Mujib, as the leader of the majority party, was expected to visit West Pakistan. His visit was eagerly awaited by leaders of the small parties of West Pakistan. However, let alone Mujib, even his secretary-general, Tajuddin, did not visit West Pakistan. Mujib's Bangla-centric strategy created much bad blood against him and his party in West Pakistan. It was taken for granted that either he did not care for West Pakistan, or was a poor tactician politically. He did not show the acumen and maturity that was legitimately expected of him as a national leader.

The psychological breach between the two wings thus continued to widen instead of narrowing down in the aftermath of the elections. Bhutto sent his emissary, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, to Dhaka towards the end of December. He was well received by Mujib. On the face of it, it appeared that on a reciprocal basis Mujib was quite willing to leave Bhutto alone in West Pakistan.

On ll January, the president flew to Dhaka and stayed there until 14 January. He had several meetings with Mujib during his stay. Apparently, an understanding was reached concerning Yahya's own position after the National Assembly was summoned and the constitutional process got underway. Mujib agreed to let Yahya stay on as president alter the national government was formed under the new Constitution. Mujib had also agreed, in principle, to let Yahya stay on as the C-in-C of the armed forces. The president, before his departure, described his talks with Mujib as satisfactory and in an indirect and oblique reference, called him 'the fixture prime minister of Pakistan'.

On arrival at the Karachi airport, Yahya was asked to explain his remarks about Mujib. He said that it was normal for the leader of the majority to form the government and that was all he had meant by calling him 'the future prime minister'. It could safely be assumed, however, that Yahya's statement was not loose talk but a calculated manoeuvre aimed at, first, to set the military up against Mujib, and second, to provoke the Pakistan People's Party, From Karachi, Yahya flew by helicopter to Larkana-Mr Bhutto's hometown. The president

was to go there for a 'bird shoot' and was supposed to meet Bhutto only incidentally. However, he landed in Larkana with his entourage of generals and admirals as the personal guest of Mr Bhutto, and was driven straight to Al-Murtaza, Bhutto's ancestral home.

Al-Murtaza had been renovated to receive the president and the generals including Peerzada, Hamid, Umar, and Commodore (later Rear Admiral) U.A. Saied. Larkana thus became the turning point in Pakistan's politics. It deepened the political involvement of the martial law administration and left no doubt about their preferred party. Bhutto indulged and entertained his guests in the best tradition of the wadera (feudal lord) hospitality.

Yahya's Dhaka statement had produced the expected reaction from the PPP. Their stand was, and rightly so, that if Mujib was to be the prime minister, the presidency should go to Bhutto only. I had a meeting with Hanif Ramay, editor of the Musawat, the party newspaper, in Lahore. He was not too happy about Yahya's pronouncement. It was not the president's business, he said, to nominate the prime minister. The matter should be left to the National Assembly.

In any case, Ramay said, he had held talks with Bhutto on the subject of his becoming the president, and the latter was averse to being a constitutional figurehead. Personally, Ramay did not wholly share Bhutto's reservation. According to him, much would depend on the personality of the president. He gave the example of Governor General Ghulam Mohammad, who had proved to be stronger than Khawaja Nazimuddin, the prime minister. He also referred to Jinnah, who was in absolute command and control of the government, and even a formidable prime minister like Liaquat Ali Khan, mattered little at the highest level of policy-making and the conduct of state affairs. He felt that Bhutto must, therefore, accept the office despite the obvious constitutional handicaps. He was sure that, in the course of time, these handicaps would be overcome.

Ramay also expressed his unhappiness over the increasing involvement of the army in politics. Their job was only to hold elections, convene the National Assembly, authenticate the Constitution, and then return to the barracks. Everything else should be left to the elected representatives of the people, he said. Reactions in the Punjab (of the bureaucracy and the army) to Yahya's statement were equally unfavourable. No one had reconciled to the idea of a Bengali coming to power with an absolute majority. They felt that

Mujib would only serve to plunder West Pakistan and take all the wealth away to East Pakistan. The army, on the other hand, feared that a Bengali prime minister would weaken the army, so much so as to practically destroy it.

On 24 January, Bhutto left for Dhaka along with a complement of fourteen party members and was well received by the Awami League, Mujib's absence at the airport was, however, noticed and resented. Nonetheless, by coincidence or by design, Mujib and Bhutto ran into each other on the way. They both stopped and greeted each other. Mujib told Bhutto that he was hurrying back home to be in time to receive him there. The talks began in a friendly atmosphere. For a while it appeared as if everything was proceeding well. Bhutto said he now had a better comprehension of the six-point programme. He conceded to five and a half points almost straightaway, the only unsettled half-point related to foreign trade, but that was also negotiable. Reports from Dhaka were encouraging. Towards the end of his three-day stay in Dhaka, Bhutto went on a five-hour river cruise with his host. That raised hopes all around. A cruise would have been unthinkable in the event of a deadlock. Before his departure, Bhutto assured every one that the talks would continue.

Meanwhile, a new development took place that put back the clock of political compromise. On 25 January, two Kashmiris hijacked an Air India Fokker and forced it to land at Lahore airport. The passengers were allowed to disembark but the hijackers refused to release the plane. They threatened to blow it up unless the Indian government ordered the immediate release of their comrades-in-arrns in Indian jails. The entire affair seemed ominous. On his arrival at Lahore airport from Dhaka, Bhutto, accompanied by one of his party men, Mubashir Hassan, went straight to meet the hijackers occupying the plane. He had talks with them and later described the hijackers as freedom fighters. On 27 January, the plane was blown up.

This was a real disaster. Bhutto and his party supported the action. Mujib and Sardar Qayyum, the Azad Kashmir president, denounced it. Mujih demanded an immediate enquiry. While accepting the hijacking as a fail accompli, he called the destruction of the aircraft unfortunate. The Indian government reacted strongly to the event. They demanded an explanation and claimed damages. The stand taken by the Pakistan government was that the hijackers were not Pakistani nationals and, therefore, the government was not responsible for their actions. Bhutto supported the government. India retaliated by placing a ban on PIA

inter-wing flights over India. The distance between the two wings suddenly increased from a 1000, to over 3000 miles all the way round the coast via Sri Lanka. The National Assembly was about to be convened. Mujih had already suggested 15 February as the date for the inauguration of the assembly. The rerouting of PIA planes via Sri Lanka all but upset the tentative schedule besides highlighting the long and tenuous link between the two wings.

February saw the PPP and the Awami League drifting further away from each other. The earlier conciliatory posture had given way to open confrontation. Bhutto wanted a consensus on the future constitutional arrangements outside the assembly, insisting on some assurance to that effect from the Awami League, He was not prepared to go to the assembly to 'rubber-stamp' the Awami League Constitution. He referred to the Awami League's majority as a 'brute majority' and the National Assembly as a 'slaughter house'. He said that he would not have his party MNAS travelling to Dhaka for the inaugural session of the National Assembly, to fall as 'double hostage' to India and the Awami League. Meanwhile, his meetings with the president became more frequent and even longer, The Awami League also stiffened its posture and insisted on its right to frame the Constitution as the majority party. The six-points, it maintained, were public property and there was no question of a compromise on that. Bhutto also started meeting the other West Pakistani leaders of the minority parties although he did not get outright support from them. He considered 15 February, the date suggested for summoning the assembly, to be too close, and called for more time. He went to Peshawar around mid-February where he had meetings with Qayyum and Wali Khan. He had already met Maududi, Daultana, and others. He tried hard to muster the support of all West Pakistani leaders to persuade them to be with him.

Meanwhile, Umar had been doing a lot of errand running between the president's house and minority party leaders to dissuade them from attending the National Assembly session if the PPP decided to boycott it, which Bhutto had all but decided to do. On 15 February, the president announced 3 March as the date for the first session ofthe National Assembly in Dhaka. On the same day, before his departure from Peshawar, Bhutto declared that his party would not attend the assembly session on the date announced by the president. He needed more time. That did not, however, mean a boycott of the assembly; he would be willing to go to Dhaka as the leader of West Pakistan's

largest single party. He threatened to start a mass movement if the PPP was ignored and not accorded its due share in framing the Constitution as the single largest party of West Pakistan. A strong element of uncertainty thus entered the political climate.

The Awami League, despite growing frustration, at once cheered up and welcomed the president's announcement. All the leaders of minority parties of West Pakistan welcomed it too. The leaders of the minority parties started either leaving for Dhaka or getting their bookings made on PIA. Bhutto resented any suggestion of a boycott by his party. He had long meetings with the president in Rawalpindi and Karachi. Mujib was also expected to come to Karachi for talks on 26 February, but the visit never came through.

In the meantime, reports of troops being flown to Dhaka gained momentum and caused much speculation. On 22 February, a governors' conference was held in Rawalpindi. The decision to use force, in principle, was first taken at this conference. This was confirmed later by Major-General Rao Farrnan Ali Khan (MGCA) at HQ MLA, East Pakistan. He told me that his operational plan came up for discussion during the conference. It was a plan envisaging mass arrests of Awami League leaders, including Mujib. Farman showed me the pencilled draft of the operational plan containing the names and addresses of the Awami League leaders and details of troop deployment, including the East Pakistan-based battalions of the East Bengal Regiment. There was until then apparently no fear of mutiny by the Bengali personnel.

After the governors' conference, the president dissolved his Council of Ministers and invested the governors with martial law powers. Before that, the local military commanders had functioned as martial law administrators. The dissolution of the Council of Ministers and appointment of governors as martial law administrators caused much speculation. Where was the justification for this move, barely ten days before the inaugural session of the National Assembly? There was something not right and all sorts of doubts and misgivings started to circulate. After the governor's conference, the president flew to Karachi, ostensibly on his way to Dhaka, but chose to stay back in Karachi to meet Bhutto. In a press statement Bhutto said that he would announce his party's stand on the assembly's inaugural session at a public meeting on 28 February in Lahore.

Bhutto left Karachi for Lahore on 27 February to address the public meeting at Mochi Gate-Lahore's Speakers' Corner. The next day, at

the meeting, Bhutto demanded either a postponement of the assembly session or an extension in the 120-day period earmarked for formulation of the Constitution. He threatened the West Pakistan leaders, those already in Dhaka, and those intending to go there, with dire consequences. Anybody in khaki or eivvies travelling to Dhaka would do so at his own peril and 'will not be allowed to come back to West Pakistan with his legs intact'.

With Bhutto's declaration to boycott the assembly, the die was cast.

4

ASSEMBLY POSTPONED:

MUTINY IN EAST PAKISTAN

I LEFT Rawalpindi for Lahore and Karachi on 26 February. Even while I was in Lahore, talk of boycotting the assembly was in the air, I believed that a postponement would be disastrous, and thought of cancelling my trip to Karachi and returning to Rawalpindi post-haste. However, I decided against it for fear of exceeding my authority as the head of ISPR, and proceeded to Karachi according to my programme, The atmosphere in the town was thick with rumours. My talks with a number of senior journalists and friends showed that there was little hope for optimism. The indefinite postponement ofthe inaugural session of the National Assembly seemed to be a certainty. I returned to Rawalpindi on the evening of 28 F ebruaiy.

Bhutto had already spoken his mind. His Mochi Gate harangue was all fire and brimstone; an open threat to his opponents-civil and military. First thing on the morning of l March, I rang up the CGS, General Gul Hassan. He told me to come and see him directly. During our conversation I reported to him all that I had seen or heard during my stay in Lahore and Karachi. It was quite clear that Mujib would react fiercely to the news of a postponement. The assembly session must, therefore, be held as scheduled and, if necessary, adjourned the same day sine die after the president's inaugural address and the swearing-in ceremonies. The president in his address could appeal to the House to work in a spirit of accommodation and with a sense of patriotism. The adjournment period should be utilized by members, particularly those of the majority party, for mutual discussion and accommodation. The period would not count towards the stipulated period of 120 days set for framing the Constitution.

This arrangement, I explained to Gul Hassan, would save the National Assembly, appease Mujib, and allow the PPP all the time it

wanted for building consensus outside the assembly. The alternative to this arrangement would be a national disaster. Gul Hassan agreed with me wholly and told me to see the PSO, General Peerzada. I suggested that Gul Hassan should speak to Peerzada himself He said that he had been trying to get hold of Peerzada for the last three days but 'the fellow' was just not there. He told me to ring him up from his office and find out if he available.

I called Peerzada's office from the G-2's (Major Javed Nasir, later a lieutenant general and DGISI) office. His PA, Bokhari, answered the call. I said that I would like to see Pcerzada immediately to convey a message from Gul Hassan. I told him to call me back on the G-2's number within the next fifteen minutes and at my number after that. He called me back and told me that Peerzada was waiting for me. I drove to the President House immediately and was ushered into Peerzada's office on arrival. It was immediately apparent that Peerzada was not his usual self. He looked tired and worn-out, even a bit afraid. I imagined that he must have been wondering as to what message I was carrying from Gul Hassan for him. He might well have imagined a counter-coup or something. I could see anxiety writ large across his face.

After a normal exchange of greetings, I brought up the subject. There was an immediate sign of relief on his face. His fears were misplaced; there was no counter-coup. I repeated what I had earlier told Gul Hassan.

'Do you really expect much trouble in case of a postponement? He asked.

'No end to trouble. So much so that you will not be able to control it,' I answered.

He paused, and then asked, 'What can be done then? Do you realize that once the gates of the National Assembly are thrown open, Mujib will refuse to leave the House until he frames, and imposes his Constitution.'

'That might well be true," I said, 'but if you don't throw open the gates of the assembly, what is there to stop him from going to Paltan Maidan and announcing his Constitution from there. In fact, there is a real threat of a unilateral declaration of independence by Mujib.'

Peerzada nodded uncertainly. 'What about Bhutto?'

'I believe there is an answer to the problem' I said, and went on to explain the ways and means to save the assembly. 'Just call the assembly into session, and let the president address the assembly.

Adjourn it sine die after that and let the subsequent recess not form part of the period stipulated for Constitution formulation. The 120-day period would be logged from the date and time the assembly meets again. This arrangement should satisfy Bhutto and give him all the time in the World for talks outside the assembly.'

Peerzada pondered over this for a while. He repeated the argument that once the Awami League was formally ushered into the house, they could not be thrown out until they had framed the Constitution. I argued that framing the Constitution was to be strictly within the framework of the LFO. The draft Constitution, unless authenticated by the president, could not be placed on the statute book. The LFO would come into force in case Mujib refused to play by the rules. However, Peerzada would still not see the point. His mind seemed to be far away. He said that all these factors had already been considered and evaluated; perhaps a decision had already been taken and would be announced presently. He did not tell me when.

I drove back to my office, rang up Gul Hassan and told him that perhaps a decision had already been taken regarding the postponement of the assembly session. He had also come to know of it by then and told me to wait for an important announcement at I2 noon. At around 11 a.m. or so, I got an advance copy of the president's address to the nation for the press information department. The assembly had been postponed sine die. That the announcement came within twenty-four hours of Bhutto's Lahore speech was significant. The existence of a hotline between Yahya and Bhutto was conclusively proven. What lent an eerie touch to the broadcast was that it was read on behalf of the president by a newscaster. Even more frustrating than the postponement itself was the tone and the substance of the broadcast. Mujib was singled out for public reprimand.

Yahya gave three major reasons for postponing the National Assembly session. These were:

(l) A major political party, the PPP, as well as certain other parties, had declared their intention not to attend the National Assembly session on 3 March;

(2) The tense situation created by India had further complicated the issue; and

(3) More time was required to allow the leaders of the political parties to arrive at a reasonable understanding on the issue of the formation of the Constitution.

As expected, East Pakistan exploded like a powder keg. The reaction there was instant and tumultuous. The cricket match being played between Pakistan and the Commonwealth XI at the Dhaka stadium had to be abandoned after angry crowds attacked the playing field. Mujib announced a general strike and launched a 'non-violent' civil disobedience movement. He seized the civil government and issued his own orders and proclamations to run the administration.

I submitted a note to Gul Hassan suggesting an immediate remedial action, including the announcement of a fresh date for the assembly session, a broadcast to the nation by the president, and his immediate departure for Dhaka. I feared that even if Mujib himself did not favour a unilateral declaration of independence, he might not be able to resist the demands of his party men and all the public pressure that was piling up on him. Bhashani had already said Assalam Alekum to West Pakistan during the November cyclone. Ataur Ralunan had demanded autonomy on the basis of the Lahore Resolution. And then there were the extremists within the Awami League-Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam, and Tofail. How would any political leader be able to resist all these pressures? There was a dire need for an immediate and positive action to preserve the unity of the country.

In West Pakistan, the reaction to the postponement was equally strong. Even the PPP was shocked by the happenings in Dhaka. Bhutto claimed that he had not demanded a postponement of the session, but only the removal of the time limit of 120 days set for framing the Constitution, though he would never explain why.

On 3 March, the president announced his plan to hold a Round Table Conference on 10 March in Dhaka. It was an impractical proposal. Mujib ruled out the prospect of the conference right away. To even imagine that the Awami League, despite its overwhelming majority in the polls would agree to face some seven West Pakistani parties-Pakistan People's Party, Council and Qayyum Muslim Leagues, Pakistan Democratic Party (Nasrullah), the Jami'at-i-Ulama Pakistan (Noorani group), the Jami'at Ulamai Islam (Mufti Mahmud group), and Jama'at-i-Islami-at the conference table all by itself, was ludicrous. ln any case, for all practical purposes East Pakistan had been in a State of mutiny since 2 March. There were only four days left to 7 March, when Mujih was to address a public meeting and was supposed to make his unilateral declaration of independence. Time was running out.

Gul Hassan told Janjua 'What's that? What magic formula-ghidhar singhi-have you got, Abdul Rahman?', he inquired.

In the meantime, the ADC came and ushered us into Hamid's office. Gul Hassan asked me to explain the plan to Hamid. I explained the details as best as I could, stressing that if action was not promptly taken, there would be no end to the trouble. The assembly should be convened immediately either on 23 or 25 March, as both days were significant. 23 March was Pakistan Day, while 25 March was the second anniversary of martial law. Most important of all would be the president's visit to East Pakistan and the transfer of power at the provincial level. Hamid gave his approval and suggested that I see Peerzada, an idea which I promptly rejected. I had been to see him only the other day and it would hardly be proper for me to go again. It would be much better if he, the COS, spoke to Peerzada himself. 'All right/ he said, 'I will speak to the president.

The meeting gave me some sense of relief I happily believed that something positive would come out of it. But matters did not move the way I expected them to. On 5 March it was announced that the president would be addressing the nation the next day. I thought that Hamid must have conveyed our plan to the president and hoped for the best. The text of the presidential broadcast, however, shocked me completely. A fresh date for the National Assembly session, 25 March, was announced but the language used for the Awami League and its leadership was provocative and harsh. What the president gave with one hand, he took away with the other. The Round Table Conference was called off, but the president was to hold talks with Mujib. It was all very well except for the harsh words used against the majority party and its leader.

In his address to the nation on 6 March, Yahya held Mujih and the Awami League squarely responsible for the lawlessness and violence following the announcement postponing the National Assembly session.

Our East Pakistani leadership reacted in a manner which resulted in destructive elements coming out in the street and destroying life and property, [and in a more hectoring tone], I will not allow a handful of people to destroy the homeland of millions of innocent Pakistanis. It is the duty of the Pakistan Armed Forces to ensure the integrity, solidarity and security of Pakistanfa duty in which they have never failed. ..

On 4 March, Gul Hassan called me to his office. When I went there I found the Major General Abdul Khaliq Qureshi (VCGS), Brigadier Muhammad Iqbal ,(DMl), and Brigadier Riaz Ahmad (DMO), discussing the situation arising out of Mujib's refusal to attend the Round Table Conference.

'Well, what's your answer now?' Gul Hassan asked me. I was ready with my answer, having discussed it already with my staff, first thing in the morning. I suggested a three-point plan:

(a) The president must immediately announce new dates for the assembly session,

(b) He must leave for Dhaka immediately.

(c) There should be an immediate transfer of power at the provincial level, while martial law could continue at the national level until the new Constitution was framed.

The immediate transfer of power at the provincial level under the overarching umbrella of martial law at the centre, I explained, would in the circumstances, only amount to recognizing and accepting a fait accompli. The fact was that Mujib had already staged a civilian coup and seized all the apparatus of civil administration. He was the boss in East Pakistan for all practical purposes; all that remained to be done was for the government to recognize the fact. As regards the continuation of martial law, Mujib would have little to complain on that score once he had power in his own province, In West Pakistan also, the transfer of power should produce a calming effect on Bhutto, Wali Khan, and the others. Let this, I said, be taken as the first step in the transfer of power.

Gul Hassan accepted my plan at once. The DMI, however, was not in favour of the president's visit to Dhaka in view of the conditions there, given that there could be a threat to his life. 'So what,' I interrupted, 'isn't he a soldier, first and last, and as the C-in-C responsible for the safety and security of the country?'

The army had already been called in; there were incidents of firing in Dhaka and curfew was imposed there, and it would be only in the fitness of things for the C-in-C to be at the spot without any further delay. Abdul Khaliq agreed with me. He suggested that Gul Hassan should immediately take me to the COS, General Hamid. Gul Hassan and I walked over to Hamid's office. We first went over to Brigadier Gulistan Janjua, the PS(C). 'Siddiqi has got a plan that should work,"

Was he afraid of the army? Perhaps he was and who would not be, or was he playing for time to come to power legitimately and redress the injustices done to East Pakistan? He had swept the polls on the wave of Bengali chauvinism of which he himself was a product and prisoner. Mujib‘s monster, Bengali chauvinism, was now pursuing him relentlessly. A unilateral declaration of independence by him would have been too logical after his rhetorical assault against the West Pakistani establishment. The party hardliners and street mobs were all for a declaration of independence, but Mujib did not announce it on the 7th, and left the meeting abruptly, after raising the slogans of Joi Bangla and Joi Pakistan, one after the other.

A couple of days later I received a signal from the Eastern Command, calling me to Dhaka. At around the same time, the president also decided to go to Dhaka. The whole thing, however, was to be kept a secret until the president reached Dhaka. There were several reasons for the secrecy. First, until the day he left, it was not certain whether he would be going there at all; second, there was the fear of hijacking or some other plot to blow up the plane. We were told to keep the trip top secret and the first announcement about it was made on the 14th, after the president reached Dhaka. On the same day Bhutto made his historic announcement at a public meeting in Karachi, suggesting transfer of" power to the two majority parties in the two wings.

I left Rawalpindi for Karachi on my way to Dhaka on the l5th. I was due to leave at 5 a,m. on the 16th for Dhaka, but because the airport was enveloped by fog, the plane could not leave before 9 a.m. It was a long six-hour flight via Sri Lanka. There were no civilians or commercial passengers on board; only troops in civilian clothes. The atmosphere inside the plane was depressing. Since I did not know any one on the plane, I used the time to catch up on my reading and to get some rest,

I arrived in Dhaka on 16 March at about 4 p.m. local time. It was a deserted airport under heavy military guard. The crowds, normally seen on the roof of the terminal building, were missing. Instead, I could see thousands of black flags (symbol of Awami League’s protest movement) fluttering from every building. The only Pakistan flag visible from the air had been the one at the HQ MLA Zone-B in the vicinity of the airport. The green-and-white flag fluttered lonesomely in the midst of myriad black flags of all sizes and descriptions. All government and private offices closed after 2 p.m. The usual crowds

Yahya's 6 March harangue was perhaps the last straw on the camel's back. On 1 March, the governor, Admiral S.M. Ahsan had resigned after his failure to bring about some sort of understanding and working arrangement between Yahya and Mujib. Three days later, Lieutenant General Sahibzada Yaqub-Khan, force commander, martial law administrator, and acting governor, also resigned and left for Karachi.

They had both been against the postponement ofthe assembly and the use of force as an answer to the problem. Both Ahsan and Yaqub, and especially Ahsan, had all along been very sympathetic to the Bengali stand. Between the two of them, however, Yaqub had been more of a hawk. He had advocated a 'limited use of firepower' in case Mujib and his Awami League did not behave and the situation took a violent turn. He mentioned this to me some time after Mujib's massive show of party power at a public meeting on 3 January 1971 when Mujib put his party MNAs and MPAS under oath for an irrevocable commitment to his six-point manifesto.

Yaqub adumbrated his plan for the use of 'limited fire-power' in his so-called 'Exercise Blitz',* The expression he used for the actual use of force was a 'whiff of the grapeshot', in his own inimitable rhetorical style. 'We may have to give him [Mujib and his party men] a whiff of the grapeshot, should they reiiise to behave and go berserk', or words to that effect. The new commander replacing him was a rough and tough soldier, Lieutenant General Tikka Khan. The central government was going to get tough. On 7 March, Mujib addressed a huge public meeting at the Paltan Maidan. It was feared, almost taken for granted, that he would make his unilateral declaration of independence that day. The speech was all fire and brimstone, but there was no such declaration. He named the following four conditions for attending the National Assembly: (a) an immediate transfer of power, (b) withdrawal of martial law, (c) return of troops to the barracks, and (d) an enquiry into the conduct of the troops.

He ended it with the twin slogan of Joi Bangla and Joi Pakistan. lt remains quite a puzzle why Mujib did not declare independence on 7 March 1971. Earlier, while talking to the press outside the Poorbani Hotel, he partied questions about secession by saying, 'not yet', When his attention was drawn to the burning of the national flag by the mob, he said, 'no commentsi * See Fazal Muqeem

Khan, Pakistan 's Crisis in Leadership, 1973, pp, 53-54

in the streets were missing. Vehicular traffic was at a minimum. The very air at the airport was ominous and tense. Major Salik (my Press Liaison Officer-PLO Dhaka), Colonel Naqi, and Captain Aquil were on the tarmac to receive me. A one~star plated jeep stood by at the runway in front of the terminal building. The driver was a Bengali named Anis~ur-Rahman. I was to stay with Naqi and we drove to his house in the cantonment.

It was time for the afternoon news when we got home. I turned on the radio. Spirited Bengali music poured forth. Radio Pakistan Dhaka had already changed its signature from 'Radio Pakistan Dhaka' to 'Dhaka Baitar Kendrio' (Dhaka Radio). The only time it used Radio Pakistan was during the national hook-up for the news from Karachi. The music on the radio filled me with a kind of dread~a sinking fear of the unknown.

Yahya had been in Dhaka since the 14th. The talks had been going on between him and Mujib. Hope and fear about the course and outcome of the talks interacted in a sort of a shadow play. Things had gone too far-was this the point of no retum? Mujib was at the peak of his power; the crowds followed him unquestioningly. The first half of March had passed off peacefully, and the immediate threat to the unity of the nation seemed to have passed off. Some in the establishment admired Mujib for holding back on the unilateral declaration of independence while others thought it was a mere hoax, a temporizing ploy. He was merely buying time; his mind was made up and he would eventually settle for nothing less than complete independence.

The next day I rang up my various friends in Dhaka. They were generally glad that I was there, however the amount of warmth which used to be there in the past seemed to be missing, They were reluctant to come and see me in the cantonment. I spoke to Khairul Kabir of the United Bank Ltd. and requested him to lend me his car as I had a service jeep, and it was neither safe nor advisable to be n-[oving around town in a jeep. The city, including the Dhaka Club, had been placed out of bounds for all practical purposes to all ranks. Khairul immediately obliged and sent his Mercedes.

I reported to the President House on the morning of the l7t11. When I arrived, the talks between the President and Mujib were already in progress. In the lounge sat the Information Secretary, Roedad Khan, Ghulam Umar, S.D. Ahmad, and others. I looked for Brigadier Iskander Al-Karim (Bacchu) and found him sitting at a table underneath the

staircase that led to the first floor, He did not look too happy. I asked him as to how the talks were proceeding. He was not quite sure because he had not been associated with the discussion at all. 'They no longer seem to take me into conftidence,' he said with a smile. The military secretary to the president, Major General Ishaque, had even stopped tea being served to him at the regular intervals except on request.

As I sat with Bacchu, I heard sounds of hearty and relaxed laughter from the conference room at the end of the passage where the talks were going on. 'Thank goodness/ Bacchu exclaimed, 'you should have heard them yesterday-such angry exchanges! Today it sounds much better?

Mujib had accused the president of betraying his trust by unilaterally deciding to postpone the assembly. The president, on the other hand, accused Mujih and his party of overreacting by taking the law into their hands. When Mujib boasted as to how smoothly he had taken over the administration and how well he was running it, the president retorted, 'It's not you Sheikh Sahib, who has taken over the running of the administration, it's the bloody goondas And then the president said, 'Look Sheikh Sahib, every soldier is a gentleman until you make a badmash (ruffian) out of him.'

I heard Yahya laugh throatily every now and then. His message to Mujib was that as far as he was concerned, he did not care a damn about staying in power but that he would never compromise on the integrity of the country.

I sat with Bacchu for a while and then returned to the lounge where I met Roedad Khan, and congratulated him formally on his promotion. He had replaced the Bengali, Sayed Alunad, with immediate effect, subsequent to the events occasioned by the postponement of the National Assembly on 1 March. His staff officer, Jalaluddin Ahmad, was there too. Both had arrived from Karachi that morning. After a little while, members of the Awami League negotiating team, headed by Syed Nazrul Islam and Khundkar Mushtaq Ahmad, entered the lounge. Behind them were Tajuddin, Qamaruzzaman, Captain Mansoor Ali, and Dr Kamal Hossain. They all looked quite relaxed# even happy. Dr Kamal Hossain recognized me and introduced me to the others. I had known Qamaruzzaman previously. He too recognized me at once and gave me a friendly smile. Nazrul Islam asked, 'Bengali bhushan?' (Do you speak Bengali?) I said, 'No sir.' He smiled back, without mirth. Tajuddin looked like an intelligent and a hard-headed fellow-a man of few words-correct without being rude. Captain

Mansoor Ali had a bland face without a marked expression. Dr Kamal Hossain was his usual self, chubby and cheerful as ever. Qamaruzzaman had the puffy looks characteristic of one given too much to the bottle; he also smoked incessantly, Khundkar was the shortest of the whole lot. He was weak and frail but wore a most friendly expression on his face.

Not long afterwards, Mujib, escorted by the ADC to the president, entered the lounge. Mujib was tall and impressive and sported a handsome moustache. He held a pipe in his mouth. Everyone stood up as he entered. He went towards the entrance after a brief exchange of courtesies with us West Pakistanis. His white l970 Toyota, bearing the black flag, waited outside. Mujib, like everyone else in his party, wore a black arm-band as a mark of mourning for those who were either killed or wounded during the disturbances. Outside the president's house, a crowd of Bengalis swirled and jostled, shouting Joi Bangla. 'Good Lord,' Mujib exclaimed, as he heard the crowds chant.

Major General Ishaque and the ADC were there to see off Mujib. The others left aher him. As soon as they were gone, Ishaque tumed around and said, 'I would hardly ever have thought that Allah Almighty would have spared us all to see this day.'

'I thought they all looked rather happy,' I said.

'They can never be happy. God has not made them to be happy,' Ishaque commented.

There was something amiss or else Ishaque would not have been talking like that about his 'future prime minister'. I had a hunch that all was not well. Ishaque told me to take Roedad Khan to the Eastern Command HQs for an 'Ops immediate' call to Karachi. Roedad had a message from the president for Bhutto. We drove to the HQs Eastern Command and went straight to the office of the chief of staff to the martial law administrator, Brigadier Ghulam Jeelani. An 'Ops immediate' call was booked through the military exchange for Bhutto and was soon put through. Roedad told Bhutto that the talks 'were not on'. The quality of connection was poor as usual. He repeated the message several times to make sure that it was correctly conveyed to the recipient.

'The talks are not on sir,' he shouted again into the mouthpiece. 'You will hear from us soon. Meanwhile, you are not coming to Dhaka.'

' That was on the l7t.h. Roedad then rang up Peerzada confirming that the message had been conveyed to Bhutto.

We then drove to the cantonment via the airport. The atmosphere in the cantonment was as usual-calm and quiet, but there was a touch of foreboding in the air. It felt like the lull before a storm. The trees and plants, then so quiet, seemed ready to burst forth into an elemental frenzy and violence. There was an aura of suspense; you just did not know when all hell might break loose. Roedad and I went over to the Mess for lunch, We had dual (lentils) and some curry. The Bengali contractors, with two or three exceptions, had stopped supplying fresh rations. Meat, poultry, and vegetables were, therefore, in great scarcity. There was no beer in the Mess»not even a Coke or a 7-Up. Roedad was generally annoyed with the state of affairs. Jalaluddin agreed with his boss. The Bengalis deserved damnation for their insulting attitude towards the national army. The next day Roedad came to my office at the HQ 14 Division where we discussed the situation. He was highly annoyed with the Bengalis; there was a limit to everything and the Bengalis had gone much too far. He was for sterner measures to teach them a lesson. How on earth could they be so insolent towards the national army?

On l8 March, a Dhaka daily The People came out with a long article calling the Pakistan Army a ‘mercenary army’, comparing it to the occupation force of the East India Company. The article was strongly resented by the cantonment-based civil and military brass. The suggestion of clamping an outright ban on the paper was heatedly discussed but the decision was deferred until approved by President Yahya himself. The article had undoubtedly used an extremely provocati ve tone heaping all kinds of invectives on the army. Roedad was for a ban on the paper. I opposed it on the ground that such an action might gravely impact the Yahya-Mujih talks. Our duty was to help the chief in his mission, in other words, to obey and carry out the will of the commander. It appeared that the will of the commander, till then, was to bring about a peaceful transfer of power through negotiations.

From that day onwards, however, the atmosphere in the Dhaka cantonment started to change quite perceptibly, as troops went about armed, as if in an emergency. Also, orders were issued that all ranks were to be attired in their uniforms at all times, even when off-duty. The city area had already been placed out of bounds to the troops except those on duty. Outside the cantonment, troops were seen only at certain public buildings like Radio Pakistan, Pakistan Television Centre, the Telegraph Office and, of course, around the President

House, which was under heavy army guard. It had been cordoned off and nobody was allowed inside the small perimeter in front of the main entrance.

Although there was no curfew Dhaka looked strangely deserted and desolate. The largest concentration of people at a single place was at the airport, where between 3000-4000 Bihari men, women, and children, waited outside the terminal building for seats to board the west-bound PIA Boeings. Scores of cars were parked nearby. They were on sale for a song. Brand new Toyotas were selling for as little as Rs 7000/-_ Other household effects were also on sale. The ethnic violence in Chittagong, Khulna, Dhaka, and other areas of the province earlier in the month, had badly shaken the Biharis.

On the 19th, the situation suddenly deteriorated after a shooting incident outside Farm Gate in which two or three Bengalis were killed. On the same day, a larger and much more serious incident also took place. A brigade commander (Brigadier Arbab Jehanzeb of 57 Brigade), who was returning from Joydebpur after inspecting one of his battalions, the 2nd East Bengal Regiment, was mobbed by angry Bengalis near a level crossing. He asked the mob to disperse and clear the way for him. The mob refused, and someone in the crowd opened fire. The brigadier ordered his men to retaliate but the Bengali troops refused. This marked the beginning of the mutiny.

The CO of the battalion, a Bengali officer, Lieutenant Colonel Masud, was immediately relieved of his command and demoted to major. The incident was seized upon and exploited by Mujib and his party. They intensified their demand for the immediate withdrawal of troops and their return to the barracks. Surprisingly, however, the talks with the president appeared to be proceeding smoothly, It was officially announced that the president and Mujib had reached a settlement in principle. Members of the Awami League negotiating team at the president's house were all smiles. From the conference room came peals of laughter every now and then, with everyone sounding completely relaxed.

I saw Justice A.R. Cornelius, the law minister and head of the president's advisory team, hand over certain papers to Dr Kamal Hossain, to be examined and discussed further that evening. 'lt's alright with us,' Dr Kamal told Cornelius smilingly. Then, turning to Tajuddin or Nazrul Islam, Cornelius said, 'We are going to advise Mr Bhutto to join us in Dhaka with his team post-haste. Please make sure there is

no trouble when he arrives or else the purpose of the whole exercise could be defeated.'

Tajuddin assured Cornelius that Mr Bhutto and his team would be their 'most honoured guests'. And there was no question of any trouble whatsoever.

From the President House, Roedad and I drove to the HQ MLA. He booked an 'Ops immediate' call for Bhutto who was still biding his time at 70 Clifton, Karachi. The call was put through immediately. Roedad told Bhutto: 'Sir, the talks are on. You can now come to Dhaka with your party men.' That was on the 19th. The same day, M.M. Ahmad, deputy chief of the Planning Commission, also arrived with a joint secretary. So it appeared that the negotiating team had really come down to the brass tasks; the six-points were not altogether non~negotiable. Dhaka appeared relaxed for the first time since the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement on l March. I had been invited to dinner at Khairul Kabir's house that evening. Major Aquil was with me when I left for Khairul's house at 5.30 p.m. He had been of great help to me during my stay in Dhaka. A Bihari and a former student of the Dhaka University, he could manage his Bengali fairly well and that was a great asset at a time when the ordinary Bengali shopkeepers had virtually refused to serve non-Bengali speaking customers.

On our way we saw lorries carrying young men racing down the road. They were shouting the 'Joi Bangla' slogans. They looked fearsome in their collective strength. What if the mass fury breaks the banks? What if Mujib fails to control the monster of mob rule which he had himself unleashed? Despite the apparently relaxed atmosphere, Dhaka was still a tense city. The atmosphere was impregnated with a heavy sense ot" foreboding and uncertainty.

I asked Aquil to drive through the locality of Mujib's Dhanmondi house, I wanted to see for myself how the place looked. As we drove into the lane where Mujib's house was situated, we found ourselves in the midst of a milling, slogan-chanting mob. There were people from all walks of life, mostly young, in their teens and mid-20s-students, party workers-vociferously shouting 'zindabad and Joi Bangla' slogans. They were all eager to have a glimpse of their leader. The driver dropped his speed to a crawl and then brought the car to a dead stop.

We waited for the crowd to disperse. I experienced a moment of fear. Anything could have happened. They could smash the

windowpanes of the car and manhandle or even kill us. I did not look like a Bengali, nor did Aquil. The driver, despite his knowledge of Bengali, was a Kashmiri. It was very common in those days in Dhaka for a mob to halt one in the middle of the road, ask all sorts of awkward questions about one's loyalties and place of origin and force the person to sing in Bengali and raise 'Joi Bangla' and 'Pakistan Murdabad' slogans. Often they would smash the car and give the occupant a good beating»Dhaka belonged to the mobs. But surprisingly, on that evening of 19 March, while we were virtually trapped in the midst of the frenzied crowd, nobody so much as gave us an angry look.

They seemed to be in a state of euphoria. There were reports that an agreement had been reached in principle between the president and Mujib on the basis of the six~points programme, bringing their dream of 'Sonar Bangla' ('Golden Bengal') within their reach. The driver inched his way through the crowd which let the car go through without any hindrance. I heaved a sigh of relief as we drove out of the mélée. The remaining one or two miles to our host's house could not have been quieter or smoother. Away from Mujib's house, Dhanmondi looked almost deserted in the sleepy twilight hour. Most of the bungalows had their gates closed. The inmates, in most cases, had been indoors since 2 p.m. The bustling crowds and the mad rush of vehicular traffic, so characteristic of Dhanmondi in the evenings, were totally missing.

We were at Khairul's house in a matter of minutes and were warmly received by him. Even the servants were courteous. Khairul looked happy and relaxed, I shared his feelings. That moming I had seen Mujibur Rahman and his party men at the President House. Mujih had never looked happier since the talks began. I told Khairul that the tempers at the President House could not have been better. He had heard similar reports from his own sources. We both hoped and prayed for the success of the talks. He told me about the heavy pressure Mujih had been under from the extremists in his own party. That, he said, had made Mujib edgy and tense. He went on to say how Mujib's wife took good care of her husband to ensure that he was at his best during the talks. On the eve of the talks, Khairul had gone to see Mujib in connection with some urgent bank matters. Mujib had just retired tc his bedroom and Khairul was met by his wife. She told him that Mujib had hardly had any sleep for the last many days. She had, therefore, just given him a sleeping pill to ensure that he had a good

night's rest before beginning talks with the president in the morning. Like a good wife, she wanted him to wake up fresh and calm.

As we talked, one of the servants came up to say that there was a call for Khairul. Having taken the call downstairs he came back beaming. 'It was Khundkar Mushtaq Ahmad. He said everything was okay. An agreement had been reached between the president and the Awami League and would be announced shortly.' 'Khundkarj he went on to say 'is wondering who shall be the first to offer mishti (sweets)~ him or me.'

I left Khairul's house at around 8.30 p.m. driving back to the cantonment through a deserted looking Dhaka. The city was ominously desolate. Only the odd pedestrian was seen hurrying back home and there was minimum of vehicular traffic. At a little distance from the cantonment barrier, the driver stopped the car to remove the black flag from the bonnet. 'What a bother,' he grumbled as he took the flag off. We stopped to identify ourselves at the barrier. The soldier on duty saluted and waved us on, The cantonment, normally quiet at that hour, lay under a blanket of an oppressive silence. The silence was so pervasive that one could hear the proverbial pin drop.

The mood in the cantonment, which had so far been one of disgruntled passivity, seemed to be rapidly changing pace. The People had come out with yet another bunch of highly provocative news items, articles and cartoons against the armed forces. A cartoon captioned PIA 's New Passengers showed starved, gaunt-looking soldiers at the tarmac, gratefully welcoming a party of chickens from West Pakistan. The chickens were the new PIA passengers. The cartoon was a dig at the army running short on rations and other items of daily use because of the boycott by the local Bengali contractors. An angry lieutenant colonel came to my office abusing the Bengalis. They were all 'traitors and none of them could be trusted, even those in unif`orm'. Every Bengali~soldier or civilian-was aiding and abetting Mujib and the Awami League. He had had an incident with a Bengali mob near Farm Gate that very morning. Although he was in uniform the mob (he used an abusive word for them) had stopped his vehicle, calling him all kinds of names and only letting him go through when he threatened to use his gun. The officer was red with rage. I asked him what could the military do in a situation like that. There were over 20,000 armed Bengali personnel in the East Bengal Regiment and East Pakistan Rifles and the number of police officers was over and above that.

'No problem sir, all these bastards are a pack of cowards. They should be instantly disarmed and confined to the barracks, We do not need them; they should get out of our way.'
We went on to discuss the situation and the ways to resolve it. The officer was wholly opposed to a political solution and supported immediate military action.
'But what about the requisite force which any military action must have?' I asked.
He said that arranging the force was no problem. He needed only a company-plus for the city of Dhaka. With that force under his command, he would take twelve hours to control the troubled city and 'throw Mujibur Rahman at your feet',
He must be joking, I thought to myself He was an Engineer Corps officer and apparently had little knowledge or experience of handling troops in action. But the man was in dead earnest. He glanced through the pages of The People and went red in the face.
'The bastards' he raged. 'ls this the way to treat a national army? High time to sort the bastards out!'

Bhutto reached Dhaka on 2l March, All the other important leaders (MNAS-elect) from the West~Daulatana, Wali Khan, Shaukat Hayat, Mufti Mahmud, Shah Ahmad Noorani, had already arrived. It was only logical, therefore, that the leader of the single largest party should also have been there. After Bhutto's recent utterances, leading to the postponement of the National Assembly's inaugural session and civil strife in East Pakistan, a strong sentiment prevailed against him in East Pakistan. Nevertheless, we hoped that all would go well given the reports of an agreement between the president and Mujib.

The tempo of political activity in Dhaka picked up with Bhutto's arrival. Bands of people holding placards inscribed with anti-Bhutto slogans appeared on the city roads: 'Butcher Bhutto go back', 'Killer of innocent people go back'. Similar slogans were scrawled on a number of walls in the city. The atmosphere was beginning to change again. However, the news from the President House continued to remain encouraging. It appeared as if the talks were on course.

At a time like this, however, when Dhaka had been virtually under mob rule for some twenty days, the Bengalis had sworn vengeance on all non»Bengalis, and thousands of Biharis had already been uprooted and concentrated outside the Dhaka airport, an overt display of the hostility of the Biharis as a group, towards the Bengalis, was not easy to understand. Their morale was almost unnaturally high. They behaved

even more hawkishly than the military. They openly asked for military intervention to control the Bengali 'traitors'.

It was like the minority syndrome as was seen at the time of the partition ofthe subcontinent in the Muslim areas of India. The people of these areas knew fully well that Pakistan would not be a homeland to them, and yet they demanded it, and were in the vanguard of the Pakistan movement, It could be said that the non~Bengalis were the only Pakistanis left in East Pakistan. The Bengalis-particularly the youth-had been completely alienated and cut asunder from emotional and psychological links to Pakistan. They lived in Bangladesh and were ready to die for it. Mujib and the Awami League fully exploited the prevailing mood of unabashed xenophobia. For him the lives of a couple of million people did not count in the achievement of his objective of 'Sonar Bangla'. He continued to repeat his own statement that if a million Bengalis had lost their lives in the cyclones, another million or so could die in the struggle.

Mujib's outright denunciation of the enquiry commission set up by the government to investigate the circumstances leading to the military's tiring outside Farm Gate, resulted in a further deterioration of the situation. On the 19th, before inviting Bhutto to join the talks, the president reportedly mooted the idea of bifurcating the National Assembly with Mujib. I had tea with Mainul Hossein ofthe Ittdaq on the afternoon of the 20th. Mrs Akhtar Sulaiman (Baby), daughter of the late Prime Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and his only child, was also there. Mrs Sulaiman had come all the way from Karachi to be in Dhaka while the talks were on. She had sought an interview with the president and was waiting for an appointment. She hoped and prayed for the success of the talks. She was sorry that Mujib had not been able to get close to the army like the PPP.

Of the reported move on part of the president to bifurcate the National Assembly, Mainul Hossein said that by doing so, the president would be able to placate Bhutto on the one hand, and give Mujib a completely free hand in East Pakistan, on the other. The president, according to Mainul, had told Mujib that although the Awami League had an absolute majority in the House, it remained a regional and provincial party. In West Pakistan, PPP had emerged as the single largest party and hence could not be completely ignored. In case Mujib was unwilling to settle for anything less than framing a Constitution on the basis of his six-point programme, the president suggested that the best thing would be to let the PPP have a free hand in West

Pakistan. Under the proposed arrangement, the Awami League and the PPP, with their majorities in each wing, were to proceed with the task of framing the Constitution in their respective zones of influence and should work on mutually evolving a common formula to serve as the basis for the national Constitution.

According to Mainul, Mujib had agreed to the president's proposal readily. He assured the president that as far as he was concerned the PPP could have a completely free hand in the West. The Awami League did not intend to create any problems for the PPP. A free hand for the PPP naturally meant a free hand for Awami League in East Pakistan, Nothing would suit Mujib better. Mainul and Mrs Sulaiman were full ot" praise for the sagacity of the president.

Everyone expected Bhutto to accept the arrangement. It was the closest to the 'you' in the East and 'us' in the West call of the PPP chairman, and Mujib's demand for full provincial autonomy. Given a modicum of political will there was no reason why the two wings should not be able to evolve a common national Constitution out of the two drafts. That was not to be, however, as later events proved. The two-convention idea, reportedly initiated by the president himself, would explode in Mujib's face like a bomb. The bomb did not kill him but it killed Pakistan.

As mentioned earlier, the PPP chief arrived in Dhaka on the moming of the 2lst. There was a heavy security guard at the airport. A SSG officer, masquerading as a people's guard volunteer and armed with a Sten gun, hovered around Bhutto, covering him fully. Around the Inter-Continental Hotel where the party was to stay, the Awami League volunteers of the Rakhi Bahini (aimed wing of the Awami League) in their green and white caps (symbolizing the colour of the party flag) and armed with bamboo-sticks, formed a protective cordon around Bhutto. The personal safety of the visitors was their responsibility also. A glance at the volunteer corps, however, made one doubt their ability to do their job efficiently. It was a motley, shabby-looking rabble-over-enthusiastic and over-excited-going through their drills and movements outside the hotel.

A large number of demonstrators carrying anti-Bhutto and anti-PPP banners and shouting slogans, had also started marching up and down the roads in the vicinity of the hotel. The atmosphere was charged but not exactly hostile. The PPP chief along with his aides had his first meeting with the president on the evening of the 21st. On the morning of the 22nd, the president was to have another round of talks with

Mujib; Bhutto was to join the talks. It was said that Mujib was not agreeable even to sitting next to the majority party leader from the West. But the president used his personal charm and influence to make the two sit together.

It must have been the most amusing scene imaginable. Yahya was to mimic the two at his first press conference on 24 May in Karachi after the crackdown. The two would not even speak to each other, He made them sit next to each other and talk. After a while, Mujib suddenly rose to take his leave saying that he had a funeral to attend and must, therefore, leave at once. 'Such was the calibre of the man at a time like that. He was more concerned about attending a funeral than about the fate of the country'. That was Yahya's version of the opening part of the Bhutto-Mujib talks.

I saw Mujib come out of the conference room followed by Bhutto. They both came to the lounge where we had been sitting. We rose from our seats to greet them. Mujib's car stood outside waiting for him. Ishaque was also nearby. Mujib had the 'Joi Bangla' sticker placed on the windshield of his car along with the black flag on the bonnet. Outside the wrought-iron gates of the President House, a milling crowd waited for their leader shouting 'zindabad' slogans. He eyed the multitude of people from the terrace outside the lounge. 'Good Lord,' he said, 'what a crowd!', and lit up his pipe; looking completely relaxed. Just then an ADC hurriedly came to tell Mujib and Bhutto that the president wanted to see them at once. They both returned to the conference room. After a few minutes the ADC came out with a slip of paper and went towards the waiting crowd outside the house, This was the announcement about the indefinite postponement of the assembly, which in his 6 March address to the nation the president had scheduled for 25 March. The president wanted the announcement to be made while the two leaders were still in the house so that there was not even a 'bleat' later on.

After a while, both Mujih and Bhutto came out of the meeting room. Mujih looked even more relaxed than before. Bhutto looked preoccupied and lost in his thoughts. They walked over to the lawns and talked as they strolled. From the lounge I could see their backs only. At one point, Mujib impellingly grabbed hold of Bhutto's hand, drawing him closer to whisper something into his ear. Presumably, that was the time when he was supposed to have begged Bhutto to agree to a compromise to get the military off their backs.

'They will finish me off first and then they will send you packing', Mujib is reported to have said, They strolled up and down the lawns for a few minutes and then Mujib turned back and Went towards his ear. He must have remembered his 'funeral' appointment. He got into his Toyota and drove off Bhutto stayed behind.

Back in the cantonment, I found a sudden change in the atmosphere. The troops were seen carrying their arms which was not usual. Something was in the air. It was not in line with the rhythm of the political talks which appeared to be proceeding well. The president was expected to address the nation in a day or so and it was generally surmised, and hoped, that he would announce the end of the martial law.

Why then the heightened state of alert and readiness in the cantonment? Perhaps it was to keep the troops well within the perimeter as a first step towards their return to the barracks. Or was it something deeper than that? The suspense was deepening. Bhutto stayed in the hotel under heavy security cover. He addressed a press conference on the 22nd, and reiterated his plea for a broad consensus between the two major parties outside the assembly, hoping at the same time, that all would be well.

5

RUN-UP TO MILITARY CRACK DOWN

THE Awami League called for the observation of a 'Resistance Day' on 23 March, which was officially celebrated as Pakistan Day. Bhashani, the 'sleeping tiger', called it 'Independence Day' from his lair at Santosh. There was fear of a general flare-up. That may have been yet another reason to put the troops on alert. The president was to issue his usual Pakistan Day message on the day. Roedad was summoned by General Peerzada on the 22nd and told to draft the message. 23 March dawned on an ominous note, as the newly designed Bangladesh flag unfurled on the rooftops alongside the black flag as far as one could see. The Pakistan flag was seen only at the Flagstaff House in the cantonment, the HQ MLA in the second capital, and at the president's house. A cluster of national flags was also seen flying on the roofs of the Bihari homes in the Muhammadpur and Mirpur enclaves. At other public buildings, the Bangladesh flag flew alongside the national flag.

All the major English and Bengali dailies came out with special Bangladesh supplements hailing Mujib as a great national leader. Pakistan's image seemed rather blurred and undefined against the sharp and well-defined contours of Bangladesh. Rallies were organized at which homage was paid to the new flag. Mujib's house might as Well have been a shrine, to which people went in droves of hundreds and thousands in order to pay homage to the great leader. At Baitul Mukarram outside the stadium, retired Colonel M.A.G. Osmani, who was later to emerge as the commander of the Bangladesh forces, organized a rally of Bengali ex-servicemen. Lorry loads of young Bengalis came from far and wide to see the parade and take part in the rallies. The slogans of Jai Bangla and Sheikh Mujib zindabad were being heard all over. There was a complete strike throughout the city

and not a shop was open. Only crowded lorries sped along the main airport road connecting the suburbs with the city.

After a quick spin to the Inter-Continental Hotel, I came back to the Mess, deeply disturbed and depressed, and went to Roedad's room. He was happy that Peerzada had approved his draft of the president's Pakistan Day message 'without changing a comma'. We talked of the situation and agreed that it was not good and was rapidly getting out of control. Roedad was for stern military action. Presently, the telephone rang. Jalal took the call. It was General Umar at the other end. He invited Roedad to join the president for lunch at the Flagstaff House.

In the evening we met again and took a long walk together. Roedad was quite pleased with himself, He told me how the president had insisted that he should have something stronger than a coke or a squash to drink, The president himself had whisky while Roedad had a beer,

'You know what the president is like, so kind and hospitable] he said admiringly. The president had asked him if everything was under control with respect to the press, radio, and TV. He had ordered the immediate despatch of West Pakistani staff to take charge of the radio and TV stations. Dhaka TV (formerly PTV) had announced that it would not sign-off the transmission with the national anthem and the national flag. That seemed to be the last straw and we were all furious about this blatant display of disrespect for the national flag. The management of the media could not be left to 'he Bengali staff. They were all a bunch of 'traitors'. After a heated argtnnent, the TV people finally agreed to show the flag at a minute past midnight. Accordingly, the transmission was extended by two or three minutes and signed-off with the usual show of the national flag which actually was the moming of 24th.

As I drove to the President House on my routine morning visit, outside the barbed-wire pelimeter, I was mobbed by a crowd of young rowdy men shouting anti-Yahya slogan. It was an angry mob in sharp contrast to the one I had seen earlier outside Mujib's house. I was in uniform in my star-plated jeep. They spoke angrily in Bengali using abusive language. The words which I clearly picked up were 'Punzabi, shala Punzabii One of the young men came closer to the jeep. He looked straight into my eyes. I had never seen such hate, such black fury in my life as at that moment. It seemed as if he was going to attack me and drag me out of the jeep. I sat quiet and still in my seat

and tried to look as brave as I could, till the gate was opened and I drove in.

On the evening of 24 March, Colonel Naqi, my host, and I, took a short stroll across the deserted golf course. It was all so quiet and oppressive. Naqi also mentioned that something was in the offing»- perhaps a military action was going to be launched. According to his assessment, the talks had failed already. He spoke of Colonel S.D. Ahmad and Brigadier Jeelani, and how happy they both were. They were the real hawks and wanted the Bengalis to be 'thoroughly sorted out'. A day or two earlier The People had carried its usual anti-army, anti-West Pakistan propaganda. It also printed a story along with a sketch~map about the existence of a 'death ditch' inside Signals Lines in the cantonment, where innocent Bengali contractors-who refused to serve the West Pakistan army~were dumped after being tortured.

24 March 1971 was a day of high tension. The cantonment looked like an armed camp. Things had actually taken a turn for the worse since the arrival of Bhutto and his party men on 21 March. It seemed as if the point of no return had already been reached. However, the talks were still going on. Quite a few of the non-PPP West Pakistani leaders were in Dhaka; among those who I recall were Khan Abdul Wali Khan, Mian Mumtaz Daulatana, Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan, Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani, Maulana Mufti Mahmud, and Sardar Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo. The president was still in the city and it could still be hoped that a miracle might, after all, happen. The tension, however, continued to mount. The army's transit camp inside the cantonment looked fuller. There had obviously been fresh reinforcements from the West.

23 March being a holiday, there was no newspaper on the 24th. Papers appearing on the morning of 25th carried a statement by the Awami League secretary-general, Tajuddin, saying that the 'ball was now in the court of the president and his team'. His party had already declared 27 March as a protest day. It looked like a cliff~ha.nger. I was due to leave for Rawalpindi on the 26th and drove to the President House first thing in the morning to take my formal leave of Peerzada and Ishaque.

Before that, however, I rang up Bacchu. He happened to be at the Eastern Command HQs. He had also read Tajuddin's statement and was equally upset, He sounded deeply disturbed and very pessimistic about the prospect of an amicable settlement. I suggested that he talk to Peerzada to bring the latest developments to his notice. I volunteered

to accompany him, if necessary. He agreed half-heartedly and asked me to wait. He had booked a call for his wife in Rawalpindi and was waiting for it to get through. The call was put through soon. He spoke to his wife. Having finished his call, he still seemed uncertain about our meeting with Peerzada. Finally, he suggested that I should go on my own. He was not too sure if Peerzada would like to see him, 'You know how things are; I am a Bengali after all'. I understood his predicament.

Bacchu was already a suspect like all Bengalis. I was in two minds for a while-should, or should not I go to see Peerzada? I had never believed in overstepping my boundaries, and preferred, as far as possible, to stay out of political involvement. But the situation had a PR side as well and I thought it was my duty to convey my views to Peerzada. I had met a number of people from the press, and had learnt quite a lot about the situation from our talks. So I decided to drive to the president's house in Khairul Kabir's Mercedes. I was in civilian clothing.

The road from the cantonment to the president's house via the Inter-Continental was deserted. The approach to the President House, heavily barb-wired and cordoned off was also strangely deserted, with no slogan-chanting crowds and waiting newsmen outside as had been the case on the last three days. Dhaka was a desolate city.

Before leaving for the President House, I had rung up Colonel Mahmood Chowdhry, a Bengali staff assistant to Peerzada. Since I had requested him to inform the guards at the gate to let me in as I was not in uniform, there was no problem at the gate and I went straight to the lounge. Ishaque and the ADC were there. I asked the ADC to send for Mahmood Chowdhry. He came in presently. I told him that I urgently needed to see Peerzada. In the meantime, Ishaque asked him casually about the situation. 'Couldn't be worse,' he answered. 'It has taken an ugly turn. The Awami League is on the warpath. I know and understand these people. They will settle for nothing less than complete independence. Awful, isn't it?'

After a few minutes, Mahmood informed me that Peerzada was waiting for me out in the lawns. 'Please make it short~five minutes or so,' he said. I went out and found Peerzada waiting for me. We exchanged greetings. 'Yes', he asked, 'what's up'?' I began by telling him that I was off to Rawalpindi the next day. Then I gave him a quick run-down on the situation, hastening to draw

his attention to Tajuddin's statement. 'It's sort of a now-or-never message,' I said.

Peerzada reflected a while before commenting how deeply unhappy the president was over the happenings on 23 March (the raising of the Bangladesh flag, etc.). There was a limit to everything. That it all happened while the 'Head of State' himself was in the city, made it all the more intolerable, He also spoke of some 'rude' demonstrations against the president on his way to the cantonment, where he had gone on the 23rd for lunch with the commander, Tikka K.han.

'It appears] he said, 'that they have all gone berserk. This is certainly not the best way to press for one's demands. They are helping nobody by pushing the president so much. After all, it's his (the president's) job to ensure the solidarity of the country. You cannot throw it to the wolves, can you?'

He went on to recount all that the president had done to restore democracy through fair and impartial elections. He spoke of the president's desire to satisfy the political aspirations and demands of East Pakistan. He restored their majority by holding elections on the basis of one-man one-vote. All that was done in good faith-out of conviction and not out of weakness. Mujib had made the silliest mistake of his life by resorting to unconstitutional means of usurping power and provoking the armed forces, which he never should have done. 'The fact is that today his very name stinks in the nostrils of every soldier. He had no business to insult and humiliate the armed forces as he did. The man is a fool. He missed his best opportunity when he refused to visit West Pakistan after the president had already named him as the would-be prime minister,' he went on.

In the meantime, Bhutto accompanied by his party's secretary- general, J.A. Rahim, arrived at the President House. They got off the car and waved their greetings to the general. I made a reflexive move to leave, but Peerzada stopped me. He beckoned the visitors to proceed to the lounge. 'What then can be done?' he asked, 'Things have already gone too far. The army is furious-and rightly so. No national army in the world has ever been subjected to such public humiliation.'

I asked him if the intention of the administration was to have one or two Pakistans?
'One,' he said.

'But how?' I asked.

His answer was evasive, the wait-and-see sort. As I asked for his permission to leave, I said: 'I have a humble, a very humble request to

make sir, which is that, if this country is to disintegrate, let Mujibur Rahman preside over its disintegration. Please keep the army out of it.' As I took his leave, I fervently prayed in my heart for the president to address the nation as soon as possible to take the people into confidence. The growing sense of uncertainty was simply excruciating. While leaving I happened to look at the glazed veranda leading to the meeting room, and saw Yahya Khan glancing through a sheaf of papers. He was wearing a white shirt and gold-rimmed reading glasses, and looked thoroughly absorbed in his work. As I was to find out later, he was at that moment studying the draft of his speech which he was to make the next day from Islamabad.

I left the president's house with mixed feelings of elation and frustration. I felt gratified for the time and attention which Peerzada had given me despite his many pressing engagements, and frustrated because of the impression I got about the failure of the political talks. I did not know that the president had already decided to 'shoot his way through'-something I would come to know later. Back home, my host, Colonel Naqi, said, 'It seems the action is to begin at about midnight tonight."

Kishwar (Mrs Naqi) informed me of a call from Major Jalal, staff officer to General Hamid. The message was that I was not to proceed to Rawalpindi the next day. Instead, I was to report to the Eastem Command. Headquarters first thing in the morning.

I retired for my usual siesta with Solzhenitsyn's Full Circle, but found it hard to concentrate on it, or to sleep. What was going to happen? The question kept on haunting me. I was going to meet Badruddin that evening at the Inter-Continental, and he was to pick me up at 6 p.m. The clock could not have ticked more sluggishly that afternoon; time hung heavily on my hands. I was restless.

Later in the evening, Badruddin came in his Fiat. He too was visibly depressed. I avoided talking about the coming 'action'. But he himself had a feeling that by insulting and provoking the army, Sheikh Mujib had incurred the wrath of the armed forces. There had been no need for him to do that. He could have been more dignified and discreet; but such was the man. On our way to the hotel through an otherwise deserted city, we came across truckloads of Bengali youth raising 'Joi Bangla' slogans. Some of them were perhaps on their way home to the rnoffusil from where they had come for the day. Their slogans sounded more threatening and vociferous than before, or perhaps I was merely imagining things. We had a quiet drink at the hotel bar. Badruddin

was perturbed about the future of the Bihari minority in the province. Biharis had already suffered greatly. They were going to be the first targets of the Bengali wrath should any large-scale trouble break out. We left the bar at about quarter to eight. The lounge was very full, I found myself in the midst of a familiar crowd. Mazhar Ali Khan, Mian Mahmood Ali Kasuri, Noman Zuberi, and A.B.M. Musa of the Pakistan Observer.

I embraced Mazhar Ali Khan and we spoke a few words. He had just been to see Mujib but was not quite sure as to who was coming and who was going. He had been staying with Dr Rehman Sobhan. In fact, Dr Sobhan was waiting for him outside in his car. He suggested that I should go and say hello to the doctor; but I demurred. He introduced me to Mian Mahmood Ali Kasuri, the famous lawyer.

In the meantime Musa came up to me. 'The president has just left Dhaka,' he said.

'But he was here until just about a few hours ago,' I snapped, not knowing anything about his sudden departure.

'No,' Musa reiterated, 'he left at about 7.30 p.m.' I must have looked rather nonplussed. I shook hands with Musa, and left after exchanging the usual formalities with him. I could see that he was both peeved and frightened. He looked very dark in the face.

As I made for the door, I heard Noman Zuberi of Folk's Cigarettes accost me from behind. I had been trying to avoid him but in vain. He was perhaps the greatest of the hawks in the Bihari community and wanted every Bengali to be shot and killed. 'You should all be ashamed of yourselves] he harangued, 'what kind of an army are you to knuckle under these bloody Bengalis. Go and tell Yahya Khan to put on chooriyan (bangles) and pishwaz (costume wom by Kathak dancers) and dance to the tune ofthe Bengalisl'

I merely gave him a smile and hastened to leave. It was getting late already, Badruddin had to drop me back and I did not want to keep him waiting. We did not talk much on our way back. The fateful hour was going to strike very soon. The knowledge of the matter weighed heavily on my mind and on my conscience.

The road was practically deserted with just an odd pedestrian trudging along or a vehicle driving past. It was, however, absolutely clear-no barricades, no pickets, no fallen trees. At the cantonment barrier, we went though the usual drill of stopping the car and removing the black and the Bangladesh flags. I told the soldier on duty that my

companion, Badruddin, would be driving back to the city after dropping me. The guards on duty questioned me rather closely about Badruddin. Security had been tightened in view of the impending crackdown. Badruddin dropped me back home and as we took our leave told me that he would go first to his office where he had some work to do.

At around 11.30 p.m., I woke up with a start to the crump of rocket-launchers, the bang of tank shells and the stutter of automatics. The action had been launched-about an hour or so before the H- Hour, which was to have been 1 a.m. The attack was concentrated, Machine-gun bursts interspersed with the thunder of rocket-launchers and tank fire, were mixed with the sound of small automatics and artillery firing. The noise was absolutely deafening.

Everybody in the house was awake. The big bay window looked out on the street. Kishwar drew the curtains apart and we saw the horizon lit up with red flames. It was horribly eerie. Dhaka was buming. She recited verses from the Holy Quran under her breath. It had begun after all-days of suspense and uncertainty had suddenly given way to stark horror. Despite being forewarned, I was stunned, unable to think, finding it difficult to resign myself to the terrible reality. I lay down again to sleep. The next day was going to be a long one and I had to get some rest. I must have dozed off but woke up again about half an hour later. Kishwar was awake and sitting in a chair. ‘The telephone has gone dead,‘ she said. ‘Good,’ I said, ‘end of the awful suspense!’

The firing continued with unabated intensity but sounded more distant. The horizon was still aglow with deep orange flames. The troops had obviously spread all over town-patrolling and taking hold of strategic places and installations. The sound and fury of the guns was interspersed by sporadic and muffled ‘Joi Bangla’ slogans. The slogans were not concentrated. They did not issue forth from masses of people but small groups of individuals under attack. These too were soon silenced and the trail of fire seemed to travel deeper into the town and away from the cantonment.

Screams, chants, and machine-gun bursts pierced the layer of darkness like flying darts. While concentrated heavy firing receded into the distance, sporadic bursts of machine-gun fire could still be heard in close proximity. The chants of the slogan-raisers decreased and then virtually died out in the midst of an increasing volume of fire. I lay wide awake but strangely calm in my bed. Let alone answers,

even the questions were impossible to form at that moment. It was a total collapse, a chaotic turn of events-the dark and tragic finale to an era of constantly mounting tensions between the East and the West.

I finally dozed off, drifting through a maze of chaotic dreams and nightmarish visions. It went on like that until daybreak. The distant horizon was still ablaze; the first and still veiled rays of the rising sun gave it a lighter hue-a desolate incandescence. The sun rose painfully over the city. My morning cup of tea was already there at the bedside table, which I drank with relish and a sense of gratitude. I was soon out of bed attending to the early morning chores. Having shaved, showered, changed, and breakfasted, I moved out of the house.

The jeep was ready and waiting for me with the Bengali driver Anis-ur-Rahman at the wheel. He was armed with a Sten gun. He was very much his usual self-quiet, detached, and alert; only he looked tenser, perhaps a trifle frightened too. Maybe I was only' imagining things. It was so very quiet outside; nothing seemed to stir. The black flag atop the adjacent house looked like a deflated sail, its Bengali inmates stood at the balcony looking quite stunned. They stared at me clad in my uniform, visibly afraid. There was a stench of charred bodies and smoke in the air. It was all oppressively still.

The driver saluted smartly»his gun slung over his shoulder. What if he was to shoot me with that very weapon, I thought to myself; he could be very upset though he appeared calm and unruffled. He placed the gun in the rear seat and after I took my seat, climbed into his own and turned on the ignition. The engine purred into life, and we were off. A short cut to the main road took us through some uncultivated fields. They were deserted, very different from the normal busy scene. Suddenly to the right, at some distance from the jeep, I saw a dead body-flies feasting on it avidly. I turned my head to have a better look from the jeep bouncing over the rutted track. The body carried stab wounds-dried and bled-out,

Away from the body lay a broken transistor. There must have been a scuffle before the killing. The killer had obviously tried to snatch the radio from the wretched man. I wondered if the Bengali driver had also seen the body, and if he had, what did he think of it? We were soon on the main road driving towards the headquarters of the 14 Division. On the way, I was greeted by armed soldiers who smartly slapped their right hand across their chest. They looked so different from the last few days. Their faces were beaming and their heads were held high. There was an uncharacteristic energy in their movements.

Their saluting was sharp; and despite the visible traces of sleeplessness, they seemed alert and fresh. Their faces shined with triumph. The days of tension, humiliation, and waiting were over; their dignity and honour had been restored.

The improvised Shanty Market-sort of a convenience store-was a heap of ashes. The market had remained closed since the launching of the civil disobedience movement, despite the warning of the military against the consequences of a continued closure. This market had been put to the torch, Some of the charred remains still smouldered, exuding an unpleasant stench. A number of jeeps and trucks carrying soldiers passed us by-they saluted me smartly.

At the command headquarters all was quiet. I went to the chief of staffs office. Brigadier El-Idroos was in his seat. I knew him quite well. He did not look too happy with the state of affairs, and said something about the 'desirability' of the action having been taken earlier. He quoted his previous boss, Lieutenant General Yaqub, to prove his point. The general had made his plans as far back as l January-two days before the Awami League held their oath-taking ceremony at the Paltan Maidan. That was the time when, with a limited use of force, the evil could have been nipped in the bud.

No one, however, cared to listen to Yaqub and things were allowed to drift unchecked and get out of hand until now, It was now too late as the movement had spread out from Dhaka to every nook and comer of the province, like a small flame growing into a wild forest fire. It would not really be possible to control it now with the quantum of forces available. The Bengali troops were already in a state of revolt and could hardly be trusted. It was true in the case of both the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles and the Bengali police was no exception.

El-Idroos looked and sounded like a soldier left out of battle. He was the chief of staff of the corps but had been kept out of all the planning concerning the action. The entire operation was planned at the ML HQs in the second capital. I asked him where I would find General Hamid and others. My orders were to report to the headquarters first thing in the morning. 'Oh, that,' he responded, suddenly remembering. 'In that case, you had better go to the Flagstaff House. Everybody is there." I thanked him, took his leave and drove off to the Flagstaff House.

Minutes later I was there, and went directly into the drawing room. The first person I ran into was General Umar. He could not have

looked happier. I saluted him. He embraced me and said that he was glad to see me. Generals Hamid and Tikka were breakfasting in the adjoining dining room. Presently, I saw Rear Admiral Rashid, the naval commander, sitting in one of the deep leather sofa chairs. We greeted each other. The admiral, along with his staff officer, was about to leave for Chittagong. We exchanged a few desultory remarks about the situation.

In the meantime, Hamid entered the drawing room. He looked completely relaxed after a satisfying breakfast. Behind him was Tikka. I saluted the two generals and they were also happy to find me there. Tikka asked me if I had had my breakfast. 'Yes, sir, thanks," I said.

'All right,' he said, pointing to some oranges on a plate, 'have some of these. These are fresh from West Pakistan' An orange was an absolute luxury in East Pakistan and I graciously accepted one.
Hamid asked me as to what I had planned to do.
'Switch on the radio transmission straight away, sirl'
'Good,' he said. 'Go ahead'.
I took the general's leave and left the room~orange in hand. Out in the verandah, I met Umar again. I told him of my brief conversation with Hamid. I added that I was going to switch on the transmission with recitations from the Holy Quran followed by the announcement of the various martial law orders followed by recitation again. Until things got better, the air time would be divided between recitation, martial law announcements and, of course, the news from the national hook-up. The national anthem would be played at the usual hours but there was to be no music. He approved of the plan and suggested that I should also see Roedad Khan in the Mess. On my way, I could see smoke still rising in various directions while single rifle-shots and odd bursts of machine-gun fire rang out in the distance. Military trucks and jeeps kept speeding towards the city; they were spreading out.

I drove to the VIP suite of the Officers' Mess. Roedad Khan had just left. In the dining room, I saw General Osman Mitha on the phone, trying hard to get through to some distant place-most probably Chittagong. He was using the crisp service jargon and swear words to drive home his point to the person at the other end. I thought I should have a word with him before leaving, so I waited for him to finish the call. When he did, I greeted him and enquired as to how he was.

'What the hell are you doing here'?' he exploded.

'My job, sir. Right now, I am going to the broadcasting house to switch on the transmission."

'Damn the radiol' He swore.

I could see that he was in no mood to talk so I saluted him and drove to the radio station. The scene on the way to the cantonment barrier was much the same as it had been an hour ago-ominously quiet, with wisps of smoke rising from the ashes of the Shanty Market. Only the cawing of the crows had become louder and more persistent. They had alighted upon the carrion and were busy picking on it,

Beyond the Kurmitola barrier, the horrible remains of the previous night's operation became suddenly visible. The road seemed to have been ploughed in places. Whole trees had been felled to block the road. Cement pipes and electric poles had been used as barricades. Rocket launchers must have been used to clear the road, leaving big craters behind.

Near the notorious Farm Gate, the signs of violence and destruction were more prominent. That appeared to have been the most well- defended locality with barbed wire and piles of concrete. It was amazing how well and quickly the agitators had prepared their defence. The road had been absolutely clear when I had driven through it the night before. The shops beyond the airport had all been burnt down and were still smouldering. The military columns had moved from different sides to link up at the university campus which was the stronghold of the agitators. The first column moved south towards the city on the main axis, the second followed a south-easterly direction, sweeping through the second capital and the refugee colonies of Mirpur and Muhammadpur, and the third via the industrial area of Tungi.

It was obvious that the Awami League agitators had got advance information of the operation from the type of defences and barricades they had erected. They must have had a good two to three hours warning; the reason why the H-Hour had been advanced by about an hour and a half. All routes for going forward had been blocked; hence the use of concentrated fire-power to tackle and demolish the obstacles but not to kill. At places, the metalled road had been churned up just like whipped cream. It was so badly damaged that one had to make a detour to avoid the wide swathes of craters and broken patches. The jawans (troops) had, however, established their checkposts and pickets at key points in front of Farm Gate.

My jeep was the only starred vehicle on the road and I do not remember when I had been saluted this much, and so well, by passing jawans during my more than two decades in the army, as on that day. They looked relaxed, their faces beaming, in sharp contrast to the

complete desolation around. The traffic lights functioned normally, changing from red to amber and green. It was an eerie sight even at that hour of the morning. The only person I saw was a homeless beggar, crouching under a shop front. He was naked and his unwashed body was almost scaly and smeared with dirt. He blankly eyed the scene, saw the jeep, and crawled deeper under the shop front for protection. Not a sound could be heard except for the steady whir of the motor engine.

Between the day before and now, Dhaka had moved from the path of protest to the road of death and disaster, The truckloads of slogan- chanting young protesters with bloodshot eyes, thirsting for revenge- now seemed to belong to some distant past. The black and red-and- green Bangladesh flags still fluttered from the housetops but seemed to be without the force and fury which surged behind them until the other day; they might as well have been lifeless rags. Dhaka was a ghost city; a monstrous skull with flies buzzing in and out of empty eye sockets. My head swarmed with madly racing chaotic thoughts. I found myself incapable of digesting the situation. We pulled up outside the closed entrance of Radio Pakistan. A soldier's head appeared over the gate and dropped instantly behind to open it. We drove in. Another series of smart salutes followed. I got off the jeep and walked into the studio to find Roedad along with Major Aquil there.

A number of Bengali staff members had already been brought to the station under armed escort. They were translating the martial law rules into Bengali, I greeted Roedad; he was happy to see me there. I told him about my meetings with Generals Hamid and Tikka. Presently, a vulnerable-looking Maulana-a Bihari from Muhamn1adpur»and other members of the radio station staff, joined us. Salik also came along. I told him to leave the affairs of the radio to us and help out journalists trapped in their offices. We were to meet at 12 noon at the Pakistan Observer office,

The Bihari Maulana narrated the story of his sufferings at the hands ofthe Awami League 'hooligans'. He told us how they were forced to haul down the national flag on 23 March. Incidentally, the Bihari colonies of Muhammadpur and Mirpur were the only places other than the cantonment, the second capital, and the President House which carried the national flag on the 23rd. The Biharis bravely resisted the Bengalis' attempts to insult the national flag. The Maulana was happy that the authorities had finally taken a decision to deal with the situation with a firm hand. It was still not too late.

We decided to switch on the transmission with the usual signature 'Radio Pakistan Dhaka' replacing Dhaka Baitar Kendrio. The programme opened with a recitation from the Holy Quran followed by a translation. Then Aquil went on air with the special announcements in English, followed by Bengali translation, The announcements were repeated and the transmission ended at around 11.30 a.m.

I left for the Observefs office a little while later. I was at the wheel myself and the Bengali driver sat next to me. Near the Dhaka Club, I saw another couple of dead bodies lying spread-eagled. Roadblocks and barricades, all blasted off by rockets or tank fire, could be seen at several intersections and checkpoints. The 'Ramana Greens' were a vast expanse of awesome desolation~lush green under a bright sun. The Gulmohar and Champak trees stood still as if lost in an agonizing meditation of the scene. Sporadic rifle-shots could still be heard in the direction of the campus.

I saw a Dodge truck appear from behind the roundabout at the road intersection. Salik sat in the front seat next to the driver. Almost simultaneously, we slowed down and then stopped alongside each other, In the rear sat Mehboobul Haq (Mehboob Bhai) of the Pakistan Observer. We got off and exchanged greetings.

'How are you Mehboob Bhai, is everybody okay?' I asked.

Mehboob thanked me, looking visibly shaken,

'What about the paper, when is it coming out?' I asked.

Mehboob said that they would try to bring it out but it might not be possible. Most of the staff had been trapped in the office since the night before without any food. They had to go home first to get some food and to rest. Besides, the telephones and the news agencies were all inert. I asked him if it would be possible to print just a sheet or two carrying the various martial law orders and the speech of the president which he was going to make that evening. Then I suddenly realized the absurdity of my own suggestion: even if the paper were printed, who would read it? The city was under a 48-hour curfew. I asked Salik if he had been able to provide curfew passes to the press staff He said he would tackle the issue after lunch. Right then he was taking Mehboob Bhai to ML HQs in connection with some work, Major General Farman wanted posters to be printed and plastered all over the city walls assuring peace-loving, law-abiding citizens that they had nothing to fear. The crackdown was only against a handhil of miscreants and there was nothing to be afraid of whatsoever.

Posters on the walls of a town under curfew? It sounded like a bad joke. Who would step outside to look at the posters? Mehboob had his own technical problems: the job-work section of the press had been without workers and the right size of paper required for the posters was not available. I told Salik that it would be utterly stupid to have the posters printed and pasted on the city walls. It would be much better to have small pamphlets printed in hundreds of thousands which can then be air-dropped. There was, therefore, no need to take Mehboob to HQs, He could go and tell that to the general from me. Salik demurred but very soon came around to my viewpoint. Mehboob heaved a sigh of relief. He regretted the fact that it had to happen this way. He had never been a supporter of Mujib, had contested and lost elections against an Awami League candidate. He was a trade unionist heading the East Pakistan Railways Workers' Union.

I looked around and was deeply saddened by what I saw. Not too far away down the road lay another dead body. The vultures had come down, crowding in thick and fast from the top of the banyan and Gulmohar trees. They cawed fiercely, stabbing the still air like a sharp knife. Street dogs wandered in search of their share of the dead.

I decided to go to the Observer office to drop Mehboob Bhai and help the staff trapped there. It was getting hot and sultry and I was sweating around my collar already. The uniformed Bengali driver sat stiffly next to me. What might have been his feelings, I wondered! What if he was to hit me on the head with the butt of his gun? We came upon more dead bodies on the way. The vultures squealed and flapped their monstrous wings as they fed on the carrion.

6

TOWARDS A PARTING OF WAYS

MY mind was in a whirl, swarming with stray thoughts. What stood out loud and clear was the death of the pristine Pakistan (14 August 1947-25 March 1971). The rest was a confused mess-a bundle of stinging sensations. We pulled up outside the Observer office and went upstairs. Musa, K.G_ Mustafa, and many others were there. Musa looked absolutely dark with repressed fury. K.G. smiled wanly. It had happened after all, The others were simply stunned, They were won-ied about their families. I gave them each a word of good cheer and directed Salik to get them back to their homes immediately. If curfew passes were not readily available, he could drive them home in his own vehicle.

I left the Observer office after a while, and drove up to Manik Mian's Ittqfaq office and was shocked to find it completely demolished, It was all in ruins. The Ittefaq had behaved most responsibly throughout the crisis. I wanted to get down and see if there was anybody there but then decided against it. What was the use? There was not a sign of life there. Not far away from Ittefaq 's office, I came upon a stretch of charred shops and could not readily recognize the place. Later I was told that it was the old Thateri Bazar, the Sher Shah of Karachi-where all sorts of junk, old motor tyres, tubes, and spares were sold. I also tried to look up Badruddin in his Morning News office but my knocking on the door drew no response from inside.

On my way back to the cantonment, the scene was much the same as before-deserted bazaars and roads and speeding military vehicles. The traffic lights still functioned, pale under the blazing sun. I picked up my luggage from Naqi's house and drove to the Mess where I was going to reside for the rest of my stay in Dhaka. The atmosphere in the cantonment was strangely relaxed in sharp contrast to the deserted town.

There was no curfew within the cantonment limits and people went about their business, unafraid and unhindered. The armed jawans smartly saluted me by thumping their right hands across their chests. Their eyes shined and their faces beamed. After dumping my stuff in my room (which had been occupied by M.M. Ahmad before I checked in), I went over to the office where I had a few things to do, Salik also came back after lunch looking happy. He was at the martial law HQs for most of the night and had witnessed the conduct of operations from there.

He told me something about the messages exchanged between headquarters and the leading 57 Brigade under Brigadier Jehanzeb Arbab. After Mujib's arrest, the first message radioed to HQs was, 'He11o, hello, the big bird is in the cage. The smaller ones have flown away. Everything under control?

Salik said that the previous night's operation had been a great learning experience for him. What he had learnt during those few hours at the headquarters, he could not have learnt in a lifetime Everything went off beautifully and according to plan.

I dictated a signal to Salik to send to Rawalpindi, to summon Colonel Qasim to Dhaka and in view of the present emergency, request the military secretary's branch to recall Major Amir Afzal Khan, then on leave preparatory retirement. Though pleased with the tum of events Salik regretted the fact that only Mujib could be arrested while the others had escaped. This was because information regarding the action had been leaked out. Yet he hoped that everything would be under control within the next 72 hours or so. The news from Chittagong was not too good and there had been reports of a mutiny at the East Bengal Regimental Centre. The way and speed with which the Bengali troops had reacted showed only too clearly that they had been preparing for the showdown and were ready for the worst of eventualities.

In Dhaka itself, the Bengali personnel of the East Pakistan Rifles at their Peel Khana HQs, had offered stiff resistance the night before. One West Pakistani major was killed in the fighting. The mutineers were, however, soon overcome and disarmed. News from other garrisons particularly Jessore, Comilla, and Rangpur was still confusing but, by and large, everything was said to be under control. I asked Salik whether there was any chance of newspapers appearing the next day. He said that the Observer and Purbo Desh staff were quite ready, but were reluctant to be the only ones to bring out their daily editions. As regards Morning News and Dainik Pakistan, most of their staff had been missing and so there was little chance of those being published,

At around 4 p.m., I left the office to go to my room for a little rest before going to Radio Pakistan again. My jeep stood outside but the Bengali driver was not there. I-Ie must have been disarmed and confined to the barracks. The magnitude of the operation was beginning to dawn on me. It was no ordinary military operation in aid of civil power but a concerted punitive drive against a whole people and their land. Presently, the telephone rang. Brigadier Ghulam Jeelani Khan was at the other end. He asked me to report to the HQs. 'Alright', I said and drove straight there. There was much activity at the headquarters with staff officers walking briskly back and forth from one room to another carrying files. I asked for Jeelani and was presently shown into the operations room. He received me with an air of relaxed courtesy.

Three or four days earlier, a Bengali mob near Farm Gate had blocked his jeep and told him to get out. The Bengalis had shouted anti-army slogans and insulted the brigadier who happened to be in civvies. They knew who he was but did not care. Jeelani, according to his own statement, faced the situation squarely. He told the mob that he was a soldier and was only doing his duty. Someone in the crowd thought better of the whole affair and let him go through.

Jeelani was relaxing on a sofa. It was obvious that he had slept very little. He offered me a seat and was most affable. He regretted the fact that it had to happen this way, but felt that the Bengalis had left the army no choice. No army, he continued, could go without food. If you denied the soldier his rations, there was nothing to stop him from looting the shops. The Bengalis we. decent, God-fearing people, but they had been completely misled by Mujib and everyone had seen the result. There was a limit to everything, and especially to the army's patience. It was, after all, a national army and not a foreign force. But the way the Bengalis had insulted and provoked the army was unprecedented in the history of the subcontinent. Even the Indians, during the worst days of the anti-British agitation, had not behaved this way with the British army. The president himself had been most reluctant to take an action but he was left with no choice.

According to Jeelani, the President actually decided on the necessity of action on the 23rd as he drove to the cantonment for lunch at the Flagstaff House. On his way he saw all those Bangladesh flags and was greatly hurt and surprised. Until then, perhaps, he had not realized how much the situation had deteriorated. Mujib was unfortunate. He could have had the premiership of the whole country if he wanted.

The president had made a sincere effort to appease him as long as he accepted a unified Pakistan. But the fellow was really after complete independence. Autonomy was only a camouflage for his real design, which was 'secession', and no national army or government worth its name could allow that.

There was no doubt, I put in, that Mujib had played his cards all wrong but perhaps all the bloodshed could still have been avoided. Would it not have been better to have rounded up the real mischief- makers and to have them sent to jail? That was all very well, Jeelani said, but that would hardly have been enough considering the gravity of the situation. The fact was that a rebellion had taken place-a situation in which the mobs had simply gone berserk. Such an extreme situation called for extreme measures. He was sure nevertheless that everything would soon be all right. The 'miscreants' would be identified and punished to set an example for others.

There had been a number of telephone calls as we talked, all of them operational. At the end of each call, Jeelani would say 'Roger'. The operation till then was proceeding according to plan. On the wall hung a large map of the Dhaka city and its suburbs, indicating the operational area. Perhaps, at that stage, the assessment was that the trouble would not spread out of the city environs, and that it would take an estimated time frame of 72 hours to complete the first phase.

Having discussed the situation in general, Jeelani asked me as to what I planned to do on the PR side. I gave him a brief account of all that we had done since the morning-re-activating the radio transmission, contacting newspapers, etc. The TV team from the West was also expected at any time to get on with the normal transmission.

'What about the foreign correspondents in Dhaka? How many are here at the moment?' he asked,

Salik put the number at around twenty or so. Most of them were at the Inter-Continental, some at Purbani, and a few at other places.

The brigadier was not quite sure if it would be of any use to let these correspondents continue to stay in Dhaka. Neither was I. It is always difficult to handle foreign correspondents in a grave situation like this, Besides we had very little to show for ourselves. The military action and curfew, the shooting and burning, the general state of ruin, were hardly the things one would have liked to project to the outside world. That was the truth and the rest-the official version-would be of no interest to them. I suggested that Jeelani speak to the information

secretary, Roedad Khan, and get his views on the matter. He said that the problem was mine to sort out. And there the matter ended.

I drove back to the cantonment and found Roedad in his room. I broached the subject with him. He was not quite sure of what to do and wanted to consult the foreign office in Islamabad about the whole affair. Meanwhile the telephone rang; Jeelani was on the other end. He spoke to Roedad and told him that all foreign correspondents were to be expelled without delay. It was a command decision and had to be implemented immediately. Roedad spoke about his idea of consulting the foreign office but the brigadier would not listen. Of what use were these correspondents in a situation like this, he asked. There was also the concern of their personal security. The town was under curfew and some of the correspondents had already tried to create a problem by moving out of their hotels during curfew hours. Roedad agreed.

After a while Salik came looking for me. He conveyed to us the commander's decision about the expulsion of the foreign correspondents. We told him to go ahead with its implementation. Most of the correspondents were in the Inter-Continental, but some were also staying at Purbani, A few odd journalists were either staying with friends or at other less expensive hotels, It was not very difficult, however, with the help of intelligence officers to find their whereabouts, In fact, an intelligence officer of the eastern command, a lieutenant colonel, came to look us up presently with a list of all the correspondents in Dhaka. I told the two of them (Salik and the colonel) to get on with the job. The orders were that the correspondents were to be taken to the airport and packed off to Karachi or Sri Lanka by the first available flight, latest by the next day. All their notebooks and negatives (exposed camera films) were to be thoroughly checked and any objectionable material retained, to be returned later, through the diplomatic channels.

I told Salik that I would look them up at the Inter-Continental later in the evening. Roedad heaved a sigh of relief after the two officers had left. After a while we went to Radio Pakistan. It was close to sunset and the Dhaka sky was an endless vista of variegated colours- with different shades of red, orange, and purple smeared here and there with lazily rising wisps of smoke; the fires were going out but they were still visible enough to make a greater visual impact against the setting sun.

The cantonment looked busier than it was in the morning. More pedestrians were out on the pavements than earlier. Truckloads of soldiers and one or two ambulances drove past on their way to the city, and back, Beyond the barrier, however, it was totally deserted. Only soldiers were seen at their posts. The airport was quiet but then we saw a PIA Boeing coming in to land. Its red and green signals blinked eerily and the roar of its jets sounded almost like a thunderstorm.

I drove the jeep with Roedad sitting next to me and a West Pakistani driver at the back. (The Bengali driver had since been removed). The army post at Farm Gate was well manned and sandbagged. There was no traffic to control but the lights worked perfectly. The naked man at the shop front I had seen earlier was not there. I pulled up outside the radio station gate and honked. A soldier promptly peered over the gate and opened it. We drove in and got out of the jeep. The place was very well guarded-a young lieutenant was in command. Soldiers had set up a camp kitchen out in the lawns behind the studios. Others lay sprawled in the passage, resting after almost 24 hours of strenuous vigil.

Suddenly there was a burst of machine-gun fire not very far away. Then single rifle shots. Though startled, Roedad and I both kept still. A number of Bengali artists were in the studios. They had been picked up from their houses and brought to the station under army escort. Recitation from the Holy Quran followed by the announcement of the martial law orders had continued altenately throughout the day. There were some new announcements including the one about a three-hour relaxation in the curfew the next morning. I read out these announcements myself and signed the logbook. Then I joined Roedad in the office,

The president's speech was scheduled for 7_l5 p.m. (EPST). We waited for it eagerly. The speech was heralded by the national anthem as was customary. Then the president spoke in a brash, hectoring tone. He traced the events leading to the action of the previous night, denouncing Mujib and his party men, as 'enemies of Pakistan':

He, (Mujib) attacked the solidarity and integrity of this country-this crime will not go unpunished. We will not allow some powenhungry and unpatriotic people to play with the destiny of 120 million people ....

I have ordered the armed forces to do their duty and fully restore the authority of the country. , .As for the Awami League, it is completely banned as a political party.

Yahya went on to announce a ban on 'all political activities throughout the country' and imposition of 'complete' press censorship.

He ended his address with an 'appeal to his countrymen to appreciate the gravity of the situation for which the blame rests entirely on the anti~Pakistani and secessionist elements...' Thus he slammed shut the door of a political settlement in the face of the country's largest democratically-elected party and its undisputed leader. He behaved like a general in a dual tactical and strategic bind, unable to realize the gravity of the situation. Roedad's face beamed as the president denounced Mujib as a 'traitor' and declared that the man 'would not go unpunished'. 'Yar iman tuza hogia,' (my faith stands revived), he said.

The speech was followed by translations in Bengali and Urdu. We came out of the studio to take a little stroll out in the lawns. Sporadic bursts of small arms pierced through the nightly silence every now and then. I thought of the foreign correspondents. By then, all of them would have been rounded up and brought to the Inter-Continental. I suggested that Roedad should come along but he demurred since he had some instructions to issue to the radio staff for the next morning. So I drove to the hotel myself Two or three army trucks stood outside the hotel. Inside, I saw Salik and a couple of army officers with practically the whole lot of correspondents in the lobby. They were all ready to leave. One of them asked me: 'Brigadier, is this an order'?'

'Yes,' I said, 'it is an order.'

I stayed on only for a few minutes and then decided that it would be prudent to leave, I was in uniform, and the American correspondents addressed me as 'General'. It would have been most unpleasant to get into an argument with them and run the risk of attribution and misreporting. The day's work had finished and I left for the cantonment. The fiery traffic lights still functioned with a diabolical energy. We were stopped at a couple of checkposts by the soldiers but they let us go through on seeing me, To my left I saw red flames leaping to light up a section of the night sky; there were more fires. The gunfire had also become more persistent and the volleys concentrated. The action was on again. The cantonment looked much more normal than the rest of the city which resembled a ghost town. I drove to the Mess and after dinner, retired to my room.

The president's speech rang in my ears with menacing clarity. He had foreclosed all his options. It was one thing to denounce Mujib as a traitor but quite another to ban the party altogether. All chances of a

political dialogue were doomed as a result of the ban. It was quite clear that Yahya was in no mood for a political settlement. Once he had decided ‘to shoot his way through’, he had to go on shooting- last man, last round. Nobody could predict how long it would take. But it was certainly going to be a long haul-very much longer than the 72 hours estimated earlier. The military action on the night of 25- 26 March' was bound to be followed by mass violence and bloody protests to bring the army in direct conflict with the people. When two hostile forces exert equally strong pressure to dislodge each other a blood bath becomes unavoidable.

It was no longer just a law and order situation in the ordinary sense of the term. It was a mutiny--an open rebellion and more. The way the EPR personnel offered resistance on the night of the action showed that they had all been mentally and militarily prepared for it for a long time. They were ready for mutiny when the bugle was sounded and they proceeded according to plan. Mutiny spreads like a contagion when backed by political strife and agitation. Chittagong, which had the largest concentration of the Bengali troops, faced an immediate threat. In fact, as I came to know later, trouble had already broken out there. Early on the morning of 26th, rumours had already reached the Bengali personnel in Chittagong that Dhaka had been ‘razed’ to the ground and taken over by the military. The Bengali troops, already in a mutinous frame of mind, reacted violently to the news and went berserk. There was hardly a battalion of West Pakistani troops in the area and the Bengalis virtually took control of all the vital installations there. This was certainly an alarming state of affairs.

Brigadier Ansari (later major general), the logistics area commander, flew over to Chittagong to take command of the situation, which he was able to partially control with the help of the navy. He cleared the city of the rebels and pushed them into the hill tracts. The rebels had concentrated along Kaptai Road and had seized the radio transmitters installed there. News from other areas like Jessore, Comilla, and Rangpur was equally disturbing.

On the morning of 26th when the CGS, General Gul Hassan, rang up Tikka Khan he was informed that action had been launched and was proceeding according to plan. Gul Hassan would tell me later that until he had rung up the commander, General Tikka Khan, he had known nothing about the actual launching ofthe action. He had called the commander to find out about the president’s programme and the situation in general. The whole action, according to him, was planned

locally with the blessings of the chief of stafi General Hamid, who had been present in Dhaka.

On the morning of 27th, the commander held a staff conference. Everybody exuded confidence and looked fully satisfied with the progress of the military operations. Brigadier Jeelani spoke at length about the need for psychological warfare to win over the hearts of the Bengalis. The process of cultural alienation from West Pakistan must be stopped forthwith, he said. Urdu script must replace the Bengali script which was the same as the Hindi script, and all Hindi features of the Bengali culture should be erased. It was high time, according to the brigadier, to go 'flat out' in that direction. There was nothing wrong with the Bengali masses as such; they were a simple God- fearing people. It was the educated middle class-the teachers, lawyers, intellectuals (mostly Hindus, according to him), who were behind all the un-Islamic ideas and motivation amongst the youth.

The evil must, therefore, be nipped in the bud. The location of the Dhaka University also came in for discussion. Its present situation, right in the heart of the old city, was hardly desirable. Instead of a teaching institution it had turned into a virtual hub of all subversive activities and a sanctuary for all anti-social and anti-state elements. It was time to shift it elsewhere, perhaps to Savar, about eight miles out of the city limits. The students had, during the past few years, emerged as the strongest pressure group in politics and the farther they were from the city, the better it would be for everybody.

At the commander's conference, it was also suggested that the broadcasting of the 'Rabindra Sangeet' on the radio should be stopped immediately. After some discussion, however, it was decided to go slow on that. The 'Rabinrha Sangeet' was the folk music liked by the Bengali masses, so why deprive them of that? Let them have their till of the music and wish them happy listening.

Brigadier Jeelani suggested the name of one Punjabi professor, Dr Jilani, in connection with the psychological warfare campaign. The professor had been teaching at the Dhaka University for nearly eleven years and he felt that there were few who understood the Bengali muse better than he did-attack the Bengali muse and everything would be all right. Mujib enjoyed his popularity only because of the cultural and ideological vacuum at the national level. The moment that vacuum was filled there would be no problem. Too much of freedom was not good for the Bengalis, They did not have it for centuries and were likely tc make a mess of it when they did!

After the conference I drove back to my office. On my way I saw an endless stream of people-men, women, and children with their respective loads-on the move. Where were they off to»I did not know. I failed to see any emotion or expression on their faces. They simply moved on-children trying hard to keep pace with the grown- ups and women struggling behind with children on their shoulders in their single-fold saris. They looked like a crowd of 'aliens'-a people without a country, a people on a foreign soil, There were two or three hours left until the resumption of curfew and so they all moved quickly. It was a heart-rending sight. All along the road the human stream rolled on. There was much activity by the roadside; people had come to make their purchases and handle other urgent business. Everybody was in a hurry.

Back in the office I had a meeting with Salik and Aquil. In the meantime, the reception phoned to inform me that Mohammad Hanif, my uncle-in-law, and Salam Bhai, the editor of the Pakistan Observer, had come to see me. Salik told the receptionist to let them in. They both were unkempt, unshaven, and thoroughly shaken. The civilian telephones, they said, were still out of order and it was impossible to find out what had happened to friends and relatives. Dhaka was in the grip of terror. They suggested that immediate steps be taken to restore civilian morale, The exodus must be stopped. Peace committees should be formed and the martial law administrator should go on air to assure the people that they were safe. There were reports that Chittagong had been bombed and razed to the ground; the Bengali troops disarmed and shot. Unless appropriate measures were promptly taken to counter the rumours, the situation was bound to get worse.

There was a lot of truth in what these two gentlemen were saying. Both were senior citizens of Dhaka and knew the city and the people well. They wanted to see General Farman. I told them he was at the ML HQs. They insisted that I call him to set up an immediate appointment. Farman was at first reluctant to meet them; he was busy and there was little that he could do to help them at the moment. On my insistence, however, he agreed to the request and asked me to send them over to his I-IQs. I told Salik to take them to the General. Before leaving, Hanif Sahib took me aside and said that he was simply shocked at the enormity of the firepower used. '

The army does not come to shoot crackers,' I said. 'You wanted the army to intervene, didn't you? Well here you are. You got what you wanted.' We exchanged a few more sentences and bade each

other goodbye. I asked Aquil about the foreign correspondents. He confirmed that most of them had left. Only one or two of the lot had been missing. Arnold Zeitlin of the APA (Associated Press of America)-a Rawalpindi-based correspondent-was one of those missing. His personal stuff including some of his notepapers still lay in his hotel room, but he was not there. The newspapers had, in the meantime, been contacted and they had agreed to bring out a one-page supplement by the next day or the day after.

The TV team from the West had already arrived and hoped to resume their transmission by that evening. They arrived in strength~ happy and excited. They were happy that action had been taken at last, which they all thought should have been taken much earlier. The Bengalis had pushed matters to the extreme and no government worth its name could have gone on tolerating such mutinous behaviour. Roedad recounted the events preceding the crackdown to his 'boys' and they all agreed that the 'traitors' should be given exemplary punishment. Aslam Azhar, Khawaja Shahid Hussain, and Zubair Ali headed the TV team. They had brought the much-needed whisky with them and were self-sufficient in all respects. TV went on air the same evening, with news and some music. There was no question of allowing any Bengali artist to appear live so the team had to make do with pre- recorded videotapes.

The arrival of the TV team created an atmosphere of revived cheer, in and around the Officers' Messes. They discussed their technical problems with such enthusiasm and zest as if nothing else mattered. They were full of praise for the president and for the firmness of tone and language used in his address to the nation. Mujib had proved himself a traitor twice; there was absolutely no question of allowing him another chance. He must be hanged. He was already under detention at the Adamjee High School, Kurmitola, and there was talk of shifting him to West Pakistan in a day or two.

Thus, both the TV and radio were back on air-even if somewhat lamely. On the morning of 28th, the newspapers also appeared as single-sheeters carrying the text of the president's speech and martial law orders. PR operations were getting into the stride. There was much chatter about normalcy and of the situation being under control. However, news from the interior did not seem to be too good. Bengali troops in Comilla and Jessore had rebelled and quite a few of them had crossed the border into India. Only the northern districts of Rangpur, Natore, etc., where the majority of the Biharis were

domiciled, seemed to be comparatively quiet. Chittagong was not quite pacified yet and the rebels were still active. In Dhaka, slowly and painfully, life started to get back to normal, but there were more refugees on the road than pedestrians. Most of them were said to be people from the countryside and the suburbs who had been brought to Dhaka by the Awami League to take part in the demonstrations scheduled for 27 March. They were now returning home. Despite relaxation in the curfew hours, the city was usually completely deserted by midday. People scurried back home as soon as they had made their essential purchases.

On the morning of 28th, the commander had a meeting with a number of senior civil servants. The European and the American Consul-Generals also called on him and these visits were covered by the TV and BBC. The All-India Radio (AIR) had earlier broadcasted that Tikka had been shot dead. TV coverage did a lot to expose AIR's canard. On the 28th, Roedad was urgently summoned to Islamabad and left Dhaka the same evening. On the 29th, Lieutenant Colonel Qasim, my deputy, joined me in Dhaka. That aftenoon, at about 2.30 p.m., I happened to pick up the Swadin Bangale Baitar Kainderi (Free Bangla Radio Station) broadcasting close to 900 KHz in the medium wave. The reception was sharp and clear, Bangladesh had already declared independence and the radio was broadcasting an Order of the Day by Major Zia-ur-Rahman-'C»in-C of the Liberation Forces'. I rang up Tikka immediately and informed him of the event, giving him the frequency details.

He called a meeting of the radio and TV staff, the PAF commander, and myself. By then, it had been established that the rebels had set up a small station along the Kaptai highway after having seized high- powered radio transmitters. It was decided to 'silence' the transmitters at any cost. Since a simple land operation would not have served the purpose, air action was therefore suggested and approved. That would mean the complete destruction of the transmitters. But the price had to be paid. The clandestine radio station simply could not be allowed to continue broadcasting. Two PAF jets were accordingly scrambled the next day and the transmitters were silenced.

At the meeting, the question of allowing an ICRC team to come to Dhaka for relief operations was also discussed. The team had already reached Karachi and was waiting to fly to Dhaka. The commander, however, advised against the visit since there was no need for it. There were plenty of medicines available and no external help was

needed. There was a general distrust of all foreigners. It was decided, therefore, to advise the HQ CMLA not to allow the team to proceed to Dhaka.

Things were already reported to be under control and were expected to normalize quite soon, Citizen committees were being formed to restore peace and win the confidence of the people. Nurul Amin, Hamidul Haq Chowdhry, Maulvi Farid, and Professor Ghulam Azam had already met the martial law administrator. Contacts were being established with Fazlul Quader Chowdhury and Abdus Sabur Khan. A number of Awami League leaders, including Zahiruddin and Faizul Haq, son of Maulvi Fazlul Haq, had signalled their willingness to co- operate with the administration to help restore normalcy. It was suggested that the leaders should broadcast appeals for peace so that those in the countryside felt safe and secure.

General Farman suggested that the martial law administrator should appear on TV himself I was against such an appearance and saw little purpose in that. Television had a very limited range and would not reach the people outside Dhaka. I recommended a radio talk instead and eventually they agreed with me. I produced a three~page draft for the martial law administrator, assuring all peace-loving and law-abiding citizens full protection and safety and warning miscreants of the consequence of their mischief making. I gave the draft to Farman and never heard about it again. The martial law administrator did make a radio talk, about a week or ten days later, but the text was different from the draft I had prepared.

The atmosphere at the ML HQs was one of brisk activity and high efficiency. Officers worked feverishly and carried files themselves from one place to another instead of using peons (mostly Bengalis) for the job. The mood of anger and frustration of the past four days had given way to one of fulfilment and confidence. It was the Bengalis' turn to have a little taste of the army's might. They had insulted and humiliated the army long enough and had to be paid back in the same coin. The TV and radio chaps went about their jobs in dead earnest and were achieving results. Already the TV camera crews were out in the bazaars and shopping areas, shooting scenes of 'normalcy'. But the frames of the TV films, taken from very special angles, had little to show except for an odd car or the half a dozen cycle-rickshaws and a few dozen pedestrians, hurrying to get the day's business over with and get back home. Life in the cantonment had improved a great deal. There was chicken and meat in place of the normal 'daal', and fresh

fruit in place of tinned stuff. Some whisky and beer had also found its way back to the Mess.

At the airport the throngs of Biharis outside the terminal building were thinning out. They were returning to their homes in the cities and villages. The army action had restored their confidence and given them a sense of security. But the Bengalis were simply stunned by the happenings. I met quiet a few of my journalist friends. They were sullen and uncommunicative. A wall of alienation, so to say, had suddenly risen between the East and West Pakistanis, and with each day it rose higher. The only Bengali who looked relaxed was Hamidul Haq Chowdhry, whom I met at his office. I arranged an interview for him with Tikka Khan and he was quite satisfied with the state of affairs. He had apprehended all along that Mujib's ill-conceived policies and pronouncements would one day bring matters to a head.

According to him, the East Pakistanis were, by and large, against secession; their demand had only been for full provincial autonomy. However, Mujib had been shifting his stance steadily~from autonomy to outright secession. Regrettably, he said, Mujib was just not destined to come to power. After his great victory in the 1970 elections Mujih should have shown better political sense and wisdom than he did. The president had gone out of his way to pronounce him the prime minister even before the National Assembly was convened. Power was being dumped into his lap but the unfortunate fellow did not seize the opportunity. It was because he was not an astute leader. His immense popularity had only made a captive out of him. He was led by the masses rather than leading them himself. Hamidul Haq denounced the strong-arm methods of the Awami League, and recalled the threats he himself had received from the party. They had on several occasions tried to set fire to his office and warned him to cease publication of the daily Watan, the only Urdu newspaper in the Observer group and also the only Urdu daily of any consequence in East Pakistan.

Although a Bengali, his reaction to the military action was as favourable as that of a Bihari. In fact, there were a large number of eminent Bengalis who had expressed relief over the action. They were those who had all along been afraid of Mujib and his policies and regarded the Awami League as a potentially fascist organization.

Dhaka was beginning to look better than it had three days ago. But it was still far from normal. In many ways it still resembled a ghost town, and after 2 p.m, even before the resumption of curfew, the bustling town would turn into a howling wilderness. Gone were the sardine-like

packed truckloads, carrying excited Awami League volunteers, the flag marching, and the spirited gatherings at the Paltan Maidan. The only crowd that one still saw was the almost unending stream of Bengalis hurrying out of the city. Signs of the magnitude of the disaster were already in evidence. It was not just a question of restoring law and order but of rehabilitating people physically, mentally, and psychologically. All links between the people and the army had been irreparably snapped. It was not for the first time that I had seen the army in action in East Pakistan in aid of the civil power. I had seen the army being used in the same role in 1957-8, when operation 'Close Door' was launched, to stop smuggling of goods and money-by chits and hundi~to India. As recently as November 1969, the army had been called in to deal with the situation following the Bengali-Bihari disturbances in the predominantly Bihari colonies of Muhammadpur and Mirpur. In 1970, the army had been all over the province in aid of the cyclone-affected people.

It was the same army and the same people; but a lot of water had flown under the bridge and many a water lily had blossomed and withered away. In the three weeks of the Awami League's mass civil disobedience campaign, the army had been used as the main target for all kinds of public insults and ridicule with the result that the people and the amiy had drifted farther and farther apart from each other. The mentality of an occupation army was gradually, and unmistakably, coming into play. Insults were being avenged and the army was exerting efforts to re-establish itself as a national army. Doubts were being raised as to whether or not the spirit of a united nation still existed in East Pakistan, and above all, if the army was still regarded by the Bengalis as a part of the nation. 'Once a traitor always a traitor', was the fateful conclusion which the army's rank and tile had come to, in the aftermath of the recent events. The president had already declared that traitors would not go unpunished.

A sort of 'trigger-happiness' was setting in: young officers went about in full combat gear, the jawans twirled their moustaches and looked down disdainfully upon the Bengalis. A colonel proudly told a gathering of friends that he had been able to shed his reluctance to shoot and kill. I knew the fellow and there was no doubt that he was bragging and talking nonsense but there was also doubt that the soldiers had lost all respect and regard for the Bengalis~their life and honour. In the same country there were now two nations tom asunder by deep mutual hostility and hatred. Even the common bond of religion, which

had survived the many political vicissitudes in one form or another, had finally snapped. The army had moved in not just to control an immediate law and order situation but also to brainwash the people, to wean them off their native Bengali mores, and make them true Pakistanis. 'Pakistanization' of the Bengalis, was the objective of the exercise. Hindu influence and customs must be done away with once and for all.

The army, it seemed, had come to stay. It was not just a temporary mission of pacification but one of conversion and transformation of the Bengalis into true Muslims and Pakistanis. The Hindu influence must be eradicated root and branch; and the handful of people who were misguiding the innocent and illiterate masses, must be liquidated.

Trouble was reported to have started in other parts of the province. As Dhaka quietened down, the interior became more turbulent and uneasy. Khulna and Mymensingh became centres of the rebel activities. There were reports of mass massacres of non-Bengalis from these areas. The fleeing 'miscreants' had embarked upon a scorched earth policy. They were destroying everything in the way of their disorderly flight. Their demolition squads were active. This was against the general expectation of the establishment that once Dhaka, the nerve-centre, came under control, the rest of the province would also return to normal. But the actual sequence of events was quite the opposite.

After mass desertion of the Bengali personnel of the East Bengal Regiment (about 6300), East Pakistan Rifles (about l6,000), Police (about 35,000), and Mujabid and Ansars (around lO0,000), the strength of the Pakistan Army was very thin on the ground. During the civil disobedience days, only one brigade with two battalions had arrived from West Pakistan. Reinforcements by sea were still on their way. Reinforcements were also coming by air but with troops carrying personal arms only. The ammunition ship, MV Swat, had arrived in Chittagong on 23 March. She had been off-loaded only after a great deal of trouble.

Following a general mutiny in Chittagong, the army acted with alacrity and a column from Comilla was soon able to effect a linkup with the small force in Chittagong. The rebels had tried hard to stall the advance of the column by setting up roadblocks and blowing up culverts, but the column had pressed on and entered Chittagong by 1 April. The PR work in Dhaka had been fairly well organized. Most of the Bengali radio staff was back at work and the TV people were also

trickling in, but they all worked under the strict supervision of the West Pakistani staff. Newspapers had also resumed publication.

On the evening of 30 March, I drove to the university area-the stronghold of the Awami League agitators-to see what it looked like. Qasim and Salik accompanied me. We drove to the Jagganath and Iqbal Halls. The two halls were absolutely deserted but there was not much evidence of destruction. It made one wonder, however, where the entire population of the halls had gone. The halls could have been deserted because the university had remained closed since l March and most of the teaching staff and students had gone home. It was also possible that the remainder may have left during the curfew breaks. Nevertheless, we did not see a single soul. Nor did we make any special search for the residents.

We went around the classrooms and the dormitories»-all were completely deserted. We saw a pile of dummy wooden rifles in a corner. These were obviously used for small arms drills. In one or two rooms we found smashed windowpanes and some broken objects scattered around but that was about all. From the halls we drove back via Nawabpur. It was curfew time already and the roads were completely deserted. Heads popped out of the street-side windows of a number of double-storeyed houses. They disappeared as soon as they saw uniformed personnel.

As we drove through Nawabpur, we were stopped by a young man. He looked quite insane and started shouting as soon as we stopped. He spoke in the highly accented Urdu of a Bengali or perhaps a Bihari, looking terribly worked up. He said the Bengalis were determined to set Sheikh Mujib free and liberate their land. ‘They say’, he went on to add, ‘that they will come back and kill all the West Pakistanis. They will destroy the army and we will become an independent country.’ We listened to him for a while and then got back into the jeep. It was no use getting into an argument with the stranger-the lone pedestrian in an area under curfew.

As we drove off I could still hear the man-mad with fury and hate for the army-calling for revenge against the ‘Punzabi` oppressors. His voice gradually faded away and eventually was lost in the void. The encounter left me with a chilling feeling about the future. More than the beginning of the end it was beginning to sound like the death rattle; a sort of the fade-out before the flashing of ‘The End’ sign on the screen at the end of a movie.

I left for West Pakistan on 1 April.

7

FOREIGN NEWSMEN'S VISIT TO EAST PAKISTAN

FROM the moment I boarded the PIA Boeing in Dhaka and took my seat, I had the aircrew fussing over me as if I was a hero. There was no first class and yet I was treated better than I had ever been during a flight, Anything was there for the asking- sandwiches, beer, whisky-anything, you name it. All through the long, seven-hour flight, with an hour's stopover at the Colombo airport, I was lavishly treated to an excellent fare of food and drink. The ever- obliging hostess and the steward never made excuses, never went to consult their superiors about anything. They only served, well and generously. The stock of the army could not have been higher. The army had saved East Pakistan; it had redeemed the national honour and ensured its integrity. It was the sole hope and mainstay of Pakistan.

Back in Karachi, the first message I received was that the CGS, General Gul Hassan, wanted me back in Rawalpindi by the first flight. I only had a night to spend in Karachi. The peace and quiet and obvious sense of relief pervading the city stood in sharp contrast to the desolation and the grinding sense of foreboding in Dhaka. People in the city, as indeed in Lahore and Rawalpindi, as I would find out later, appeared least concemed about East Pakistan. There was a consensus on the fact that the Bengalis had got only what they deserved. They had rebelled and had engaged in mutiny and deserved to be punished for their deeds. The military action was not only fair, it was unavoidable. The army had taken this step only after it had exhausted all other options for a peaceful and fair political settlement. The president had gone out of his way in Dhaka to appease and satisfy Mujib but the man would not listen. The fact was that he was a traitor 'first and last'. The army action had made Karachi's fleshpots look forward to the future with greater confidence. The stock market was

up, more bullish than ever. During my 24 hours in Karachi, Dhaka seemed more like a nightmare from which I had woken up to realize its patent unreality. It all seemed so far away.

Everyone in the city felt sure that the issue of East Pakistan had been solved once and for all, Mujib was the only problem, the real traitor, and with him in the cage things would soon return to normal. Almost everyone praised Yahya Khan for his political sagacity and far-sightedness and man/elled how a plain and simple soldier like him had mastered the political game so well. They spoke of his LFO which had really saved the situation. The LFO, enforced exactly a year ago on 31 March 1970, was an evidence of Yahya's political vision; it was his instrument to protect national integrity and his weapon against separatism. The LFO gave the president's action a legal cover, that is, if ever a legal sanction was needed in a situation as extreme as the one prevalent in East Pakistan prior to 25 March. It had armed the president with the power and authority 'to make any amendments in the Order' and 'resolve any question'.

In short, Karachi, the industrial and financial hub of the nation, fully supported the military action. The mohajirs (refugees) were at the forefront of acclaim. They had been in sympathy, quite naturally, with the Biharis-the main target of Mujib's 'terrorism'.

The next day, 2 April, I left for Rawalpindi and on reaching there, called on Gul Hassan at his house. He was glad to see me. I gave him a quick run-down on the situation prevalent in Dhaka during my stay. I had been virtually caught up in 'a crossfire' of momentous events- the army on one side and the mutineers on the other. The Biharis fully supported the military action; the Bengalis, on the other hand, though not wholly supportive of Mujib, wanted 'us' (the president and the army) to accept and recognize him as the leader of the majority party and treat him accordingly. They were, by and large, scared of the dire consequences of a deadlock in the Yahya-Mujib talks.

Gul Hassan told me about the federal secretaries' conference held daily at COS General Hamid's oftice and asked me to attend the conference with him the next morning. He did not seem too happy with the views of the information secretary, Roedad Khan, towards East Pakistan, considering them as too 'simplistic'. Roedad apparently viewed the entire issue as essentially a PR problem, Nothing could be farther from the truth. PR would come into play only when the situation was physically under control. People, in their present state of shock and bewilderment, had neither any use, nor the time, for PR. There

was no doubt that the intensity and magnitude of the action had shocked the Bengalis. No talk of ideology and integrity, or even of Islam, was going to carry weight with them at the moment. Then there was the question of the mutiny of Bengali personnel. The mutineers were engaged all over the province, in fighting and fleeing across the border to seek shelter in India. As for Mujib, the best thing under the circumstances would be to leave him to his fate. He was already in West Pakistan and face to face with his inquisitors.

The next day was a Sunday. Early that morning, I received a call from the Daily Telegraph correspondent, Clare Hollingworth. She wanted to see me in connection with the defence problems of Pakistan. I was most wary of foreign correspondents after my experience in East Pakistan. There was little in our situation which we could have used to our advantage. I told Clare that Pakistan did not have any immediate defence problems There was only a grave internal security problem and we were trying to tackle that as best as we could. She insisted on a meeting, I demurred and advised her to see the information secretary who was in-charge. As it transpired, all that Clare was actually looking for was a permit to visit East Pakistan as that wing had been sealed off to all foreigners-particularly those belonging to the press. The lady was very annoyed by my response and complained about my behaviour to several highly placed people including the infomation secretary. An explanation was called for and I repeated exactly what I had told Clare.

On Monday, I attended the secretaries conference at the COS secretariat. That was the first and the last time I ever attended that meeting. It was quite an eye-opener for me. It was amazing to see how just a few people holding positions of authority could ruin an entire country and justify the loss of so many lives. Gul Hassan told Hamid that I had a lot to brief them about the East Pakistan situation. I recounted my story. Subsequently, the infomation secretary raised the issue of the TV coverage of Mujib. He argued that it was absolutely essential in order to counter the foreign propaganda that he had either escaped or had been 'bumped of`f'. I disagreed with him.

TV, I argued, not only 'projeeted' but also 'betrayed'. It may well be the 'Judas' of the media, I said rhetorically, inasmuch, as it did not only feed but also poisoned and killed. Hamid did not seem to get the point but the Foreign Secretary, Sultan Mohammad Khan, did and put in a word for me instantly. 'There is a lot of weight in what the brigadier says,' he said, 'a TV film can, by all means, be made but

there is no need to telecast it immediately. Maybe later, when things improve...'

There was some more discussion. In the end, it was decided that a still photograph of Mujib under police custody would be published. Shortly afterwards, Mujib's photograph appeared in the newspapers. It showed him slumped in a chair flanked by two sturdy Punjabi policemen. There could not have been anything more symbolical, in the context of East Pakistan being a captive of West Pakistan.

The Bengali staff of the Information Ministry had already been dispensed with and there was no question ot" associating them with vital 'national' problems, except perhaps, at the lower level, As mentioned earlier, the general attitude was 'once a traitor always a traitor'. The Bengalis having once rebelled, had forfeited the trust of the nation. This attitude prevailed despite the president's statement that it was only a 'handful' of misguided people who supported Mujib in his separatist designs, The bulk of the East Pakistanis, according to him, were patriotic and God-fearing people.

The rising crescendo of foreign propaganda against the army and the country 'perturbed the bureaucrats and they were soon devising ways and means of countering it. The president was also becoming painfully aware of that necessity, Even the President of the Soviet Union, Nikolai Podgorny, in his letter of 2 April 1971 to Yahya, had pleaded for a political settlement of the East Pakistan situation through the elected representatives of the people. Yahya brushed aside Podgorny's appeal on the plea that the East Pakistan problem was entirely an 'internal affair' of Pakistan, In reality, however, in the aftermath of the military crackdown, East and West Pakistan might actually have been two different entities, within an irreparably ruptured and militarily~held national framework.

The East was now reduced to a little more than a colony of the West which was emerging as the unrepentant colonizer. It reminded me somehow of Jane Austin's Mansfield Park in which Sir Thomas Bertram, the absentee landlord, used the Caribbean as his colonial agricultural base and England as the industrial capital hub.

Podgorny had also strongly advised Yahya against the use of force to suppress insurgency in East Pakistan, and to call off the military action as a first step towards a peaceful, political resolution of the crisis. He wrote:

Continuation of repressive measures and bloodshed in East Pakistan will, undoubtedly, only make the solution of the problems more difficult and may do great harm to the vital interest of the entire population.

Reaction to Podgorny's letter at the GHQ general staff level, was largely impulsive-reflecting a somewhat injured pride, coupled with a great deal of cynical rebuke couched in crisp service jargon (who the hell...'? what the hell ?,..damn it). There was hardly any calibrated response or serious analysis of the Soviet démarche at the general staff level. At least insofar as I was concerned, Gul Hassan never mentioned it.

In contrast to East Pakistan, West Pakistan was an abode of peace with no political or industrial unrest. There had not been a single incidence of strike, lock-out, or gherao /jalao. The bulk of the West Pakistanis stood behind Yahya in serried ranks greeting all his moves with muted hurrahs.

From East Pakistan the only information that ever came through was about the restoration of normalcy and the steady improvement in the law and order situation. Foreign networks, particularly the AIR and BBC, however, had altogether different stories to tell. They reported pitched battles between the 'freedom lighters' (Mukti Bahini) and the Pakistan Army regulars and para-military troops. It was evident that things were not altogether under control despite the government's efforts to portray them as such. Curfew still continued and stories of the exodus multiplied. Reports of mass refugee outflux were, however, dismissed contemptuously by the government as a figment of the imagination of hostile propagandists.

In the wake of normalcy stories, there also came a spate of despatches about the military operations. Two news agency men had been specially assigned to East Pakistan for the coverage. They were attached to various formations and units and were engaged in the operation as 'war correspondents'. The public in the West was fed the official press releases about the state of affairs. It was a pity that no one in the West thought about visiting the East, station himself there long enough to find out things for himself The entire projection of the East Pakistan situation was thus left to the controlled media.

Around mid-April, Gul Hassan went to East Pakistan on his first visit after the military action. He returned a very happy and satisfied man. He told me that the 'boys' were all over and had done a good job. Everything was under full control. He saw no reason why East

Pakistan should continue to remain a closed book for the outside world. It was time to throw it open to the foreign press, There was nothing to hide or be ashamed of In fact, there was a lot for them to see. The atrocities committed by the 'miscreants' against the non- Bengalis were to be seen to be believed.

The martial law administrator, General Tikka Khan, had certain misgivings about the wisdom of allowing the foreign press into East Pakistan but Gul Hassan did not agree with him. He also commented that the operation in East Pakistan was a very expensive exercise, 'We cannot afford such an expense every second or third year. The present one should be good enough for the next fitteen or twenty years.' The depredations and subversive activities of the rebels, he admitted, had done a lot of damage to the means of communication. But that was not of much consequence to the progress and success of the military operations. It would only cause hardship to the people in the interior. If there was no road and river transport there would be no food. If they were going to let their own people starve, it was their business.

In fact, a famine might even be helpful to quicken the pace of normalization, he felt. The British had created a famine in Bengal in 1943; their only objective was to break the hack of the Bengali resistance, Famine was not unknown in Bengal, and yet another would hardly mean anything extraordinary, The morale of the troops, he said, could not have been higher. They were absolutely fit and in high spirits. That wing had, in fact, turned out to be an excellent 'training area'. Later, a decision could be taken to assign young officers to East Pakistan for their battle inoculation, preparation, and experience.

Not all were, however, so optimistic. A senior general officer, Abdul Khaliq Qureshi, vice-chief of the general staff, was of the opinion that the East Pakistan operations were not going to end 'in our lifetime'. It was going to be an arduous job. From a peaceful tactical exercise designed for the restoration of normalcy, the military operation had turned into a national and political commitment to protect the country's integrity.

Gul Hassan sought my opinion on the desirability of allowing foreign correspondents in East Pakistan. I said there was nothing wrong with the idea provided there was no censorship, for a foreign correspondent resents nothing more than restrictions of any kind on the freedom of their movement. The concept of pre-censorship of their message would irk them greatly. Allowing them in the province would be a calculated risk. One of their objectives, in the course of their

coverage of East Pakistan, would be to meet many Bengalis and obtain their version of the story which most certainly would not be the same as ours. Many unpalatable facts would thus come to light. Nevertheless, East Pakistan could not stay a closed book for ever-it had to be thrown open sooner or later. As it is, a number of enterprising correspondents had already been able to smuggle themselves into Dhaka and other areas and write their own highly biased accounts of the situation. They were all the more bitter and hostile towards us on that account and the removal of the ban should put them in a better frame of mind. The first trip, however, should be officially sponsored and conducted.

A few days later, Gul Hassan told me that he had obtained the president's approval for his proposal and the Information Ministry had already been directed to make a list of the correspondents and invite them to visit East Pakistan. I was to be their conducting officer and they were to be given a VIP treatment throughout. The ministry invited six correspondents based in Singapore, Malaysia, and Islamabad. They were Louis Kerrar of the TIME magazine, Malcolm Brown of The New York Times, Harvey Stotckwyn of the Financial Times, Maurice Quentence of Reuters, Morte Rosenblurn of Associated Press, and Wuyi Hsin of the New China News Agency. They were to join me in Karachi for their first briefing by the DG ISI, General Mohammad Akbar, on 5 May. The party would then leave for Dhaka the very next day.

On my way to Karachi on l May, I stayed in Lahore for a couple of days. The city was as quiet as could be expected. Not a ripple of anxiety, or an expression of sympathy for the East Pakistanis was heard in any serious way or manner.

The few intellectuals of the radical left, who had dared to say a word in favour of the Bengalis, were called Indian stooges or communist agents. The leftist daily Azad of Lahore-probably the only newspaper critical of the military action and sympathetic towards the Bengalis and the cause of Bangladesh, ceased publication soon afterwards. Members of its editorial staff, Abdullah Malik, Hamid Akhtar, and I.A_ Rahman, were arrested under martial law regulations and later awarded heavy fines along with long sentences of rigorous imprisonment. Abdullah Malik had also addressed a public meeting condemning the military action, demanding an immediate end to it, and calling for an open trial of Mujib and a political settlement of the East Pakistan situation.

The rightist press was either discreetly quiet or distinctly vocal in favour of the military regime. The daily Musawat, PPP's official organ which was edited by Maulana Kausar Niazi, supported the government and its policy in East Pakistan There appeared to be a strong feeling in the public that the regime had saved the country through their timely intervention. Support of the regime's policies was not as amazing as the complete lack and absence of any brotherly feelings for the East Pakistanis. They might as well have belonged to Biafra or South Africa for all that one heard or saw. No consideration for human suffering seemed to exist at all. Most viewed the problem with an extraordinary degree of detachment, which was quite atypical of the normal Pakistani reaction to situations of such gravity. The two wings thus drifted apart emotionally, even before their physical dismemberment and separation. The Lahoriites, by and large, would support and sympathize with the Vietcong guerrilla forces sooner than the East Pakistan freedom fighters. In their opinion, they were all traitors, Mujib and the rest, and must be treated and dealt with as such. Karachi was still jubilant a month after the military action. But, comparatively more cynical and critical in their approach to important issues, Karachiites had begin to ask questions about the effectiveness of the military operation. They wanted and expected it to be a quick and decisive strike but the passing time was beginning to belie their hopes. How long was it going to last? They were having second thoughts about the rationale of an open-ended military action.

On the morning of 5 May, Mohammad Akbar held his press briefing in Karachi, That was the first official briefing well over a month after the action. Amongst the foreign correspondents present, I knew Wuyi Hsin of the New China News Agency, based in Islamabad. We had drawn a six-day programme for them in East Pakistan which was to take them to Brahamanbaria, Comilla, Mymensingh, Natore, Rangpur, Jessore, and Chittagong. The programme was to be a conducted one all the way. Akbar, in his briefing, re-called the chain of events leading to the military crackdown. He explained how Mujib had been using his six-point programme as a cover-up for secession. He sought votes in the general elections on the basis of his demand for maximum regional autonomy for East Pakistan. Subsequently, he changed his demand for autonomy to one of complete independence.

Akbar spoke at some length about the civil disobedience movement and Mujib's civilian coup in the first week of March. Despite all the provocation, the president still flew over to East Pakistan to hold talks

with Mujib. As early as January 1971, the president had publicly mentioned Mujib as the future prime minister of Pakistan but Mujib had already decided to settle for nothing less than complete independence. Mujib and the Awami League had already planned to forcibly capture East Pakistan with the help of the East Bengal Regiment and rebels from East Pakistan Rifles. Their plan was to take over, or put out of action, the seaport of Chittagong as well as the Dhaka airport, thus preventing reinforcements from West Pakistan. The action was planned for the pre-dawn hours of the morning of 26 March.

A statement by a government spokesman entitled 'The Present Crisis in East Pakistan' was issued on the same day. Akbar's briefing was a rehash of this statement. It was a ludicrous exercise in finding a rationale for the military action launched to pre-empt the Awami League's plot to declare the independent 'Republic of Bangladeshi The 'plan' was to seize Dhaka and Chittagong (the two main air and sea ports), lying astride the army's air/sea lifelines to West Pakistan.

The army at that time consisted of an infantry division of eighteen battalions, twelve of which were from West Pakistan. The Awami League's bid for secession was now under way... the armed forces have made a series of pre-ernptive strikes, seized the initiative and saved the country. ,.

The earlier and major part of the statement focussed on India's unmitigated hostility towards Pakistan from day one.

The root cause of the Indo-Pakistan trouble is that India has never really accepted the fact of Pakistan. Leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (India's Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister 1946-52) have been on record desiring the 'Re-unitication' of Bharat.

Akbar went on to say that Mujib had already been able to subvert the loyalty of the Bengali soldiers and could count on their full support, and as expected, they had initiated the mutiny within minutes of the military action. The mutineers included regulars from the East Bengal Regiment, civil armed personnel of the East Pakistan Rifles, the armed police, Ansars, and Razakars (volunteers). Together they made a total of some 165,000 armed and trained soldiers. The breakdown of the desertion was roughly as follows: East Bengal Regiment 6000; East

Pakistan Rifles (16 wings) l6,000; armed police 35,000; Ansars and Razakars l00,000. The Pakistan Army, alter the mass desertion, was left with barely 10,000 personnel and was in an extremely precarious position. But it was still able to control the situation in a short while, with the help of the local population.

It would be absolutely wrong, Akbar stressed, to term the rebellion 'a civil war', since the local population had refrained from co-operating with the miscreants, and was ready to help the army quell the rebellion. If it was not for the Indian help and encouragement to the miscreants, the situation would have been controlled much earlier. India had been sending armed infiltrators to help the rebels. The Pakistan Army had captured a number of Indian soldiers and seized a quantity of arms which would be shown to the journalists in Dhaka. The general also explained the offensive Indian military build-up along the East Pakistan borders.

I led for Dhaka early next morning to brief the governor, General Tikka, on Akbar's press briefing. The idea was to ensure a uniform briefing for the foreign correspondents. The flight to Dhaka was smooth and uneventful. As our aircraft circled over Dhaka, the city streets appeared almost as deserted as before. Although it was not curfew time but still all that one could see was the odd cycle-rickshaw and a few pedestrians in a hurry to do their business and get back home. The gun emplacements with the Pakistani flag fluttering atop were still Where they had been earlier. Clusters of Pakistani flags fluttered from rooftops and shop fronts in deserted bazars. The city looked weird from the air.

As the aircraft landed, I found the airport under heavy military guard. My jeep stood in front of the terminal building. There were soldiers and plain-clothed security men all around. The airport was not how I had known it to be through the years. It looked like a military air base. The stories of normalcy fed to West Pakistan were just a pack of lies. Nothing could be farther from normality and that too well after a month of the crackdown. I wondered what sort of an impression all this would make on our foreign guests.

Salik and Afzal (Wing Commander, one of my staff officers) were there to receive me. Salik told me that I was to give my first briefing to the colonel staff Eastern Command and then brief the governor in the evening. I was tired after a sleepless night and was badly in need of a nap. I drove to the Mess making a detour through the PAF base.

The cantonment was full of fully armed soldiers, on foot and in vehicles. They looked tough and confident, and six inches taller than what they had seemed before. There was an air of arrogance and superiority about them. Back in my room, I had a shave and a bath and tried to get a little sleep but could not. I went through my briefing notes, and an hour or so later, came out of my room to drive to the Eastern Command HQs. A civil transport, a Mercedes, waited for me outside in place of the military jeep. The Bengali driver bowed and salaamed humbly on seeing me. He rushed to the car door to hold it open for me. I could see that he was afraid. Bengalis are normally meek, but Rashid Mian, the driver, behaved like a slave. It was discomforting to see him scrape his heels and touch his forehead, humbly and awkwardly, in salutation. He drove rne to the office, hastened to open the door and salaamed me once again as I got out of the car.

I held my briefings at the headquarters. The field commanders while meeting the correspondents were directed to be brief and avoid answering any questions of a political nature. They were also to avoid expressions such as 'civil war'. Liaison officers had come to listen to me from the various sectors which had been included in the itinerary of the correspondents, so that they could brief their own commanders.

I had lunch with Salik. He briefed me about the military situation. The military operation was continuing. The local population was not with the army. The younger generation-young Bengali students particularly-had either crossed the border to swell the ranks of the Mukti Bahini or stayed in their homes. The university and all other educational institutions remained closed. Intellectuals were generally sullen and inimical tovfards the military. The press, with few exceptions, cooperated only out of fear. Censorship was in force and no one dared to flout it. They published whatever was officially handed out, but there was no genuine cooperation. The Ittefaq had not been able to resume publication as yet. The Shangbad had gone defunct, Inayatullah's Holiday was trying to obtain permission to resume publication but General Farman was not in its favour, Inayatullah was a leftist from the Bhashani school and Farman did not consider it advisable to let him resume the publication of the newspaper. There were enough newspapers already, like the Pakistan Observer and the Morning News, which were already in circulation. Purboodesh, Watan, and Ittefaq would be out soon.

Far from being normal, life in East Pakistan was becoming more and more difficult. This was particularly true of the countryside, where there was just no law and order, and the man with a gun~whether soldier or Mukti-was the real ruler. The peaceful, law-abiding citizen was as scared of the Pakistan Army as of the Mukti.

Relations between Governor Tikka and General Niazi had not been too good. Lieutenant General Amir Abdullah Khan (Tiger) Niazi replaced Tikka Khan as Commander Eastern Command on ll April 1971. Niazi insisted on being left alone in matters of command. For him, it was a full-scale war already; and he planned to carry it across the border to create a five-mile demilitarized zone for the safe passage of his rolling stock and road traffic. Unless that was done, it would be impossible to get the Dhaka~Chittagong rail and road traffic safely through. The army had cleared most of the areas of miscreants and gained control of the border outposts. Niazi felt it was time to extend the sector to the Indian side. Niazi's was a\1 offensive-defensive plan. He planned to go on exerting pressure on the Indians and thus retain the initiative in his hands.

Militarily, the situation could be said to be under control, but politically, it left much tc be desired. Awami League MNAs and MPAs were not coming forward. Despite the efforts by the governor, only nine MNAs had come forward so far-one of them being Nurul Amin (Pakistan Democratic Party), the other was Raja Tridev Roy (Independent), and most significantly, Faizul Haq, the only Awami League MNA co-operating with the government. Sweep operations were launched to flush out the rniscreants. Often the target area would be set on fire, and as the inmates ran for life, the soldiers would open fire from all sides, ensuring that no one was left to tell the tale. Salik told me the story of a sweep operation conducted in his presence. After it was all over, he went inside a hut where he saw a family group photograph which showed a father, a mother, and three children. There was also a rice bowl with the finger marks of a child etched in the half-cooked rice. Almost certainly, the entire family had been inside when the military took to burning, shooting, and either killing everyone on the spot, or hounding them out and capturing prisoners for interrogation.

I gathered from the stories I heard that things in East Pakistan were not the same as were being' presented by our official choreographers and that the limited punitive operation, designed to punish a handful of miscreants, was rapidly developing into a regular anti-Bengali

military campaign. The soldiers had taken over the situation completely. Every Bengali had by then, become a suspect, placed and tackled under three categories as follows: (a) those who were back on their jobs and working howsoever reluctantly; (b) those who had been transferred to West Pakistan, and (c) those who were in military custody and being interrogated for their involvement in the civil disobedience movement.

The last category included some very senior civil servants»CSPs, PSPS, and all those who had actively cooperated with Mujib, and were now held in the cantonment for interrogation, They were picked up at midnight or in the small hours of the moring from their residences and taken to the interrogation centres.

Later, when I met several of my Bengali friends, they expressed deep concern and anxiety about the missing people, The big question was, 'How long would this go on?' For instead of getting closer to any solution, the army had been sinking deeper into the morass of civil strife. The monsoons had already set in and Dhaka looked sort of romantic with its low dark clouds and sudden spurts of rain with brief interludes of sunshine. It was nice and cool as far as the weather was concerned but the political climate was turbulent and temperatures soared very high.

The foreign correspondents arrived on the morning of the 6th, accompanied by Khawaja Shahid. After lunch, they visited the hospital and the university area. They were invited by the governor for a briefing and a drink in the evening, The governor gave his account of the events much on the same lines as had been indicated to him. He was not frightfully good at it and let himself drift away from the main subject, into politics. He tried to draw a line between the patriotism of the Bengali masses and the separatist designs of a 'handful' of unpatriotic Mujib followers. He refuted all stories of wanton violence on part of the army and held the BBC and AIR wholly responsible for them,

According to him, not more than 100 to 150 people-all miscreants -were killed on the night of the military crackdown. And they were mostly those who had offered resistance to the army. No peaceful, law-abiding person was killed by design. The law and order situation was improving rapidly with the help of the people. It would be wrong to call the upheaval a civil war, as the masses were not involved. In fact, they were as sick and tired of the depredations of the miscreants, as of Mujib's misdeeds during the twenty-tive days of unlawful rule.

There was no shortage of food and no one would die from hunger. Except for the Indian involvement and intervention, the situation would have been normalized a long time ago.

The army, he continued, was now firmly in control of the situation. He said that whatever he had been doing was in the knowledge and had the approval of the president, whose nominee he was in the province. He was there entirely at the president's behest and could be 'sent back home' if the president so desired.

In his conduct and appearance Tikka reflected a strange mix of diffidence and bravado, of repressed timidity and a sort of awkward self-assurance. The army, he said, would be able to normalize the situation completely within a month or so only if India stopped its border incursions. They had a number of Indian prisoners and weapons in their custody which the correspondents would be shown during their stay. The EBR and EPR rebels had been 'sorted out' already, They had been chased across the border and the Pakistan Army had regained control of all the border outposts. The miscreants in their disorderly flight had caused extensive damage to railway lines and bridges, which the army was busy repairing. There was no direct traffic yet between Dhaka and Chittagong but the Comilla-Chandpun Chittagong link was restored. Jute had already started moving into the port town for export. Tikka's briefing was not news to anyone but it was most depressing for all its vivid personal touch and detail.

The conference was attended by the three generals, Niazi, Farman, and Rahim (promoted as Major General). Niazi sported a red carnation in his lapel and a matching pocket kerchief. He looked very well groomed-the very picture of military spruceness, polish-and-pipeclay. He watched the proceedings with muted interest, smiling, without saying a word. The moment the conference was over he strode towards the correspondents, introduced himself and heartily shook hands with everybody.

He said, 'Gentlemen, you have heard the governor. Now how about hearing me?' The correspondents produced their notebooks in anticipation of taking the commander's version of the story. 'You don't have to do that gentlemen,' he put in, 'I have something on the lighter side.' His eyes shined with an impish glint as he spoke. To his own delight he started rattling off one bawdy story atier another. The correspondents seemed to enjoy his stories for a while but soon lost interest. They were in a hurry to get back to their hotel and file their messages. Niazi would not let them go and went on with his stories; it

seemed as if he knew no end. But the correspondents were beginning to show their impatience so finally Niazi stopped, and they heaved a sigh of relief.

'Brigadier,' one of them turned round to address me, 'it appears your generals have developed an extraordinary amount of insensitivity towards human suffering?

Niazi's stories nearly ruined whatever little good effect the governor might have had. His braggadocio and smut did a lot to spoil the show.

The programme structured for the correspondents was a comprehensive one, covering almost all the important places in the province, including Mymensingh, Comilla, Brahamanbaria, Feni, Jessore, Chaudanga, Rajshahi, Natore, Rangpur, Khulna, and Chittagong. Only Sylhet had been excluded from the itinerary: that area had, until then, been comparatively peaceful and there was little to show or see. A Russian Mi-8 helicopter had been placed at the disposal of the party for the duration of the tour.

During our stay in Dhaka, the correspondents were entertained by the chairman of the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce & Industry, also the owner»cum-publisher of the Pakistan Observer Hamidul Haq Chowdhry, The businessmen's party was well attended by nearly all the important members of the community with substantial financial stakes in East Pakistan-but all of them were from West Pakistan. There was hardly a Bengali in the crowd. The businessmen were all very happy about the military action and vehemently argued that without the army they would have been ruined. All of them were extremely bitter against the Bengalis for whom they had done so much only to be treated in the end as aliens and exploiters.

When they had come to the province after independence East Pakistan had been little more than a village with hardly a mill, factory or a building worth its name. They then launched their projects, established the largest jute mills in Asia, and laid down the infrastructure of a progressive economy. East Pakistan now had a chain of jute, textile, paper, pharmaceutical, steel (the only one in the country) and other mills, along with a natural gas refinery, to name a few. And all that progress had been due to the enterprise, investment, and initiative of the non-Bengali entrepreneurs, They were most unhappy about the recent developments which, but for army intervention, would have surely led to their and the province's utter ruination. They fully supported the military presence and the full application of force, where necessary. It was generally felt that the

Bengalis must be taught to behave as patriotic Pakistanis. Bengali chauvinism was the strongest single negative force in the country and needed to be curbed and neutralized forthwith. It was time, more than ever, to do that. It was quite amazing to find so many hawks amongst the conservative and pro-military businessmen.

At his party, Chowdhry gave a political briefing to the correspondents. He had also invited Faizul Haq, the only Awami Leagie MNA who openly sided with the military government. Hamidul Haq Chowdhry said that he knew that this was going to happen. Mujib had always been impulsive; he was quite capable of creating a situation which he would ultimately fail to control. He always came close to power and failed to seize it due to his ovm 'weird psyche'. He was only a rabble~rouser, not a leader. He could stir people's emotions but could not steer them through anything. Chowdhry, an intelligent and a persuasive man, did an excellent job in support of the military action, but the correspondents were not quite satisfied with his version of the story. The fact remained that Chowdhry represented nobody; he had not even taken part in the elections. Only Mujib and his party, after their sweeping electoral victory, could have justifiably spoken for East Pakistan.

A rather unhappy incident took place during Chowdhry's party. Harvey Stotckwyn of the Financial Times had been to the telegraph office to file a message. At the gate of the telegraph office the sentry on duty checked him and told him not to carry his pipe inside. Harvey, a young and excitable reporter, refused to listen to the soldier. Instead he took to arguing with him. As expected, the soldier did not budge and Harvey was simply furious. He drove back to Chowdhry's house looking for me. He could not have been angrier when we met.

I tried to calm him down and offered to take him to the telegraph office myself That cooled him down. He told me on the way that he had been very disappointed by what he saw of the Bengalis. They were a completely gutless people. He thought that it would be wrong to make a comparison between the Bengalis and the Vietnamese. The Bengalis were hopelessly docile and would never be able to throw out the army. He called the army 'an occupation army' and argued that if it was not for them, Pakistan was all but finished. The Bengalis had been cowed down but that did not imply reconciliation and acceptance; the parting of ways was complete.

Although it was a conducted tour, the correspondents started resenting any interference from the very beginning of the programme.

They did not want anybody breathing down their necks; they just wanted to be left alone. In Jessore, the first city on their itinerary outside Dhaka, they were shocked to see the widespread destruction. They went round the city unescorted, and were able to meet a number of Bengalis and talk to them. The Bengalis were generally scared and apprehensive, and told them whatever they could in muted whispers. The correspondents were also able to see for themselves the grave of the Christian missionary shot by the army. It so happened that the governor, during his press conference, had categorically denied the report about the missionary having been killed. He had said that 'the Father' was alive. The incident impaired our credibility and was made much of by the correspondents in their despatches.

Wherever we went during our tour, the picture was practically the same, Whole cities had been 'de-urbanized' and 'de-populated'. In Mymensingh, a district with a population larger than that of Switzerland, there was not a soul to be seen around the bazars and streets. In Comilla, a few shops were open and rickshaws plied the roads but it was hardly the same city, as one had known it. ln Khulna, the correspondents were taken to the Crescent Jute Mill with a large non~Bengali population. They were shown the slaughter-house where the miscreants had tortured, raped, and killed the Biharis. They saw bits of women and childrer1's clothing, strands of hair, blood-stained rags, and vandalized streets and houses.

The evidence was convincing enough and they were impressed at first. But they were also curious about the other side of the picture- what about the Bengalis, how many of them had been killed? The young local commander, Lieutenant Colonel Shams, said that he was determined to sort the miscreants out. He denied the charge of wanton killing by the army-the army fought back only when attacked. It was a national army, he said, and one just could not shoot at the army and get away with it-'We would go on shooting, if required'.

Chittagong was a dead city. All along the route-from the airport to the cantonment, a distance of about 10 to 12 miles-there was hardly a soul around. Only troops stood in full combat order as army jeeps and trucks whizzed past. The port area, normally bustling with activity, was deserted. Not much damage was visible to the port installation and except for the patrolling troops, there was hardly any other sign of activity. A number of ships were docked at the piers without their crews, The impression of normality which the West Pakistani press had been trying so hard to build, was shattered at first glance.

After the briefing by the brigade commander, the journalists split into two groups, one to go to the Ispahani Colony at Kalurghat and the other to the port area. Before we left, we went for lunch to the newly built air-conditioned Agrabad Hotel. The hotel was practically deserted except for one or two Bengali families lunching and talking in low tones. There were a number of army officers in uniform. Two young SSG commandos present there, stood out for their excellent military turnout and bearing. They were the centre of attention and the Bengali staff of the hotel fussed over them as if they were the actual rulers. The difference between the Bengali civilian and West Pakistan military could not have been more glaring. They were anything but fellow citizens.

The food was excellent at the hotel; better than in a Dhaka or a Karachi hotel, and was well served, but there was no communication between the staff and the West Pakistanis whatsoever, except for an occasional exchange of furtive glances. It was difficult to imagine how the two could ever become one after such a complete breakdown of trust and communication!

8

A CURTAIN-RAISER

THE foreign correspondents were beginning to assess the situation for themselves. The army was all over the place and there was not a trace of the Bangladesh they had heard so much about. Most of the rebels had been either driven across to India or had gone underground. The army was in full control of the cities. Nevertheless, things were far from normal and the question in everyone's mind was that how long would the army be able to stay in control without the support and goodwill of the people? It was evident that the Bengalis, irrespective of their political affiliations, were distrustful of the army.

The correspondents would in due course come to know of the army's excesses-its 'sweep operations'-to eliminate the 'miscreants' from various trouble spots. No witnesses were left as a result of these operations. In a Bihari refugee camp, the misery and the state of the people, mostly women and children, was beyond comprehension. It was becoming quite clear that there were already two nations in Pakistan and no power on earth could keep them together. By then the Bengalis were totally scared and thoroughly demoralized and it seemed unlikely that they would ever be able to fight back and send the army packing. The only organized party, the Awami League, had been banned and most of its front-line leaders had fled to India.

The Bengalis, generally speaking, could be divided into two broad categories-the refugees who were crossing into India in hundreds and thousands every day, and those who stayed at home, middle class city~dwellers in government jobs or running small businesses. They sulked in their homes and offices, never missing an opportunity of getting hold of a foreigner and pouring their hearts out to him. Stories of extensive killings and rapes floated in the air like leaves in autumn. The correspondents were often approached by the Bengalis in their hotel rooms and briefed about the actual situation.

The army itself exuded an overt sense of achievement having physically secured the province and getting rid of the 'miscreants'. They had confidence in their ability to carry on for the next 'twelve years', if necessary. By then, it was generally thought that the East Pakistanis would have seen through the insidious Indian propaganda and recovered from its effects. The army action was expected to provide a strong base upon which the edifice of the national language and culture could be raised. There was no doubt that in professional terms the army had done quite a remarkable job. The East-West airlift, ferrying troops and equipment to the East etc., were real feats of logistics. The conduct of a successful counter-insurgency operation in the East was no mean achievement. By May, the army was in full physical command and control of the province, just the right time to initiate the process of political reconciliation and settlement.

The moderates amongst the Bengalis were eager for the process to start. They wanted the president to come over to see things for himself and hold talks with the politicians. Some 80 Awami League MNAs and over 200 MPAs were said to be present in the province, waiting to re-surface at the first green signal from Islamabad. Mrs Akhtar Sulaiman had been in Dhaka as the president's envoy to establish contacts with the MNAs. She invited me to her hotel room one afternoon. She was not too happy with the progress of her work but was still hopeful. She believed that the president's physical presence in the province was essential and would make a world of difference to the whole situation. She said that the majority of the MNAs and MPAs were in the province but they were mostly incommunicado for fear of the military.

The word 'miscreant' had become the Bengali politician's nightmare. A captain or a major could label anyone a 'miscreant' and hang him. The population had been divided into three categories of white, black, and grey. The whites included mostly Biharis and only about 20 to 25 per cent of the Bengalis. The bulk of the Bengali population was in the black or grey categories. All Bengalis were potential suspects and were under a constant watch; they were not to be trusted. People were being 'lifted' from their homes without warrants and driven to the cantonments and other interrogation centres. Most of them never returned. They could be politicians, civil servants, students~anyone.

It was rumoured, and widely believed, that those who were taken away in this manner were subjected to the worst kind of torture. People

were so scared that they did not allow their children-young girls and boys-to leave their homes at all. Dhaka looked ominously deserted. l did not see more than a dozen or so young people out in the streets during my week-long stay in the city. Most of the shops were still closed. The bazar and the route to town from the airport, normally a busy area, were conspicuously deserted. Shops and localities facing Farm Gate-the notorious hub of agitators during the civil disobedience movement, were without their usual hustle and bustle. It was obvious that the military had a long way to go before 'normalcy' could be restored, alongwith civilian morale and confidence.

Dhaka was still under night curfew from l() p.m. to 5.30 a.m. The foreign correspondents ridiculed our normalcy stories. If this was normal then God help Pakistan, they said. Armed soldiers and gun- carrying Razakars (West Pakistan volunteers) were the only pedestrians who seemed unafraid and confident. The others simply scampered along like frightened lambs. The Press Club was nearly deserted with just two or three tight-lipped journalists seen reading their morning papers. Their characteristic ebullience was gone and they hardly ever talked. Bengali journalists would avoid meeting me and took good care not to be seen with me for fear of being identified and branded as collaborators. I went to their office to find them either disgruntled or gloomy; no one was his usual self.

Salam Bhai, the editor of the Pakistan Observer, pretended to be happy with the speed with which the situation had been improving but at the same time, he felt that it could have been a lot better had the government sought an end to the military action and had initiated political dialogue in sincere earnest. 'There can be no political settlement without the Awami League, whether one likes it or not,' he contended. In his opinion, the ban on the Awami League was a mistake and the sooner it was rectified, the better. He was afraid that if a political settlement was postponed indefinitely, it would lead to increased violence and anarchy. The extremist militant groups were out to create chaos and subversion. The Muktis were already gaining strength.

Young men in their hundreds, perhaps thousands, were daily crossing over to the other side to swell the ranks of the rebels. Salam's views were corroborated by Zahur Chowdhry of the Shangbad. Trying to appear his usual self; he would not talk much and was visibly scared. He would simply shudder to think of the prospect of the Muktis and pro»Mujib extremists ever getting the upper hand. He knew that

such a situation would be the end of him for his known connection with the regime and West Pakistan. He praised the senior officers but was unhappy with the conduct of the juniors. They had gone berserk. Rape and violence were the order of the day. No Bengali felt safe even in his own home. Often, during the curfew hours, young officers would barge into people's homes and do whatever they pleased. They treated the Bengalis like slaves.

One could see for oneself that something was the matter with the jawans and the officers. The way they carried themselves in the bazars did little credit to them as professional soldiers on a highly sensitive national mission. They walked with their heads high and noses in the air. The Bengalis hurried to get out of their way, something which seemed to please the soldiers. I had seen the jawans among the local people on a number of occasions previously~the last was during the days of the 1970 cyclone. At that time they had behaved and acted in the best tradition of their service and as fellow citizens helping their brethren in distress. Despite the strange anti-West Pakistan feeling even at that point, the stock of the army for their relief work during the floods stood very high. By May 1971, however, the picture had changed completely and the soldier was no longer the kind protector but the enforcer of a repressive order. One could see a distinct change in the common soldier's attitude, not only towards the Bengali civilians, but also towards his own superiors. Serious lapses of discipline by officers or JCOs were being allowed to go unnoticed and unchecked. The jawans were being made to do a job for which they had not been trained. Instead of taking orders they were ordering the Bengalis around most of the time.

A move towards political settlement by the middle of May could have salvaged the situation to a great extent. The army had by then restored the writ of the government in all the major cities.

Psychologically also, perhaps, it was the most appropriate time since a large number of people had, by then, come to believe and admit that they had been betrayed by Mujib. It was he who was responsible for their terrible ordeal. No one had voted him for an outright secession; no one had authorized him to choose the path which would only lead to bloodshed and destruction. Grave doubts about his political strategy were openly expressed. Why for instance, did he refuse to go to West Pakistan to see the president when the latter had cordially invited him and even referred to him as the future prime minister of Pakistan? Why did he have to go to Paltan Maidan

to put his supporters under an oath of loyalty to him and allegiance to the party and commitment to the six-points?

That was the moment when Mujib himself ceased to be the absolute leader of the Awami League and allowed power to pass into the hands of the 'syndicate'. Why did he have to rub the army the wrong way? Even if the civil disobedience movement of March was unavoidable, was there any need to subject the army to public ridicule and mockery? Any right-minded person should have realized that the support of the army was crucial to the whole question of transfer of power. The PPP leader knew and accepted that and had re-adjusted his attitude towards the army after the elections. Mujib should have done the same.

Begum Sulaiman regretted the fact that Mujib, instead, had chosen the path of direct confrontation with the army. That, she said, was his 'biggest error', How could anyone insult and antagonize the army~ the fountainhead of all power under martial law-and get away with it? Hamidul Haq Chowdhry also held the same view, Mujib's stature, from the unchallenged leader of the Bengali masses, would thus appear to have progressively dropped to that of a rabble-rouser. The leftists thought of him as badly as the rightists. To them he had all along been an agent of the capitalists and it would have been futile to expect anything better from him. Disillusionment with Mujib could not have been greater. The military had shown its mettle and proved its logistical capability and tactical superiority to the hilt. The border had been virtually sealed and the miscreants chased out. The common man simply asked for peace and normality; he seemed to wish to have nothing to do with Mujib, for he had done them no good.

The correspondents observed and gauged these sentiments among the people, and seemed convinced that the Bengalis had given up. They even felt sorry for, and disappointed with the Bengalis' lack of resistance. They saw that while the army was everywhere, there was no trace of a Bengali resistance movement. The Indian propaganda about an imaginary place called Mujibnagar, the headquarters of the new republic, stood thoroughly exposed, as did the Pakistani claims of peace and normalcy.

It was obvious that things were far from normal. The cities were deserted and so were the villages, One wondered where all the teeming millions had gone. From the helicopter we saw jute and paddy fields in full bloom but hardly any people around. Women and children had become a rare sight all across the countryside.

After the correspondents left on the llth, I called on Niazi, Farman, and Tikka to say goodbye to them and give them some of my impressions of the trip, They exuded self-confidence and a sense of optimism quite out of harmony with the prevalent situation. Niazi was busy convening people to their original Islamic faith from which he believed they had gone astray under Hindu influence. He attributed all the ills that East Pakistan had suffered from, to Hindu influence and propaganda. The Bengali Muslims had been poor and downtrodden for centuries; and had always been exploited by the Hindu bania (moneylender). To help them shed their fear of the Hindus, it was essential to rekindle the true Islamic spirit. There was nothing wrong with the Bengali language as it was spoken but only as it was written. The script, therefore, had to be changed and the sooner the better. An average Bengali Muslim was more religious and God-fearing than an average West Pakistani but the dominance of the Hindu culture and mythology had left an enduring impact on his faith.

Farman looked his usual sel£ quiet and enigmatic. He was not, however, as sure of himself as Niazi was. He spoke of a political settlement and said that moves were being made in that direction. He also spoke against the severity of the military action and its continuation. He said that he had been against the use of force all along and had pleaded with the president and Peerzada not to postpone the assembly session and to transfer power to Mujib. He spoke of his meeting with Peerzada a month or so after the elections. He had advised Peerzada for an early session of the assembly or else, he had warned, the situation in East Pakistan would go completely out of control.

‘What sort of Pakistan would it be with Mujib as an absolute boss, on the basis of his absolute majority?,’ Peerzada had queried.

‘A weak and loosely-joined Pakistanl’ Fannan answered.

‘But we want a strong and united Pakistan’, Peerzada stressed. ‘We won’t let Mujib have his way.’

Farman’s response was that Pakistan was no longer like ‘a palace’ but ‘a thatched hut’; and at that time the issue on hand was to save the hut. Peerzada laughed off the analogy. He did not see any cause for such pessimism,

Later, a&er the postponement of the assembly, Farman visited Islamabad again and had another meeting with Peerzada, who was then in a totally different frame of mind. He wondered if there was any Pakistan left at all after Mujib’s seizure of the civil goverment.

Farman said that the 'thatched hut' was still there but now it was without a base or a foundation. However, it could still be saved if the government wished to do so. He did not seem to be too happy with the way Niazi had been handling the situation. The Bengalis were being treated shabbily, practically as Hindus. Niazi never got tired of calling all of them 'traitors'. His oft-repeated belief was: 'once a traitor, always a traitor'.

Tikka Khan was more concerned with the civilian aspect of the problem-the economy, the restoration of the rail, road, and river transport, re-activation of the Chittagong and the Chalna ports, and the transport of jute and rice. He had been working hard, keeping an almost eighteen-hour day schedule. He was directly in touch with the civil functionaries-from the ordinary clerk to senior officials. His knowledge and comprehension of economic issues, however, was poor, He was often given rosy pictures of the situation by demoralised and frightened officials, which he accepted. He was sure that there was enough food, and also adequate means to transport it to remote areas. The Dhaka-Chittagong link was at that time through Chandpur and the direct link was to be shortly restored. The issue of politics did not bother him and he sincerely believed that the bulk of the population rested contented. Tikka's assessment of the situation reflected military hard-headedness and the reluctance to accept failure.

I was invited to dinner by the Commander 14 Division, Major General M. Rahim Khan during my stay. Rahim had taken over command of the Dhaka-based 14 Division from Major General Khadim Hussain Raja, who had been transferred to West Pakistan at his own request, shortly after the military action which he did not support. It is to be noted that for twenty-four years, from 1948 to l97l, 14 Division was the only infantry formation in East Pakistan responsible for its defence, Rahim had been an old friend of mine. A good officer, he had always been most thoroughly opinionated and inflexible in his views, refusing to see what he did not like, He argued that every military failure was in fact a PR failure. In his opinion the information agencies had failed completely. That was the reason why Indian propaganda was doing so well worldwide. Indian PR was very efficient.

'But do we have much to show to the world as our achievement? I would ask. 'There is a mounting refugee problem; Indian PR is only cashing in on our problems,' I would argue. There was nothing intrinsically superior about Indian public relations. But he would not

agree with me. He wanted all the information agencies of the government to be concentrated in Dhaka.

I left Dhaka three days later, spent a day in Karachi and then was back in Rawalpindi. On the evening I arrived there, I ran into Peerzada while taking my usual walk. He was with his wife, Fareeda, a charming Pathan lady. He knew that I had been to Dhaka and asked me about the conditions there. I told him that they were not too good and far from normal. He agreed with my assessment, and told me something rather strange, He said that he had warned the president that they would not be able to control the army once the action was launched. The action of 25 March had to be taken to save Pakistan. But he knew even then that things would be difficult to control once the military operation was launched. He was talking in riddles-I found it hard to gauge what he really meant. That he himself was no longer in command of affairs as he had been, was more than evident.

After the military action the initiative had passed from HQ CMLA to the GHQ. On the political side, the control of affairs had practically passed into the hands of General Umar. That left Peerzada without his real power base and he was reduced to the position of the most senior staff officer at the HQ CMLA, responsible for sending routine notes to the president. The real power had shifted to the GHQ and the National Security Council.

I dared to remind him of our talk on the morning of 25 March, at the President House, Dhaka. I had then suggested that the army be kept out and that a political solution be sought. Peerzada did not quite remember. About Mujib, he said, the old man (Yahya) would not hear a word in his support. The man was a traitor, had to be treated as such, and tried for high treason.

Peerzada had only too evidently been concemed with his own position in the new order of things. Although a serving general officer, he stood praeticallyi isolated from the army and did not enjoy its confidence. Hamid and Gul Hassan had now taken over the military, and Umar the political front.

The next day I called on Gul Hassan at his office. I told him that the army, by and large, had gone berserk. Young officers had become trigger-happy and, it seemed, were on a sort of a playful spree. All the rosy ‘sitreps’ (situation reports) from the Eastern Command were not always factual as they themselves were not fully in the picture. Signals from the field subordinate formations did not always report all the facts, Local commanders acted at their own discretion and did what

they pleased. The higher echelons were fast losing their grip on the lower formations and it was the man on the spot, from a sepoy upwards, who mattered. .

Men, except those sitting in the trenches and engaged in regular military operations, had lost their sense of military discipline. Foreign correspondents were impressed by the professional standards of the army but they thought it was ultimately going to be an 'unwinnable war'. Gul Hassan agreed. He said that he knew all that and had conveyed it to Hamid. Much to my own amazement he looked and sounded equally helpless-just like Peerzada. Who then was the real authority? Nobody knew. In West Pakistan, no one seemed to be worrying about the Eastem half The PPP had been quite aggressively pressing its demand for the transfer of power. After the ban on the Awami League, the PPP had emerged as the largest single party in the country and it demanded power as a matter of right.

The administration, which had been openly siding with the PPP since the Larkana talks in the middle of January, had suddenly turned against it. They did not like Bhutto's demand for the transfer of power Transfer of power to whom? The leader of the majority party was in captivity, awaiting trial for high treason and his party had been outlawed. The question of transferring power, therefore, did not arise. Was Yahya trying to turn the political stalemate into his opportunity to rule the country forever? He considered the PPP's demand for political power to be a bad joke.

If that was indeed Yahya's political strategy, there could have been nothing more crude and ill-conceived. He wanted to rule the country from his ivory tower (a la King Farooq of Egypt), after having unleashed the monster of civil war in the country. He dared not visit East Pakistan to see things for himself, and he even seemed to forget that he was still the C-in-C and that his soldiers were fighting a war in the eastern theatre. It was counter-insurgency as well as a regular operation against India. Gul Hassan told me that the chief had ignored his advice to visit the troops in East Pakistan. Perhaps a visit at that stage would have really turned the corner. It was Yahya's only opportunity to assess the situation for himself, to review the situation and alter his strategy accordingly. The operation was nearly two months old and was continuing without being anywhere near the achievement of the set objective which was the restoration of peace and normality and the creation of an environment conducive to a speedy political solution of the crisis.

Yahya should have asked himself why an operation, planned to be completed within a matter of hours or days, was still going on, and why the situation despite all the stories of normality, kept on deteriorating. He had somehow been made to believe that all the negative reports regarding East Pakistan were foreign propaganda spearheaded by the BBC and AIR. Did they not claim that Tikka Khan had been killed and Mujib was still leading the freedom movement from his underground HQs? Had they also not propagated the establishment of the Bangladesh government? As far as he was concerned, all such stories were lies and fabrications. He came to believe that it was not he or his army that had failed but his PR machinery. Yahya, who had so far shied away from PR, suddenly sought refuge in it. Hence forward, the story of his regime was of one PR failure after another, aggravated by one political blunder after another.

By the end of May, Yahya's PR operations were in full swing. He spearheaded the operations himself and addressed a press conference in Karachi on 24 May, Yahya, and his close associates, thought that the foreign press was their only enemy and developed a strong persecution complex. All blame was laid at the door of the foreign media, mainly Indian, for the stories about the teeming refugees, the activities of the Mukti Bahini, the widespread unrest in East Pakistan- in their opinion, each and everything was the figment of the foreign propagandist's imagination.

The Bengali complement at the Karachi press conference, virtually begged the president to visit East Pakistan and see things for himself and to restore general confidence. To all such questions addressed to him, Yahya's simple reply was that he would, only if he considered it necessary as the army chief Mashallah, the situation was rapidly improving in East Pakistan and there was hardly any need for him to be there 'breathing down the neck' of the local commanders and interfering with their good work. He was the president and the army commander and would go wherever there was trouble. Did he not visit East Pakistan during the floods, the cyclones, and the civil disobedience period? He would go there again at the right time. Besides, there was such a lot to be done at the centre-the national budget was in the final stages of preparation, foreign delegations were arriving, and all this left him little time for a visit to East Pakistan. He was firm about the trial of Mujib. The man was a traitor and a citizen of Pakistan, and would be dealt with under the laws of the land.

The East Pakistani editors present at the conference looked scared and did not pose a lot of questions. Even the old heckler, Zahur Bhai, looked pre-occupied in his own thoughts. For a while it appeared as if the president might go to the eastern half after all, but he never did. General Niazi advised him against the trip which he thought would create rather than solve problems. Moreover, he pointed out, the president's personal security and protocol alone would be difficult to tackle in the circumstances.

Niazi as the local army commander was in total control and left entirely to his own devices even over and above General Tikka Khan, the governor. Those who dared to raise their voice against the army action were either contemptuously dismissed, or punished, like Malik Ghulam Jeelani-a Lahore lawyer, politician, and human rights activist. The emphasis in the West had shifted almost wholly from the fate of the country, to the issue of transfer of power. Yahya had initiated a dialogue with Bhutto in this regard. But this was more of an eyewash-a temporising ploy and a subterfuge. It was obvious that he was not going to part with power.

In the meantime, on 9 August, steps for Mujib's trial were initiated in strict secrecy. Brigadier (later General) Rahimuddin Khan was named president of the tribunal. He was assured by the president that he would have full freedom of action, and that he was to conduct the trial in a manner that could withstand the scrutiny of the most impartial observer. The special tribunal was set up in Lyallpur (now F aisalabad). Logistically it was a wholly makeshift arrangement with hardly any office equipment except for some tables and chairs. There was not even a proper typewriter, and I had to borrow one from Mr Sadiq, a senior functionary of the United Bank Limited, of the Rawalpindi cantonment branch.

Rahimuddin was a typecast, a no-nonsense product of the Indian and Pakistan's military academies. He was reputed to go bythe book, with little taste or compulsion to interpret the matter imaginatively or to temper justice with mercy. As one of our family's closest friends, he told me once that Mujib appeared in the court with a copy of the Holy Quran hanging around his neck. He broke down and wept, and said: 'How can I even think of playing traitor to Pakistan, my beloved country...' (or words to that effect). The famous constitutional lawyer, A.K. Brohi, acted as Mujib's defence lawyer, at the behest and expense of the government, without a request from Mujib, who had opted to plead his own defence,

Mujib was sentenced to death in the third week of November 1971, and sent off to a maximum-security jail in Mianwali (north Punjab). He was locked up in a death cell. My friend and colleague at the HQ CMLA, Colonel Hassan, told me that Yahya never confirmed the death sentence or 'appended his signature to it'. Mujib would be eventually released by Bhutto on 7 January 1972, and flown off to London.

No steps were, however, taken to initiate the political process. This was despite situation reports that conditions in East Pakistan continued to deteriorate. The guerrillas were becoming bolder and had extended their activities from the border areas into the cities. Dhaka itself was being subjected to mounting pressure and life in the city was still far from normal. Yahya was still indecisive about his visit although it had been months since his last visit in March on the eve of the army crackdown, Newspapers in West Pakistan, under pre-censorship, continued to paint a rosy picture of the military operations, without

ever commenting on as to how and when they were going to end. Despite the pressure from Bhutto for the transfer of power, Yahya seemed to be in full command of the situation, He had the army on his side and most of the West Pakistani politicians were for a continuation of the status quo. They did not seem to care much about the country as a whole and appeared disinterested in the mounting civil war in East Pakistan and its devastating impact on the image of Pakistan in the world. Nor were they concerned about the economic depression that threatened industrial activity in West Pakistan or the looming threat of an imminent war with India.

9

THE BITTER HARVEST

I went to East Pakistan again in June. Even from the aircraft I could see little change in the general picture of the city. The roads still looked desolate and the city wore a pall of gloom. The gun emplacements at the airport were still there, and soldiers could still be seen all over the place. Hundreds of Pakistani flags flew from rooftops as opposed to the black flags seen previously. The airport itself was guarded by a heavy security force. There was little change from the situation in early May. Most of the shops along the airport were still shuttered. The cantonment bustled with soldiers-armed, wearing their full webbing equipment. They looked cheerful and seemed at peace with themselves and the world around in that strife- torn city.

The COS, General Abdul Hamid, was also in Dhaka. I contacted his private secretary, Brigadier Gulistan Khan Janjua, immediately on my arrival. He asked me to join them the next day on their tour of the various deployment areas. The tour was a real eye-opener. It looked as if the entire province had been de-populated. Fields were practically deserted and the villages looked no different. We visited Brahmanbaria, Jessore, Chittagong, Barisal, and Natore. Members of the peace committees were there to receive us everywhere. The Pakistani flag could be seen all over the place, in all shapes and sizes. Children in the streets carried paper flags; cycle-rickshaw pullers displayed them on their handlebars; they fluttered from all the shops and houses. It was a most abnormal and weird sight. I saw a similar sight in Nature, and pointed that out to the GOC, General Nazar Hussain Shah. ‘It is hardly normal to see so many national flags in a city virtually under curfew’, I said.

He agreed with me, adding that the national flag was the people’s ‘only badge of life’. It was their only guarantee for security. They displayed it more out of fear than patriotism.

We paid a visit to a Bihari refugee camp. It was just like the camp

I had visited a month ago with the foreign correspondents. The conditions and the atmosphere inside the camp were also similar. The wretched inmates started to howl as soon as we entered the camp. It was almost mechanical-a well-rehearsed piece. There was no doubt though about the sheer misery and wretchedness of the inmates. At a local school we were welcomed by the young headmistress, and little boys and girls, raising the Pakistan Zindabad slogans at the top of their reedy voices. They sang the national anthem, painstakingly pronouncing each word of the ornate Farsi-dominated text. It was a pathetic sight-national songs being sung while cries of 'Joi Bangla' were being raised just across the border, and 'Sonar Bengal' was being sung to warm every Bengali heart. What did the future hold for these children and women, one wondered even then.

The situation, by and large, appeared to be under control, at least militarily. The military commanders seemed determined to sort out the miscreants. As before, the question still was, how long would the military with all its professional skill and resources, be able to stick it out? Guerrilla activity had already assumed a regular pattern. The EBR and EPR deserters had thrown away their old army uniforms and were infiltrating deep into the villages and towns, in Iungis (a type of sarong), in order to blend in with the inhabitants. The Mukti Bahini regulars were becoming bolder with the passage of time, and were mounting ever bigger attacks, The battle of the Belonia Bulge, near Feni in the Brahamanbaria sector had just concluded. The army had carried the day but it had to deploy a whole brigade and use helicopters to surprise and chase the enemy off from the rear.

The Belonia battle was the first significant demonstration of the new tactics adopted by the Muktis, They had been able to pin down a much bigger professional force with a smaller one, and were also able to size up the 'enemy'. Belonia could be described as an example of 'over~reaction and over-expenditure' of effort on the part of Niazi. It was letting the enemy twist his arm and size up his strength for a more concerted effort in the future. Hamid did not approve of the operation, and looked unhappy and unconvinced throughout the briefing, Niazi, on the other hand, saw the Belonia battle as a tactical piece in his overall strategic plan, which was to fight the war on enemy soil and create a five-mile demilitarized zone to provide a safe passage to his rail and road network.

At a briefing at the Brigade HQs at Feni, Hamid looked visibly perturbed. He was worried about the firture. What would happen alter the monsoons if a whole brigade group had been used already? Only Niazi looked confident. He referred to the Belonia salient contemptuously as 'that tongue' and told his brigade commander to eliminate it, to which Hamid said a firm 'No'. The army had also suffered light casualties in action.

The Belonia operation, though successfully concluded, was the turning point in the civil war. The Muktis, having suffered heavily in a direct encounter with the Pakistan Army, switched over to small, surprise guerrilla incursions, exploiting gaps and rushing thinly-held border outposts at a place and time of their own choosing. They all but gave up their earlier strategy and hasty tactics which was to seize a chunk of land at any cost and proclaim their government-in-exile from there for international recognition. From this time on, they began to resort to salaami tactics to cut the Pakistan Army bit by bit, overstretch it, and inflict heavy attrition on it.

In the wake of the failure of their offensive against the army, the Muktis were now planning for autumn, when water would have receded and conditions would be more favourable for the escalation of the conflict with the active and direct help of the Indian Army. They were getting ready to launch bigger attacks in a Vietcong-type mobile warfare. This was also in line with the Maoist doctrine, which prescribed 'concentration' for the Red Army (the regulars), and northern Vietnamese General Giap's strategy to annihilate the enemy manpower and liberate land. Guerrilla warfare has to gradually move to mobile warfare.

The rebels had a nucleus of well-trained soldiers in the EBR and EPR deserters. They were used for planning and directing the mobile warfare under the Indian command. The guerrillas could continue conducting their operations, from the so-called refugee camps or rebels' sanctuaries established close to the border on the Indian side. These sanctuaries continued to mushroom as more and more young men fled across, swelling the ranks of the rebels. The rains came as a boon to the Muktis and the inundated areas became ideal ground for ambush, raids, and small lightening attacks. Bigger, set piece attacks with the active help of the Indian Army were also launched to pin down the army in certain areas. The Pakistan Army's mobility and firepower was greatly reduced by the impact of the weather. Except in the north where hard ground was still available

for the use of artillery and light armour, the rest of the province was a huge swamp. Artillery shells fell in flooded fields and swamps without damaging a stalk. The Muktis' growing confidence was expressed in their three-fold legend which was as follows:

The day belongs to the army and the night to us,

The sunshine belongs to the army and the rain to us.

The cities belong to the army and the countryside to us.

The army prepared and trained hard for the riverine war. We saw jawans at the riverine training at various places underwater, with their snorkels sticking out. The question was, how long would, or could, they go on like that? One could see weariness overtaking them despite the apparently high morale. They were homesick and afraid that they might perhaps never go back to their families, There was a strange sense of isolation-the oppressive feeling of lonesomeness in the midst of a crowd. This feeling expressed itself at times in wanton acts of indiscretion and cruelty. Rapes and killings when considered in this psychosomatic context, would perhaps be easier to understand, even if still hard to condone or forgive. Homesick, love-starved jawans are most vulnerable to elemental appetites.

For the Punjabi and Pathan soldiers, the East Pakistan operations during the monsoons were a nightmare. What with the mosquitoes, jute moths, and other pests, the jawans were beginning to lose their will to tight. The front line soldier sat in swampy, inundated trenches, manning his position-his boots soaked through '1 and water dripping from his socks, the skin of his feet tender and affected by fungus, The poor man had to make do with the same uniform, the same pairs of boots and socks until he was issued a fresh one; and that could take days. There was no question of taking a short leave to visit home- only a hope that shortly perhaps, a solution would be found and the army could go back to the cantonments,

I saw a marked difference between the front line soldier and the soldier in the cantonmnents and towns. The soldier on the front, by and large, was doing what was expected from a professional soldier in the line of duty. The soldier in the cantonments and towns was insolent and ill-mannered. He would not even properly salute an officer passing by. He was the cock of the walk and carried himself like the lord and master of the land looking down upon the Bengalis with sneer and contempt. Havaldars and Subedars sauntered the Dhaka streets like

the tommies of the past. Officers behaved in much the same manner. These were the 'Niaziites', who, like their commander, displayed an extraordinary degree of arrogance. However, there were others too, with their eye and ears open, who had started to feel that the game was already up.

'Not one, not one of us', some stressed, 'will be able to leave this damned place alive'. They had no rear except for the watery grave of the Bay of Bengal. They wanted a political settlement; the military action was a spent force, it had outlived its utility. Since families had already been sent back home to West Pakistan, officers had all the time to themselves. In their Messes and homes they discussed the situation freely and most of them believed it could not continue like that very much longer.

Conflicts and tensions also appeared to be developing in the higher echelons of command. General Tikka had been isolated from the operational side and military decision-making. He was for all practical purposes a civilian governor with Farman as his only link with the military. Rahim, who had been relieved of his divisional command and posted as deputy martial law administrator, was Niazi's number two, and the two seemed to be getting along rather well. Both were 'hawks', both hell-bent on cleansing the Bengali race and culture and reviving the glory of Islam in a land which they thought to be under complete Hindu domination, psychologically and culturally. Both had a shared trait for over-simplification and terse rationalization. The majority of the Bengalis, they argied, were good Pakistanis; only they were poor, ignorant, and backward, hence easy prey to Hindu brainwashing. Eighty per cent of the school teachers in the villages were still Hindus and the big colleges and universities had a sizeable number of Hindu professors and lecturers. They had shaped and influenced the Bengali mind in its most formative years, and must be dispensed with if the Bengali mind was to be really freed to revert to Islam.

lt was both amazing and distressing to hear the generals talk like high priests. They appeared to be perfectly satisfied with the progress of the operations and were not aware of any errors that they might have committed during the four long months. Their cocksureness was simply amazing. Niazi talked of carrying the war into the enemy territory; he wanted a five-mile safety belt on no man's land to secure his Dhaka-Chittagong line against enemy intrusions. They simply failed to assess or appreciate the general mood and attitude of the locals

which was becoming increasingly hostile and anti-Pakistan with each passing day. Their only answer to deal with such elements was to eliminate them, to 'pick them up' and 'despatch them to Bangladeshi

Search parties and patrols~actually search-and-seize missions- went out to disturbed localities, apprehended suspects, and dispatched them to Bangladesh. People once picked up hardly ever re-surfaced. No one knew if they were dead or alive. They were taken to the various interrogation centres and put into various categories by the Inter»Se1vices Screening Committee (ISSC) under Brigadier Abdul Qadir. Those picked up ranged from highly placed civil servants and politicians, to common people. Practically everyone I came across had a friend or a relative missing. The search operations had caused a great deal of panic throughout the province and the matter was brought to the notice of Hamid. He ordered that the suspects should not be hauled up without proper search and arrest warrants signed by an officer not below the rank of a brigadier. The general complaint was that junior officers-majors and captains-had gone berserk and harassed innocent people as they pleased.

Conditions, generally speaking, were no better than had been a month earlier. The cities were relatively better~paxticularly Dhaka, but the villages, the districts and lehsils (sub-districts), were much the same as before~deserted and desolate. During our visit to a brigade HQs at Chandpur, we saw a column of smoke rising on one side. Hamid noticed and asked what was going on.

'They are burning a village, sir', an officer innocently answered.

'Whatever for?'

'To flush out the miscreants, sirl' the officer answered just as innocently.

I could see Hamid's face change colour and go livid. He paused for a while and then turned to the brigade commander, Brigadier Atif, to tell him that it was hardly good burning up a whole village, for after all the village belonged to Pakistan. It would have been much better to apprehend the miscreants and punish them, and leave the loyal and patriotic elements alone.

However, Niazi remained unimpressed, without showing any emotion. Wherever we went, the picture was the same, Only the members of the peace committees-mostly Biharis, showed any sign of life and interest, while the Bengalis, except for the odd official, looked lost and uncertain.

The bustling city of Chittagong was just as dead as before. The port was practically idle. The military was all over but the pedestrians were few and far between. Up north, at Saidpur, with its pre-dominance of Bihari railwaymen, the situation seemed a lot better. We were given a rousing reception at the newly-constructed airfield. The Biharis had done the job entirely on a self-help basis. Incidentally, ours-an Otter STOL (short-takeoff-and-landing) aircraft-was the first PIA aircraft to land at Saidpur. There was, therefore, more reason than one, for the enthusiasm and excitement. People raised 'Pakistan Zindabad, Pakistan Fauj Zindabad,' slogans. lt was almost like the good old days, only with a strong touch of the bizarre. These people were like a group shipwrecked on an island waiting for a phantom rescue boat.

Niazi accompanied Hamid throughout the tour, looking the very picture of cockiness. But that was more of an appearance than reality. He had serious command problems. At Jehnida, the GOC, Major General Shaukat Riza requested Hamid for a meeting to discuss 'command problems'. Hamid agreed and the two retired to a corner to talk. Shaukat Riza asked for permission to resign or for a transfer back to West Pakistan. He told Hamid that he was sorely upset with Niazi's behaviour, which he compared to that of a Subedar-major. Niazi was meddlesome and did not allow his commanders any freedom. Only days later, Shaukat Riza was transferred to West Pakistan.

Niazi's one egregious blunder was that he had tumed a purely intemal security operation into a full fledged military one. He was more concerned with a military victory against India than with normalizing the intemal situation. Internal security management was left to his junior commanders, who did what they pleased. Cases of rape and looting were dealt with by the local commanders as far as possible, and reported to the higher command only in case of extreme gravity. Many unpleasant facts, therefore, were hardly ever made known to the authorities in time.

The army was in a desperate haste to flush out the rebels and consolidate their position before initiating a political dialogue. The Muktis, having been expelled from the province, were going all out for a chunk of land well inside the province to establish a show-piece government and ask for international recognition. India was also becoming desperate as the operations did not seem to be proceeding within its given timeframe. In view of these developments, the need for an early political settlement could not have been more compelling. But the senior

commanders missed the point completely. They based their assessment of the situation on what they saw in Dhaka. Compared to March and April, Dhaka seemed fairly normal in terms of official activity: the attendance in the secretariat was nearly 90 per cent, the university was open, and factories had resumed work. While all that was very true the fact remained that the Bengali secretariat staff at all levels, only marked attendance in their offices without doing much work. There was no one to take decisions and files moved back and forth, ultimately landing up at the governor's house or the ML HQs for disposal.

As for the university, students did go there but most of them bunked classes and stayed out gossiping in mutinous undertones. Every day, some of them would disappear to join the Muktis in their freedom struggle. The factories worked far below their capacity. Movement of raw stocks from the interior was extremely slow and unsatisfactory. The main railway link between Dhaka and the rest of the province was not yet through and inland waterway transport was the only means of transportation. Production, therefore, suffered because of the unsatisfactory state of procurement and supply. The wheels of the government machinery were back in motion, but they were painfully slow.

I was in Dhaka when Yahya broadcast his speech of 28 June. The speech, with all its underlying conditionalities and reservations for the resumption of the political process, was his Worst since the one made on 25 March. It virtually slammed shut the door to a political dialogue with the Awami League.

It was nothing less than an outright condemnation of Mujib and a plea for his impeachment' even before the man had been formally indicted. Yahya accused Mujib of conspiring to divide the country into two:

He (Mujib) had already made up his mind that he was going to break the country into two, preferably by trickery and if this did not succeed, by physical violence...

He said that all his efforts to help political parties to arrive at a consensus for an acceptable and lasting constitutional framework were frustrated by certain leaders of the defunct Awami League.

On the one hand, they brought the negotiations to an impasse, by their persistent intransigence and obduracy and, on the other hand, intensified

their nefarious activities of open defiance of the government. The Very existence of the country was at stake.

It was in these circumstances that I ordered the armed forces to restore the authority of the government. No government worth its name could allow the country to be destroyed by open and armed rebellion against the State,

Quite unwittingly perhaps, he confessed to the utter failure of the LFO to serve as the sheet-anchor of constitution-making. He denounced the 'regrettable phenomenon' of 'constitution-making' as the source giving rise to all sorts of regional and parochial sentiments. Going back to the process of formation of the constitution, he said that it had given rise to the worst type of political bickering and intrigue which threatened the very existence of the country; and when, in the end, they at last produced a Constitution in 1956, it was 'a product of all sorts of conflicting compromises and expedienciesi

He went on to announce the legal method of by-elections for the vacancies in the aftermath of the mass defections of the Awami League MNAS and MPAS. He praised the people of East Pakistan for 'manifesting a great sense of patriotism and national unity, in helping the armed forces in rooting out the miscreants and infiltrators' clever but hardly credible attempt to bring in question the patriotic commitment of the non-activist, peace-loving common people who had been confined to their own homes and who were 'engaged in a daily grind'!

It had been generally expected that the ban on the Awami League would be lifted and that a dialogue would be initiated, between the government and the Awami League. On the contrary, the plan sought to unseat all the absent Awami League assembly members and hold mid-term elections by November-still five months away. Only a fool could have thought about elections in the prevailing situation in East Pakistan. And there was no hope of the situation improving while the government was reluctant to deal with the Awami League. lt was not known exactly who was manipulating the strings of the government policy. Decision-making was lost between the GHQ and HQ CMLA.

Umar seemed to be the man on the political front but he too looked frustrated. His 30-odd-page paper on the 'Total Threat to Pakistan' had been very casually treated by Yahya. Umar had been rather proud of his thesis and expected immediate recognition and approval from the president but it never came through, He was also not too happy

with Bhutto's demand for an early transfer of power. 'He has disappointed me,' he would often say.

He was all for a political solution of the East Pakistan crisis. He would, however, still maintain that the military action of 25 March was absolutely correct. 'If it wasn't for that,' he swore, 'you would not have been able to get Yahya Khan out of Dhaka. The Awami League plans had been made already and the most important part of the plan was to take Yahya Khan alive and dictate terms. . ."

There was hardly any logic in Umar's reasoning and even he seemed to accept the obvious flaw, but pressed the point even against his own better judgement. If the action had been taken simply to save Yahya, there was hardly any need or justification for continuation of the action once Yahya had been physically moved out of Dhaka. In fact, it would have been eminently sensible and proper for the C-in-C to be there personally at the time of launch of the action to ensure a smooth conclusion. But then, what about the Awami Leag'ue's plan to seize all the cantonments soon after midnight on the 26th? It was all such a hodgepodge, now one thing and then another. Everybody was either confused or simply reluctant to confess their mistake.

Yahya, for his part, was becoming more and more inaccessible. He had postponed his programme to visit East Pakistan indefinitely. He thought that he had done enough by announcing his new plan which would have the people believe that he was still the 'reluctant dictator/ anxious to transfer power to the 'elected' representatives of the people; but hardly anyone believed him now.

The PPP was becoming increasingly aggressive. Strangely enough, it had welcomed Yahya's new plan although they would rather have had the by-elections advanced by a month or so. As for the feasibility of the plan, Umar maintained that that was no problem. They would have candidates elected 'unopposed' if many people were not coming forward. The simple question that whether that would be enough to restore the people's morale and confidence was completely ignored. The situation in the province was that the Bengalis had virtually lost their 'sense of citizenship'. They felt denationalized, deprived, and disowned. They suffered from a crushing sense of uncertainty about their own future; the word 'normalcy' simply sickened them,

In a meeting with Farman in Dhaka in June, I discussed this issue with him. He seemed to agree with me but was hopeful about the results of the president's new plan. Farman had been somewhat of an enigma to me it was impossible to divine his inner thoughts and

emotions. He was a man of few words, intelligent, with a good grasp of the situation in the province. But he suffered from the typical failing of an army general actively involved in political and civil affairs. He believed that the so-called DS (directing staff) solutions were the answer to all human problems. His other disadvantage was a lack of direct contact with the people. He, along with all other government officials, relied upon the intelligence agencies for information.

I advised him to work on a closer, more personal liaison with the Press-not for publicity»but for developing better understanding and interaction. The Press could tell him a lot, which the intelligence could not, or simply would not.

1 also told him that during a meeting, Hamidul Haq Chowdhry had told me that about 80,000 trained men of the village police and Razakars were available to maintain law and order in the interior. The army could not do justice to both the tasks of policing the cities and securing the borders. That task had to be left to the citizen militias. Farman agreed and said that action in this regard had already started under the supervision of General Rahim. He had recently been to the GHQ to discuss his Razakar scheme with Hamid, who had already given it his approval in principle. That was how the Razakars of 'Al Shams' and 'Al Badar' (mainly Biharis) came into being.

But the way they were actually used later was not how Hamidul Haq had envisaged the situation. What Hamidul Haq had suggested was the raising of a militia of volunteers to assist, and eventually to relieve, the army of its policing duties, not a body of men to tighten and terrorize the common man. Unfortunately, that is what it eventually turned out to be.

I also suggested that the bulk of law-abiding citizens should be distinguished from the small body of 'miscreantsi In my opinion the right thing then would have been to isolate the EBR and EPR deserters-who formed the hard core of the Muktis from the ordinary troublemaker responsible for creating a threat to intemal peace and security. Also, distinction was required to be made between ordinary crime and sabotage. There was no need to mete out similar treatment to an ordinary case of theft or murder or one of loot and arson, to one of sabotage. An enormous amount of confusion had already been caused by mixing the two. The impact and success of all this, however, would depend entirely on the aims of the administration. If the aim was an enduring political settlement based on the wishes of the East Pakistanis, it would be only logical to adopt all means, big and small,

to restore the people's morale. Otherwise, there would be no need for all these niceties,

Famian listened to my suggestions but did not say anything. In the end, he said that he would take it up at an 'appropriate time' with the governor and the MLA. He also advised me to raise this issue with the GHQ and obtain instructions in this regard. I knew it would be of little use to get GHQ to issue instructions, since the GHQ was not quite sure of itself Niazi openly admitted that he hardly ever paid any heed to what the GHQ said. He had also told his commanders to report to the GHQ only as much as was absolutely necessary. It was the problem of the GHQ and they had to sort it out.

Niazi seemed to hugely enjoy the authority vested in him as the force commander and MLA. His DMLA, General Rahim, fully supported his policies. Rahim had set himself the task of brainwashing the Bengalis. He talked untiringly of psychological warfare and regarded no price too heavy to launch it effectively and extensively. In his view, until such time that the Bengalis persisted in holding on to their Hindu mindset, as evident in their script, their dress, and their love for Tagore and other Hindu intellectuals, there was little hope of their ever becoming good Pakistanis. They had to be re-initiated, therefore, into Muslim thought and ideology. He wanted to launch a giant campaign-internally, to bring the Bengalis back to their ideology and, externally, to expose the false Indian propaganda and favourable project the Pakistani viewpoint. He did not quite know how to go about the task, except for hedging around terms like 'Islam and Ideology, the solidarity and integrity of Pakistan, Mujib's mutiny', and so on. He believed and argued that the foreign press could be manipulated for this purpose, in a manner similar to India's. They had a price which had to be paid.

His strategy to achieve this objective entailed the distribution of thousands of single-band transistor sets across the countryside so that people could have first-hand access to the news, He talked continuously of PR and the role it could, and should, play in the whole affair. He did not think that the refugee problem or the insurgency existed in the way it was projected by India. Most of it was simply Indian propaganda. His unawareness of the ground reality of the Bengali 'liberation war' was simply amazing. He refused to listen to the stories of rapes and murders by the soldiers; he simply regarded them as foreign propaganda. There may have been a few odd cases here and there but that, he insisted, was only natural. The only point where he

was in agreement with me was on the need for the physical presence of the president in the eastern wing.

I was not any the wiser after my talk with the DMLA, since the most important question still remained unanswered. 'How long was the operation to last?' The army itself was in a bad shape. Incessant rains and overuse had already inflicted a lot of damage to the road network and transport. Any time during the day one could see jeeps being towed by other vehicles. About the turnout of the jawans, the less said the better. Their uniforms were soggy and crumpled, boots worn-out, and socks missing in most cases.

Back in West Pakistan, the political cauldron was getting closer to boiling point. Bhutto had thrown down the gauntlet and was pressing hard for the transfer of power to the PPPQ He also demanded the advancement of the date of the by-elections in East Pakistan from November to September. A strange mood of apathy had settled over both the HQ CMLA and GHQ. l made my usual report to the CGS, General Gul Hassan, in which I told him that the situation was continuing to deteriorate. The situation reports received from the Eastern Command hardly ever gave the full or correct picture of the situation. Few unpalatable events were reported to the GHQ, if at all. Niazi had, in fact, directed all his officers to report to the GHQ only what was absolutely necessary.

Gul Hassan viewed the Eastern Command situation reports as 'a bundle of lies' and just threw them away without even looking at them. It had indeed become a most critical and alarming state of affairs-each headquarter, the Eastem Command, the GHQ, and HQ CMLA, seemed to be functioning on its own, independently of each other. Niazi was busy in building up his own image as the force commander and used his PR and media outfit extensively for that purpose. The governor, Tikka Khan, had receded into the background. ln the context of Yahya's June plan for the by-elections, Gul Hassan questioned the wisdom, or necessity, of continuing the ban on the Awami League. In any case, elections would simply be inconceivable without the participation of the Awami League. He would say nothing about Hamid, Peerzada, or Umar. Each of the generals, at that stage, had his own little acre to plough, irrespective of what the others did. They had lost cohesion completely and had drifted away from one another. There was no active hostility as such, only mutual distrust and estrangement.

As before, in West Pakistan nobody seemed to be unduly bothered about the East, or cared to ask the question as to why the military operation was still continuing after the restoration of 'complete normalcy'. Nevertheless, everyone appeared to think and believe that the situation was under control and all that they heard about Home foreign networks was just anti-Pakistan propaganda. The central government's main effort had been to reinforce its PR as the best riposte to the situation. The information ministry was busy finalizing its 'White Paper' on the Crisis in East Pakistan (released a couple of months later in August) in addition to the official film documentary named 'The Great Betrayal'.

The film was a macabre joke. The only documentary evidence it had in support of its theme were some 60 to 70 skulls and bones of the people killed during the March civil strife. It could not be proved positively if the skulls were of Bengalis or non-Bengalis. The documentary was produced and directed by Aslam Azhar. He had also written the commentary. The rush print was processed and edited at a cinema lab in Brussels. The documentary focussed on the atrocities committed by the Bengalis against the non-Bengalis before and after the military action of 25 March.

It was previewed by Yahya, along with Hamid, Gul Hassan, Roedad (i.e. along with his team), and myself. Yahya's reaction to the documentary was one of disbelief and scepticism. He put two questions to Roedad:

l. 'Are you sure that all the destruction shown in the documentary is not the result of the military action'?'

2. 'How could you differentiate between the two skulls-Bengalis and non-Bengalis? I am damned if I can tell one from the other.'

His order was: 'Don't release it until I tell you', The documentary was finally approved for 'restricted audiences only', at the diplomatic level and was not approved for public showing.

East Pakistan was now open territory for the Press correspondents who could go and stay there as they wished. Their reports were alarming. The Muktis were getting more and more aggressively active. They were now concentrating their attention on the cities, particularly Dhaka. Not a day would go by when cases of sabotage and terrorism were not reported. The saboteurs had been targeting powerhouses to disrupt the supply of electricity. They raided mills and factories to

bring production to a standstill. They ambushed buses on the highways and river boats on waterways, making the movement of food and people unsafe and cumbersome. They planted bombs and mines on busy roads to disrupt traffic and terrorize people. They even became bold enough to detonate bombs in the vicinity of the cantonment.

There had been a number of explosions in front of the infamous Farm Gate, midway between the city and the cantonment. A bomb planted inside a toilet ofthe Inter-Continental Hotel caused extensive damage to the interior of the hotel, the bar, the cafeteria, and the dining room. A number of arrests were made, and the culprits were found to be carrying several different car number plates to escape detection. They confessed to being members of an organized group of young students whose objective was to destroy and kill. Security was further tightened following these incidents, and several barriers were erected between the Farm Gate and the cantonment, to check motorized and pedestrian traffic,

At the airport everyone, including West Pakistanis, were subjected to a physical search; but while the West Pakistanis got away with just a few light probes and pats, the Bengalis were thoroughly searched. In case anyone expressed resentment, he or she was brusquely told that these measures were undertaken to ensure their own security. That was all very well but the fact remained that those carrying out these searches were all West Pakistanis …. Punjabis and Pathans. Armed military commandos, in civvies and uniforms, manned all the PIA flights to prevent hijacking.

There was speculation about the initiation of a political dialogue and announcement of general amnesty but nothing positive materialized. The administration had been vainly hoping to achieve a miracle simply by denying foreign media news, together with the print media reports, while things drifted from bad to worse right under its nose!

10

INDIA IN TENSIF IES PROPAGANDA/MILITARY CAMPAIGN

BY about the end of July and the beginning of August, India had launched a two-front offensive-propaganda and military~ against Pakistan. On the one hand, it intensified the international and diplomatic campaign against Pakistan, on the other, it began launching military forays and excursions all along the East Pakistan border. While ground operations were launched under the cover of the Mukti Bahini, the Indian artillery came out into the open targeting border villages, and the rail and road network which ran perilously close to the border. Jessore was easily the hardest hit, Comilla and Sylhet were also targeted. The vital Dhaka-Chittagong railway link was badly disrupted which made transportation between the province's major seaports and airports a hazardous operation and one of uncertain frequency.

India's foreign propaganda focussed on two salient points: (l) the horrific stories of military atrocities, and (2) the endless stream of refugees pouring into West Bengal. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at one point quoted a dizzying figure of six million refugees. Pakistan's response on both fronts was disjointed, haphazard, and mutually contradictory. Islamabad would simply dismiss India's refugee exodus stories as a canard while Niazi would boast of the successes of his military and psychological war operations. There was no realization that such intensified operations would only result in creating an environment of terror, driving more and more people to move across the border in search of a sanctuary.

Documentaries were being made and screened about the return of the refugees. The fact of the matter was that hardly a few thousand had returned. The reception camps at Jeneda, at the Jessore border on

the main East Pakistan-Calcutta axis, had received around 2,500 returnees. The returnees would stay there for three days and were then taken to their villages. There were only a couple of such reception camps. Conditions inside these camps, despite an absence of crowds, were appalling, Small children were the worst affected. Most of them suffered from malnutrition and rickets. They looked like skeletons- their stomachs bloated and out of proportion to the rest of their bodies. The rickets victims were dying on the bare floors of the camp areas. The returnees looked utterly miserable-there was no hope in their eyes. If it was not for the intensified Indian shelling which made any cross-border movement impossible, they would have attempted to return to the Indian side.

The issue of refugees was the strongest card in the Indian hand. The governor, Tikka, and others, however, seemed more concerned with statistics than with seeking a solution to the problem. India had estimated the number of refugees to be around six to seven million; the governor had settled for his own estimation of two million-as far as he was concerned, the rest was Indian propaganda. They did not seem to grasp the simple fact that the mounting refugee exodus had internationalized the Bangladesh issue and that it had ceased to be a purely internal affair of Pakistan. They would merely react to whatever AIR, BBC, and other foreign networks put across rather than taking action on their own.

Whatever policies were formulated and adopted were mostly as a reaction to the Indian propaganda. All counter-measures to face and combat the refugees problem of the publication of the White Paper in August and the grant of a ‘General Amnesty’ a month later in September-only came in the wake of the Indian propaganda offensive and were, therefore, too late and ineffective, Until the end of May, Yahya stubbornly refused to even agree that there was any refugee problem worth discussing. He believed, and declared it so at a press conference, that most of the so-called refugees in the Indian camps were Indian destitutes masquerading as Pakistani refugees, Therefore, While he would be most Willing to take back ‘my refugees', he would not accept the impoverished Indians.

The government had expected to achieve a major propaganda breakthrough with the publication of the White Paper, after the production of documentaries titled ‘The Great Betrayal’ and ‘The Great Conspiracy ’. The entire scenario painted in the White Paper- from the launching of the six-point programme in 1966 down to

25 March 197l~though scrupulously doctored to put a gloss over bare and brutal facts, still suffered from the inescapable defects of such a work. It was anything but an authentic state paper, and the only thing it really proved was that nearly all the atrocities on the non Bengalis were committed by the Bengalis after the military action. This was fully substantiated with a breakdown given at the end of the booklet. (See APPENDIX 6)

The first draft of the White Paper was said to have been prepared at the British Museum by Professor G.W. Chowdhry-a Bengali scholar and communication minister under Yahya-with the help of foreign newspaper reports and stories.

The very genesis and timing of the White Paper compromised much of its authenticity. Chapter] (Towards Con/Wantation) opened abruptly with the lines, 'The political agitation against the 1962 Constitution had led the nation to a serious crisis, necessitating imposition of martial law', to leave the reader wondering about the relevance of a decade- long chain of events (1958-68) leading to the collapse of Ayub's regime and Yahya's martial law in March 1969, As for the timing, the long five-month gap between the launch of 'Operation Searchlight'~ the codename of the military crackdown-and the publication of the White Paper in August, robbed it of much of its value even as a purely publicity stunt.

So much had happened through those five traumatic months that the document, instead of making a case in support of the regime, almost exploded in its face. For instance, the narrative recalling the atrocities attributed to the Bengalis against the non-Bengalis (Chapter Ill? Terror in East Pakistan, p. 29) before the 25-26 March military crackdown, is negated by the White Paper (Appendix G, p. 64) tracing the first such major incident to 26-30 March 1971, in Chittagong. Appendix G ended abruptly around 17-20 April 1971 (p. 69) to leave one wondering about such acts thereafter, at least up to the publication date of the document~5 August 1971. Moreover, almost all the atrocity cases recorded were based on foreign press reports.

The White Paper, an unqualified condemnation of Mujib and the Bengalis, made a poor case in support of the open-ended and punitive military action which made no discrimination between innocent civilians and the miscreants. It said little or nothing about its intensity, and above all, its unspecified duration. Perhaps absent-mindedly, the author/authors went on to quote a paragraph, from one of the speeches of the Awami League secretary-general, Tajuddin, as follows:

A class of exploiters belonging to western region had sucked East Bengal for the last 23 years...history of Pakistan is a history of conspiracy, a history of continuous oppression... (p. 5),

Though exaggerated, the statement was not far from the truth.

The only substantive part of the White Paper was the 'Awami League's Draft Proclamation' (Appendix E, p, 47) and Yahya's pronouncement relating to the transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people to create an atmosphere conducive to the early framing of a constitution for Pakistan. This read as follows:

Now, therefore, I, General Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan, H.Pk., H.J,, do hereby declare that Pakistan shall cease to be under Martial Law and Proclamation of 25th day of March, 1969, shall stand revoked in a Province with effect from the day on which the Provincial Governor takes his oath of office and shall, in any event, stand revoked throughout Pakistan at the expiry of seven days from the date of this Proclamation.

The Awami League's draft proclamation had used the designation 'Confederation of Pakistan' for the first time in place of the accepted title of 'Federation of Pakistan' (p. 52). The following subjects were awarded to the centre

With respect to the state of Bangladesh, the Central Legislature shall have exclusive power to make laws only in relation to the following matters,

(a) Defence of Pakistan;
(b) Foreign Affairs, excluding Foreign Trade and Aid;
(c) Citizenship, naturalization and aliens, including admission of persons into and departure of persons from Pakistan;
(d) Currency, coinage, legal tender and the State Bank of Pakistan subject to paragraph 16 of the Proclamation.

For constitution-making, the National Assembly elected from East Pakistan and the National Assembly elected from West Pakistan, 'shall sit (each) as a Constituent Convention' on 9th April and frame a constitution for 'the states' of East and West Pakistan within 45 days.

After the Constitutions of the State of Bangladesh and States of West Pakistan have been framed under sub-paragraph (1) and when the President if notified in writing by the respective Chairman that the Constitutions have been framed under sub-paragraph (1) the President shall summon a meeting of the National Assembly, at which all the members shall sit

together as a sovereign body for the purpose of framing a constitution for the Confederation of Pakistan ....

Just about a couple of weeks after the publication of the White Paper, an incident took place, which undermined whatever little positive impact the official propaganda drive might have made.

In the third week of August, a Bengali officer of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman, allegedly attempted to hijack an RT-33 jet along with a trainee pilot of the PAF, to India. The young pilot of the plane, Pilot Officer Rashid Minhas, while preparing for the training flight, was duped by Rahman, an instructor, who forcibly climbed into the cockpit. Rahman tried to change the course of the flight to India. Young Rashid offered resistance and the plane crashed in the process. Both pilots were killed. The event became a symbol of the deep distrust and hatred between the people of the two wings. After the destruction of the Indian hijacked plane 'Ganga' by the 'Kashmiri freedom fighters' in Lahore, in late January 1971, the PAF incident served to increase these sentiments. The loyalties of the Bengali personnel became suspect and most of the Bengali pilots were grounded. Quite a few of them resigned their commission pleading their inability to serve any longer under the changed conditions.

When this incident took place, the president was in Peshawar on a short visit. He was the guest of the air chief at lunch. During drinks, the Karachi incident was reported to the air chief. The air chief told the president that he had already ordered an immediate award of the Sitara-i-Jur'at to Rashid Minhas. The presid *it reportedly retorted: 'Why only a Sitara-i-Jur'at'? The boy deserves nothing less than a Nishan-i-Haiderf And that clinched the issue. Yahya's was always the last word. The award was immediately announced and the incident became a major national event. It was believed that the Bengali officer had intended to fly the aircraft to India, The incident was extensively covered in the national press and in the media. `

Rashid Minhas-the young recipient of the Nishan-i-Haider and the first PAF officer in the distinguished company of gallant martyrs- became a national hero. On the other hand, Matiur Rahman was branded a traitor and every Bengali thereafter came to be regarded as a potential security risk. The award of the Nishan~i-Haider to Minhas could not have been just the result of an instant whim on Yahya's part. It appeared to be the outcome of a cold and calculated decision. Yahya saw a 'Mujib' in every Bengali and there was yet another in Matiur Rahman, which uncannily rhymed with Mujibur Rahman.

The impact of the incident, on the minds and morale of the Bengali personnel of the PAF, was absolutely traumatic. One of my close friends from my own PAF days (PRO~PAF in the rank of squadron leader-1961-3), Group Captain Tawwab, then our air attaché in Bonn, resigned and quite a few others either followed suit or lapsed into muted angst. Tawwab was one of the finest breeds of officers and a thoroughly professional fighter pilot, who was much respected by everyone in the PAF. He was of East Pakistan origin but was dedicated to an unswerving code of honour as an officer and a gentleman. There were many other PAF officers of East Pakistan origin with meticulous records of service to their country.

The PAF incident made the Indian threat to Pakistan loom larger than ever. After all, who was Matiur Rahman but an Indian agent and a traitor. There was increased talk of war and 'Crush India' stickers were soon seen all over. Anti-Indian rallies were held and full support was voiced for Yahya Khan in his campaign against India's aggressive and subversive action in East Pakistan. On 31 August, the civilian governor, Abdul Malik, took over from Tikka Khan. A general amnesty was announced on 5 September by the president but it did not apply to the Awami League's top leadership. They could only return to prove their innocence in a court of law. This took the wind out of the sail of the general amnesty, as it made the acquittal of the people concerned conditional on their ability to prove their innocence,

On 6 September, I met the CGS, General Gul Hassan, at the Defence Day reception hosted by him. Yahya, and the bulk of the civil and military top brass, was there. Gul was fairly high when I ran into him. He got hold of me and started talking about the amnesty. 'It is no amnesty and hardly general,' I remarked. He agreed with me and wondered where all this would lead to and what was going to become of the country. Just then, the president, followed by Hamid, strode towards the exit to leave. Gul rushed to see him off Yahya put his arm around him and when he said something about the amnesty, Yahya patted his back and smilingly counselled him not to worry his head too much about those matters.

The 'amnesty' could not have been more ill-timed, inadequate, and ill-conceived. It made a complete hodgepodge of the government policy, in addition to giving rise to several questions-what was the administration driving at? How could people retum to their homes while the border areas were constantly under Indian shelling? It made a travesty of everything. Earlier on, in May, a conditional and limited

amnesty could have made some sense. At that time, the rebels and the militants were demoralized and desperately looking for some excuse for returning to their homes. By September, however, things had turned drastically against Pakistan, and hardly any Bengali, defector or not, considered himself a citizen of Pakistan.

The Muktis had found their feet and were fighting back more aggressively and in a planned manner. Like everything else, Yahya's announcement of the general amnesty was also hailed in West Pakistan. But the reality of the situation soon made the whole move look like a crude joke.

In the last week of September, I flew to Dhaka on what would turn out to be my last visit. I found it in the same embattled state as it had been a month ago, perhaps worse. Security had been tightened. The airport still looked like `a military base with camouflaged gun emplacements and armed soldiers standing guard at key points. After dumping my stuff at the Mess, I drove to the Inter-Continental to see for myself the damage done to the hotel by the Muktis' bomb attack, only to find it in shambles. They had been able to repair most of the damage but still the area from the bar to the cafeteria was unusable. I Went to the other end of the hotel for a cup of tea. Sitting at the improvised bar, I heard a foreigner curse and swear when he was told that there was no whisky available. Other than foreign correspondents, delegates, and those on official business, there were only few other guests; no tourists and no holiday-makers. The Inter-Continental had never looked so desolate. The reaction to the general amnesty, I was told, was 'nuts'.

What was reported as the biggest manhunt was launched immediately after the announcement of the amnesty. Instructions were received from HQ CMLA that all the suspects were to be rounded up before the amnesty came into effect, New cases registered were to be antedated to remain out of the purview of the amnesty. People were being released only after close scrutiny. I saw press photographs of a bunch of people being released from jails under the amnesty, The caption read, 'Persons released under the general amnesty armounced by the president shout patriotic slogans as they leave the jail'-this was carrying the joke too far. How could a still photograph speak at all? It might have made some sense, no matter how little, in a TV frame, but hardly in something as mute as a photo print.

I called on Brigadier Abdul Qadir, the boss of the Inter-Services Security Committee (ISSC). His outfit was responsible for the

screening of the Bengalis and their categorization into white, black, and grey. The implementation of the general amnesty and the release of prisoners was a part of Qadir's duties. He believed he was doing his job beautifully. The Bengalis, he thought, were responding very well to his methods, whereby he instilled the fear of God and the love of Pakistan in their hearts. He made the detainees recite the Kalimzzh and verses from the Holy Quran before they were released. Despite of the declaration of amnesty, Qadir had been exercising the utmost care in the selection of prisoners for release.

There was no question of setting free the really dangerous ones- politicians, party workers, intellectuals. They were at the root of the entire trouble. Most of them had been Indian agents and he had positive evidence to prove that. Qadir~a good and honest soldier-was most proud of his outfit located in one of the blocks of the MNAS' hostel. He had in his tiles, the names and particulars of all the educated, liberal Bengali intellectuals and could trace each one of them in no time. His officers had been working round-the-clock. Their workload had increased and become more difficult alter the proclamation of the amnesty. He did not believe that there was any need for the amnesty, for his outfit knew who was who in the 'rebels aviary'. But as a political device and as part of the international propaganda, the announcement of amnesty was perhaps appropriate. Qadir believed that the situation was improving steadily and it would not take long to 'normalize'. The Bengali masses were good but so full of hate.

'Have you ever looked a Bengali in the eye? Have you noticed the hate in his eyes?' he asked me and then went on to answer himself: 'Perhaps they can't help it. Perhaps they are made that way. Centuries under the Hindu domination has made them bitter and suspicious, even of their own compatriots. They are all so poor and downtrodden...' Qadir philosophized and lectured much in the same vein as his other colleagues in East Pakistan did. My instant response to Qadir's aphorlsm was: 'Perhaps a Bengali finds the same hatred and anger when he looks into your eyesl' I stayed in Dhaka for about a week or so, during which I went to Benapole to see for myself the extent and effect of the Indian shelling. Jessore was just as deserted as before. Closer to the border it wore a busier look with the soldiers around, and the civilians eyeing them, either blankly or scomfully. The artillery exchanges had become more frequent and concentrated. Not a day went by without several hours of artillery bombardment. There was no question of any refugee crossing

over in such circumstances. However, the inhabitants of the border area seemed to have become fairly acclimatized to their environment as there was apparently no panic, or fear. Small children saluted the passing soldiers promptly, almost like the children in West Pakistan. Young men were unafraid and looked straight into the eyes of the West Pakistani soldiers. The older people appeared somewhat unconcerned; they were sick and tired of both the army and the Muktis.

The entire area, within six to seven miles of the Benapole crossing point on the east-west border, was fortified with bunkers and strongly held pillboxes. However, large tracts of land were inundated with two to three feet of rain water, enabling the Mukti guerrillas to swim around and across to get over to the Pakistani side under the cover of darkness. It was also evident that the locals were in close touch with the Muktis whose increasing tempo of activity promised an early end to their ordeal. The front line Pakistani troops, while still in command of the situation, were getting unmistakably weary and demoralized. The incursions of the Muktis, coupled with the mounting pressure by the Indian artillery, was gradually exhausting their patience and strength. They kept their vigil round-the-clock and hardly knew any rest or peace.

A young battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Shams, whom I had met a couple of months before in Khulna, was just back from a recce mission. On the face of it, he was still full of verve but it was obvious that there was something amiss. He swore vengeance at the Indians more out of accumulated anger and frustration than confidence. One could see that he was not the same man he used to be, A number of other officers I talked to, reflected a similar mood. They looked lost. The military operation had dragged along much beyond their expectations. The little, ‘moth-like’ Bengalis had been fighting back with active Indian support. As a Dhaka friend would sarcastically put it, the one good that the army crackdown had done was that it had made a soldier out of the docile and chicken-hearted Bengali youth. He would even ‘hope’ that as a result of all the rapes, East Bengal was going to have a new generation of fighters and warriors-words uttered in sheer bitterness, even spite, The two sides were emotionally estranged and embittered, and the mutual trust and confidence of yesteryears had simply evaporated.

At Jessore, I called on the GOC 9 Division, Major General Mohammad Hussain Ansari, at his headquarters. He was a sober and mild-mannered man, just the opposite of Niazi. He considered the

situation to be already out of control. Both the Indians and the Muktis had been stepping up the pressure and he did not quite know how long 'we would be able to stand all that'. He also sounded unhappy with the conduct and lack of discipline of his junior officers; there was little he could do to check their atrocities. Rape and brutality were rife. 'Siddiqi', he said, 'we will all have to account for every single rape and killing when back in West Pakistan. Just mark my words. Allah never spares the tyrant.' Ansari was remarkably forthright in his denunciation of the excesses being committed by his own rank-and- file.

He was not too happy either with the ways of his commander, Niazi, who openly encouraged the jawans in their unsoldierly, inhuman, and carnal indulgences. 'What is your last night's score, Shera (Tiger)'?' he would ask the jawans with a satanic glint in his eyes. The score referred to the number of women the soldier might have molested. Niazi 3T§l€d brazenly in support of the rape cases. 'You cannot expect a man to live, tight, and die in East Pakistan and go to Jhelum for sex, would you?` As for the killings-he believed that only the miscreants were being killed. The soldiers were under orders not to show any mercy to subversive, anti-state elements, Bengalis or non-Bengalis.

Ansari seemed to be fighting a lone battle Without much hope or conviction. He thought that the government should either look for an early political settlement or be prepared for a terrible disaster. He looked preoccupied and disturbed. The Indian game plan, according to his assessment, was to pin down the Pakistan Army in the border areas and thus create a vacuum in the cities, which would enable the guerrillas to continue with their subversion and sabotage forays. The army was already overstretched and could not secure the front and rear all at the same time. Mobility was badly hampered by the rain- inundated terrain, the blown~up bridges, and damaged railway tracks and roads, as well as by the steadily worsening condition of the jeeps and trucks.

The Razakars of 'Al Badr' and 'Al Shams' were a help to the anny, but even they were not wholly reliable. Quite a few of them defected to join the ranks of the Muktis as soon as they leamt to use a rifle. Even the members of the peace committees, most co-operative and helpful in the beginning, were no longer as reliable, and cases of defection were on the increase amongst them. The Bengalis, in general, had been wholly alienated. It was a pity, he felt, that the president had

not been able to find time to visit the area and see things for himself. It was obvious that he was not being kept fully in the picture. A change of tactics from military to political was essential to stem the rot. Ansari spoke differently from other commanders in the province. He happened to be an honest and God-fearing man, unlike his other colleagues. I admired him for his candour.

Back in Dhaka, I called on Niazi, Rahim, and Farman. Niazi was as full of himself as ever. He thought that he had won the hearts of the people. As for the Indians, he just did not bother about them. In his views, the Hindus simply did not have a chance against the Muslims# history testified to that, though he would not bother to explain which history he was referring to. All he knew was that a Muslim was a born warrior while a Hindu was just a bania and it was not in him to fight. Niazi was very proud of the morale of his troops. He was confident that they could take the Indians three-to-one, at any time and at any place. He wanted PR to play its part in countering the Indian propaganda and neutralize its impact on the Bengali mind. The majority of the Bengalis, he said, were now begirming to see through Mujib's game plan and had turned against him. They would not accept him even if he were to return as a free man. In fact, they held him wholly responsible for their sufferings. Nobody had voted for him to bring about secession, disintegration, and misery to his people. He now sat in a West Pakistani jail while everybody else suffered.

Niazi had his own logic for this reasoning. He had reached this conclusion through a premise of his own contrivance, and shaped his argument to the size of his own pre-conceived conclusion. He spoke 'simply', as a 'countritied' soldier, without any sophistry and intellectual nuances. 'I am not one like you or Yaqub. I am a soldier not a scho1ar...' he would proudly declare while thumping his thighs in his characteristic swashbuckling style. He was very sceptical of intellectual arguments which made no sense to him. The situation in East Pakistan, he firmly believed, was beyond any intellectual's grasp and only a soldier could understand and face it.

He spoke proudly of his performance at an Independence Day mushaira (event of poetry recitation) on 14 August, where the entire Bengali gentry and the cream of the Dhaka society was present. He went there dressed in his high-crested Punjabi pugree (turban), frock- coat, and shalwar, sporting his favourite red camation in a buttonhole. He spoke at length to prove the invincibility of the Muslim armies against the kafirs (infidels) and was loudly cheered by everyone. He

spoke in Urdu and everybody understood him perfectly well. Not only that, they also understood and appreciated the Urdu verse, The fact of the matter was that every Bengali knew and could manage Urdu very well, he said. Only a handful of Bengali chauvinists and extremists had made it a bone of contention to further their nefarious designs.

Niazi had assumed a distinct political posture and tone. In fact, it was difficult to tell if he was a military commander or a high priest, He seemed to have little time for serious planning as the military commander because he went about-from formation to formation and town to town-addressing troops on the ideology of Pakistan and Islamic values. For him, every soldier under his command was 'an ambassador' and a custodian of Pakistan's ideology and Islamic values. He always seemed to lightly dismiss the physical reality of the mounting Bengali resistance.

As far back as June that year, he had told his commanders that they had just 'passed through the worst' and that the crisis was at its lowest ebb. Four months later, in September, he described the situation to be at a 'stage of consolidation' and went on to emphasize:

the need to go on trying to gain people's support; if we have lost it, we must make an all out effort to regain it...The real victory lies in winning over the hearts of the common people.

Of the people of East Pakistan, he said:

They get quickly irritated, and reconciled as quickly, if properly handled. They are responsive. We have only to know them and know their psychology.

As for him and his command strategy, the only targets were the miscreants and the traitors. His one and the only sane advice to his men was, 'blood wilfully shed, shortens the life of the state'. This, as it turned out to be, was Niazi's only factual statement. It was, however, already too late in the day. The situation had, by mid-September slipped out of control because ofthe mounting raids of the Muktis and the concentrated artillery barrages of the Indian artillery. Worse still had been the state of command and control, with battalion/company commanders-lieutenant colonels and maj ors-right down to the .ICOS and NCOs behaving virtually like godfathers within their own areas of authority. Even Farman, regretfully and somewhat grudgingly,

admitted the shocking state of indiscipline and waywardness amongst the junior officers.

The army had failed to enlist the slightest support of the people. Farman would attribute tl1at~and rightly so~to the unbecoming conduct of the higher command. He referred rather directly to the sordid example set by Niazi himself his weakness for women and his crusading zeal to convert the 'I-Iinduized' Bengalis into good Muslims. Farman's thoughts could be attributed to the re-awakening of his conscience, as much as to the growing slippage of power and authority from the civil administration to the military command. Niazi sat at the Eastern Command headquarters like a demiurge. On a more personal level, perhaps he was becoming increasingly apprehensive of the severity and force of the Bengali backlash in the event of a military collapse. He seemed to have no doubt whatsoever about complete alienation ofthe Bengalis from Pakistan.

The announcement of general amnesty after the installation of a civilian government under Governor Abdul Malik, initially expected to restore public confidence, proved to be a non-starter, The amnesty was neither general nor real. It was totally conditional and subject to thorough screening by military intelligence. People released from the jails hardly included any bona tide political prisoners. They were mostly common criminals set free, as my Bengali friends alleged, to swell the ranks of the Razakars.

11

COUNTDOWN TO ENDGAME

BY the end of September, Dhaka had been completely 'Pakistanized', rather, 'West Pakistanized', administratively. The entire police force, and the para-military EPR that had been redesignated as EPCAF (East Pakistan Civil Armed Force) were placed under the command of Major General Mohammed Jamshed, a tried and tested soldier. The Razakars were all from the local Bihari community. The Bengalis did not have even a nominal representation."

The Razakars of Al Shams and Al Badr were a new element of life everywhere in the province. They manned barriers, roadblocks, bridges, and checked people at sensitive points. Mostly young boys in their teens, they were keen and enthusiastic, competing with each other and vying to prove their mettle before their West Pakistani superiors. With rifles slung over their shoulders, they had developed a sense of power previously unknown to them. The gun was like a live man-eater, straining at the leash, ready to break out, attack, and kill,

I found Dhaka much worse in September than it had been in July. The military and the Razakars were all over, and the ordinary people came out for business purposes only. The same was true for the West Pakistanis also. The suspicion, fear, and distrust was mutual. The West Pakistanis-soldiers and civilians-were for the first time, quite visibly conscious of the Bengali guerrillas becoming increasingly active everyday, Mukti Bahini derisively called the Mutri (pissing) Bahini by the common Punjabi soldier-was now treated with some respect. They had been fighting with increasing ferocity and determination.

The regular troops suffered an increasing number of casualties, i.e. soldiers killed and wounded at the hands of the Muktis. Loyal civilians and Razakars were also harassed and attacked by them. Office workers, factory managers, and radio and TV artistes, received threatening letters from the Muktis to stop collaborating with the occupation army.

Radio and TV artistes were particularly threatened and at times picked up and smuggled across the border. It could not be exactly determined if they themselves allowed this to happen or were simply helpless against the Mukti guerrillas. The fact remained that most of the Bengali youth-boys as well as girls-wanted to run away to India, and did so, at the first opportunity.

The military had failed miserably in their efforts to provide security to the common citizen, with the result that there was an increasing erosion of confidence in their ability to keep the Muktis at bay.

However, the military continued to extend its operations. Truckloads of fully armed soldiers could be seen in and around the city at all hours of the day. The guerrillas had established some strongholds in Narayanganj. Army details were sent to these areas to sort them out.

Mujlb's trial continued with adjournments and breaks. Given the pace at which it was progressing, it seemed that it would go on for a long time. The trial had created a peculiar psychological scenario in which no one was ready or able to think, of a peaceful political solution to the problem. A general disappointment' prevailed regarding its outcome since contrary to people's expectations, Mujib had not been released under the general amnesty scheme. Mujib's fate had thus become a crucial issue in establishing the credibility of the amnesty.

The administration, for its part, pressed ahead with its programme for a piecemeal political solution without Mujib. The dates set for the by-elections to the provincial and national assemblies were advanced from November to October and the measures for the 'psychological rehabilitation' of the Bengalis were intensified. Once again, DS (directing staff) solutions were being applied to a highly charged political situation. The induction of a nominated civilian regime was seen as a major breakthrough and there was no doubt that Abdul Malik and his ministers worked hard and sincerely towards restoring the confidence and morale of the Bengalis, But none of them were elected representatives; they had all been nominated and were seen as 'hand- picked stooges' of the government.

That was hardly a fair assessment however. Abdul Malik himself was a man of proven integrity, with a long standing in public affairs. It was not any lust for power that had persuaded him and some others to accept ministerial portfolios. They sincerely believed that this was the best opportunity to salvage the rapidly deteriorating situation and help save Pakistan. There was a brief resurgence of political sanity and normalization but that was soon undermined by the increasing

incursions of the Muktis and the disgruntled state of the local population. The officials-babus»-as well as their superiors in the various government departments were virtually on strike and served their Bengali ministers only half-heartedly. Despite the faint hope that the civilian regime might succeed in setting things right, events did not take a turn for the better. The very fact that the govemor had not been invested with martial law powers, made him seem powerless. He was merely a figure head-a political decoy-to divert the attention of the world from the real issue, i.e. the unconditional release of Sheikh Mujib.

Mujib's trial in the West, coinciding unhappily with the beginning of the 'civilianization process' in the East, made the position of the central govenment altogether untenable. Even six months after the crackdown, Yahya was still persisting in his mindless quest for a political solution without Mujib. The new governor, despite his personal integrity, was at best a sort of a super PRO without any real powers. He was someone on whose shoulder the Bengalis could at best cry, but that was all.

The real power lay in Niazi's hands who was the troop commander as well as the martial law administrator. He was assisted by Rahim as his deputy MLA. Farman, though an adviser to the governor (virtually enjoying the powers and status of chief minister), was also Niazi's man in uniform. The Dhaka-based military hierarchy, despite their apparent self-confidence, had been losing their grip on the situation. They increasingly relied upon intelligence reports regarding the situation in the interior. These were tailor-made to reflect the favourite theme-that the majority of the Bengalis were loyal and patriotic and only a handful of miscreants were the source of trouble. Regarding Mujib, the intelligence agencies' reports gave a peculiar slant to the question of his release and of his life and death. According to them, people regarded him as the source of all their sufferings and troubles. Besides being a mediocre leader he was also denounced for his clandestine connections with India and for his calculated and pre- conceived plan to use the elections as a lever for secession.

The authorities in Dhaka took their word for it. It was not quite clear if they really believed these reports or accepted them for want of better information. An open admission of their failure, six months after the operation, would have been almost tantamount to an abject surrender. At a time when the majority of the Bengalis were fighting their greatest battle for survival, the military commander was enjoying

his helicopter jaunts to forward units and formations. The entire province was already a theatre of war. Every day, hundreds of people- soldiers and civilians- were being killed or wounded. But the high command still toyed with their utterly unrealistic idea of using psychological warfare to beat the crisis~the Bengalis must be, and could be, 'brainwashed', since the bulk of them consisted of pro- Pakistan elements.

Back at the GHQ, his contempt for Niazi notwithstanding, General Gul Hassan also supported the rationale and the need for psychological warfare. Before I left for Dhaka in September, I had a meeting with him. He had prepared quite a few arguments in support of a psychological war. The key elements for the propagation of such a war, as spelt out by him for my benefit, were as follows:

(a) Discrimination between the Hindu and Muslim refugees in the Indian camps.

(b) Prevention of Muslim refugees from returning to East Pakistan by the Indians. -

(c) India's collusion with the Awami League defectors.

(d) India's political and diplomatic game plan, to gain the sympathy and support of the world by internationalizing the refugee problem. -

(e) India's ultimate aim to destroy Pakistan.

(f) Exposure of Mujib's anti-Pakistan politics.

(g) Killing of Muslim youths by the Indians.

He advised me to discuss these points with the DMLA, General Rahim, in Dhaka.

Back in Dhaka, I found Rahim very bitter about the failure of our PR efforts. Like Gul Hassan, he also seemed convinced that it was ultimately a question of waging a psychological war. We talked at length on the subject. My main contention was that as long as Mujib's fate hung in balance it would be well nigh impossible to win over the Bengalis. Psychological warfare was indeed an effective weapon but in the existing situation it could be fought only by the people for whom it was intended. It was one thing for the West Pakistan soldier to be out in the field fighting the actual war and quite another to expect him to iight the psychological war as well for the Bengali masses. Unless the Bengali intellectuals-writers, poets, and

journalists-came forward to assist the authorities, it would just be an exercise in futility. There was no question, however, of the Bengali intellectuals coming forward. They were completely unwilling to help. There were only a couple of professors at the Dhaka University, Munir and Kabir Chowdhry, who attended their offices but even they seemed to be doing very little work. The cultural organizations were completely dormant and even the Pakistan Council of National Integration, headed by a Bengali lady, Mrs Najma Athar, worked only as a matter of routine. It observed national days, such as the Quaid-i-Azam‘s death anniversary on ll September, but there was neither the attendance nor the spirit befitting the occasion.

The concept of one Pakistan was all but dead in the Bengali rnind. The only thing between Bangladesh and Pakistan, in my mind, was the military presence in the East. Pakistan was bound to lose her eastern wing as soon as the military was withdrawn. It was a most extraordinary and disturbing state of affairs. Only armies of occupation find themselves placed in such a situation. Rahim in his own enigmatic way agreed with me. ‘Wouldn’t that be equally true of the West’?’ he retorted, ‘the fact is that the only unifying force in the country, whether in the East or in the West, is the army...’. The civilians were just not an active part of the situation. The politicians had failed miserably and there was no hope of a return to civilian rule in the near future. Rahim was very critical of the utterances and statements of a number of West Pakistani politicians regarding the transfer of power. He spoke particularly of Bhutto, who had intensified his campaign in this regard. ‘Transfer of power to whom?’, Rahim queried. The president had already announced his latest plan and the transfer would take place accordingly. Making haste in this regard would only result in ‘messing it all up’.

He had been bitterly critical of West Pakistani politicians, who, through their anti-martial law and anti-army utterances, had been playing into the hands of the enemies of Pakistan. He opined that they should all have come to East Pakistan to see things for themselves; instead, they chose to stay back in the comfort of their homes and criticize the army. Little did they realize that if anything happened to the army, the whole country would collapse. ‘Let the army complete the stupendous task of pacification in East Pakistan first; transfer of power can follow,’ he said.

I had two meetings with Rahim during which our conversations revealed the enormous gap between the physical reality and its appraisal by the military commanders. For instance, Rahim was really proud of the work being done by the Razakars. The Razakar scheme had mainly been his brainchild; and there was little doubt that it had relieved the army of much extra work involved in guarding vital installations, manning checkpoints, etc. On other points Rahim was, more or less, in agreement with the psychological warfare goals as spelt out by Gul Hassan. These included a campaign to prevent further exodus of refugees by recounting stories of the abduction and molestation of young Muslim girls in Indian camps, encouraging and inducing students to come back home, and creating division and distrust between the Awami League leadership and the Muktis by comparing the hardships faced by the latter to the luxurious lifestyles of the leaders in Calcutta's air-conditioned hotels. Such was the dominant thinking of the top brass responsible for resolving the East Pakistan crisis.

The army was-without doubt-present in full force, but whether it was also in full command, was another question. The whole situation was ridden with contradictions and paradoxes; there could be no genuine peace and normality while the army was there and yet, there would be no East Pakistan without the army. The presence of the military alone stood between the continued existence of East Bengal as a part of Pakistan and the instant emergence of Bangladesh as a fait accompli. The Bengalis had long since lost their attachment to Pakistan and the very word 'Pakistani' had become synonymous with 'traitor', 'col1aborator', and an agent of the 'Punzabi Fauj'.

Islamabad's resolve to go ahead with the by-elections without Mujib and the Awami League, had further alienated the Bengalis, So had the reports that the ban on the Awami League would be lifted only after the screening of the 88 Awami League MNAs and 100 MPAs was completed. The active interest of West Pakistani parties-Pakistan People's Party, Asghar Khan's Tehrik-i~Istiqla1 together with the Jama'at-i-Islami, the various factions of the Muslim League and others-further exposed the mala fide intent behind the upcoming by-elections, to serve as an ill-concealed democratic prefence for prolonging and consolidating the military rule in East Pakistan.

The civilian regime under Abdul Malik was used merely as a surrogate for a political government and a temporizing ploy for eventual transfer of power to elected representatives. Frustration

deepened and even the moderates and the pro-Pakistan elements started wilting under the mounting pressure.

On 18 September, the president issued a statement laying down the rules and procedures to amend the new constitution which was to come into force on 25 December. The announcement, read out by a professional newscaster over the radio, defined the powers of the National Assembly vis-ri-vis the president in regard to amending the constitution. It was a baffling hodgepodge of democratic intent and an autocratic ex cathedra verdict in respect of the formulation and promulgation of the new constitution, to be 'prepared by a committee of my officials...' About the power of the national assembly- constituted on the basis of the results of the by-elections-to amend the constitution, the following paragraph made for most baffling reading:

An amendment may be passed by the House by a simple majority, which must include a consensus of all the federating units. If any amendment is presented to me [Yahya] alter having been passed by the National Assembly in the manner specified earlier, and if I give my assent to the amendment after full consideration in the national interest, it will then be incorporated in the constitution.

The concluding paragraph of the statement made an absolute mockery of the national assembly's power (or any honourable member thereof) to amend the constitution. It said:

At the end, I should like to reiterate that I would be only too glad to accept amendments as long as these changes do not adversely affect the territorial integrity and solidarity of our nation or the ideology on which Pakistan is based.

As someone pithily remarked, this was akin to determining the sex of a baby before it was conceived,

The general expectation that the presidential announcement would be about the removal of the ban on the Awami League and the initiation of a political dialogue with its elected leaders-most of whom were either in Calcutta or in hiding in the countryside-was shattered. The fact that instead of the president addressing the nation, a radio official read out his statement, also gave rise to much speculation. 28 September was set as the date for filing nomination papers. Mr Abdussalam, editor of The Pakistan Observer, pointed out that the

public, in principle, was not exactly opposed to the holding of by- elections but the time given to complete all the formalities involved in the exercise was too short.

Accordingly, I sent an operations immediate signal to Gul Hassan proposing an extension in the time limit set for filing the nomination papers. The next day, the election commissioner made an announcement from Islamabad regarding the postponement of the elections, which were now to be held in December. The idea was to encourage fullest participation by the various political parties and their candidates.

In Dhaka itself, the public reaction to the coming by-elections was not altogether negative but the rebels, fighting the actual war, reacted violently to it. Almost immediately, acts of subversion and sabotage increased manifold. Dhaka became the main target and the centre of terrorist activity, One evening, the entire city was suddenly plunged into darkness as terrorists attacked the main powerhouse. The cantonment used emergency lights with the help of the army generators. The guards, who used to stand outside the VIP room of the Mess and had been withdrawn earlier, were posted there again. Security checks at the points of entry to the cantonment were tightened. No Bengali could enter or leave the cantonment without a pass or an army escort. This included even government officials. Army patrols combed the town. No military officer could move out of the cantonment area by himself after dark, and even during the day, armed escorts accompanied them for security.

Most of the city seemed to have turned inn 1 minefield, with the so-called ‘nuisance mines’ laid everywhere. The generals and brigadiers drove between the cantonment and city with escort jeeps carrying guns trained ahead and sideways. The city’s main commercial area was in the grip of fear. Hardly a day went by when an explosion of some sort did not take place. Reports of the peace committee members being attacked, killed, or wounded by the Muktis increased.

The West Pakistani civil servants were completely demoralized by the state of affairs, They seemed to have little contact with the army. In their private gatherings they discussed the urgent need for a political solution. The upcoming by-elections, they thought, would be a perfect mockery, that is, if they were held at all. There were neither any Bengali political parties, nor a platform for candidates. The officially backed candidates would return unopposed for want of any opposition.

Besides, they ran a great personal risk in terms of exposing themselves to the Muktis' revenge. For the first time, I also found a distinct change in the attitude of my Bengali friends, particularly those belonging to the press. They seemed to have lost the will and the need to communicate and were afraid of being seen with me in public. Even someone as forthcoming as Zahur Bhai of the Shangbad, hardly ever said anything during a meeting. He looked totally lost. Not an admirer of Mujib or his party, he knew, and was rightly afraid, of their vindictiveness, once in power. Thoroughly frightened and demoralized, most non-Bengali journalists had sent their families to West Pakistan. They hoped that the army would ultimately be able to control the situation but they were not entirely optimistic. Even Salam Bhai of the Observer had managed to send his daughter and son-in-law over to Kuala Lumpur.

Hashim (Babu) of the APP avoided me scrupulously despite my telephone calls. He would not even come to the cantonment to see me. Mainul of the Ittefaq, son of Manik Mian, was annoyed and dissatisfied with the treatment being meted out to highly respectable Bengalis like himself He was even being denied permission to go to London on medical grounds. He thought the Bengalis were being treated even worse than third-class citizens. Inayatullah of the Holiday met me only briefly. Until only about a couple of months earlier he had been trying very hard to revive his weekly Holiday; but he would not even talk about it now. K.G. Mustafa, president of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, was not around. There had been reports that he had defected. Badruddin, the Bihari editor of the Morning News, was also afraid, but happy about his nomination as a member of the Pakistan delegation to the UN.

Perhaps the most disturbing feature of the situation was the loss of confidence of the West Pakistani, mainly the civil bureaucracy, in the army. The army officials spent most of their time gossiping, drinking, and playing bridge. Most of them lived in guest houses: others shared accommodation. They seemed utterly dissatisfied with the conduct and behaviour of certain army officers. The governor was utterly helpless as all power rested with the military and the supreme commander, Niazi, who was indifferent to the views of the governor. The police chief, Mehmood Chowdhry, a quiet and reticent man, talked in much the same terms. The consensus was that the military intervention could not go on very much longer. The fear of direct intervention by India was deepening. With an overwhelmingly hostile

population, a wily enemy across the border, and a callous and unmindful army brass, how long could the situation continue. What would happen if Dhaka airport was to be destroyed? What if India blockaded the sea routes? A growing sense of isolation was taking root in the minds of the West Pakistani civilians. Every one of them would have given anything in the world to get back to the West; they were convinced of the futility of it all.

The military, however, still exuded confidence. Perhaps, it was sheer bravado-a rather desperate effort on their part to repress the same fears. Niazi had embarked upon a grand PR campaign. Not a day went by when he would not fly out of Dhaka in his helicopter to visit the border areas. His tours were well covered, his speeches sounded more like sermons on the glory of Islam and the greatness of Pakistan. The officers in the Dhaka cantonment with their 'Sam Browne' belts and crisp khaki uniforms looked fresh and fit. They got excellent free rations~three instead of the traditional two eggs for breakfast along with bread, cereal, and jam. Chicken was a rule rather than an exception. They all seemed to have put on weight. There was something reassuring about their outward appearance. 'Don't you worry, we will give the enemy a bloody nose. Just wait and see'-was the general retort.

One was forced to wonder about how long the army could hold on. The military was not professionally trained for counterinsurgency operations. They were up against a very different type of enemy- their own people, the guerrillas of the Mukti Bahini the proverbial fish in a sea of humanity. The army's brave posture was completely ut of step with the real situation. It was aggravated by daily incidents of subversion and sabotage by the miscreants. Dhaka was an embattled city. The military was physically there but hardly in full command of the situation. The borders and the hinterland both were full of saboteurs. Many senior military officers were beginning to finally realize the futility of the exercise. They felt abandoned and trapped. They had no rear, no sanctuary, in the event of a decisive military reverse (the word defeat, though uppermost in everyone's mind, was never uttered).

Farman would unhesitatingly call the army an 'occupation at-my'. He told me that he had seen two armies of occupation in his life-the first was the US Army in Japan and the second was the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan»-and that he would not like to see a third one. He, too, seemed to be suffering from a feeling of isolation from the martial

law authorities. Rahim was emerging in importance and authority next to Niazi.

The governor and his ministers were little more than pawns, without any political power or authority. The governor was a nominee of the president-the man who had launched the military action and had since then been watching the scene from over a thousand miles away. The ministers were the protégés of the governor-some of them known public figures like Akhtaruddin Ahmad and Abul Qasim Khan; others were novices and strangers, who had been handpicked from various districts to rnake a 'representative' set-up. They were all very particular about their Jinnah-caps and sherwanis (long tunic) trying hard to look like the Pakistanis of yesteryears. But their very appearance betrayed them and made them 'look like perfect strangers in their own country'. The fact was that the Pakistan of yesteryears was dead in East Pakistan and with that had died the insignia and emblems of nationhood- dress, language, culture, and fellowship. The ministers were hardly a happy lot. They had developed a deep and crushing sense of doom. They felt it in their bones that by accepting the cabinet jobs, they had exposed themselves to the 'Mujibiites' and would be the first victims of mass fury once the army was no longer there to protect them.

In all fairness to them, it must be said that they had accepted a calculated risk with little hope of personal gain, except in terms of a temporary cabinet status. They wished to help their Bengali brethren. Not many people were willing or prepared to come forward, however. For them, Pakistan's government was a colonial power in wrongful possession of their land and they all sought freedom from the foreign yoke. The only hope-a slim one though-to save the oneness of the country, lay in an immediate resumption of dialogue with the Awami League and the unconditional release of its leaders. But that was precisely what the government would not consider; it was simply going ahead with the implementation of the president's June plan. Strangely enough, there had been little or no visible fear of the Indian assault in these conditions of internal chaos and civil strife, Niazi seemed convinced that the war would be fought on the enemy soil, if only he could control the depredations of the Mukti Bahini. I talked to a number of Bengali friends and found them either gloomy or afraid. Without Mujib, they said, there could be no solution; and Mujib was facing trial for high treason over a thousand miles away in remote Lyallpur (Faisalabad). The general amnesty had come and gone and the man was still a captive. Mujib was crucial to the

success of any political move at that stage. He was as crucial alive as dead. Alive, he could resume his political leadership; dead, he would turn into a symbol of martyrdom.

In fact, the Bangladesh coterie in exile wished him dead rather than alive. The man was of little use to them in distant captivity and his death would give a fresh stimulus and impetus to their own power politics. Above all, it would arouse the Muktis' ranks to dizzying heights of courage, devotion, or simply 'desperationi 'Please make sure', my Bengali friends pleaded, 'that nothing ever happens to the man»that would be sheer disaster. You will have turned a perfect mediocrity into a martyr.' It was indeed a most baffling situation.

After a week's stay, I left East Pakistan with a heavy heart. At the airport I came across the commissioner of Dhaka, Alamdar Raza and the IG Police, Mehmood Chowdhry-both friends from West Pakistan. A forthright and outspoken man, the commissioner had a lot to say about the behaviour of young military officers, He thought that they had were totally out of control and their superiors were just not willing to listen to anything against them. He cited the case of some naval officers who were on a rape-spree. He personally reported the matter to the colonel in-charge of civil affairs.

'What do you expect them to do in a situation like this-pray and count beads all the time ?' the colonel replied curtly.

'Sir', the commissioner went on to say, 'shall I take it that the boys are doing this with the approval of the authorities?'

'You,' the colonel shot back, 'may take it the way you like. Now, what's your next problem?'

And that was the end of the interview. He also complained of a lack of contact between the civil and the military. Although a civilian Governor had been installed, there was hardly any civilian government. They had to refer every case to the adviser, General Farman, and cases continued to pile up.

There were other friends too to bid me goodbye; and it proved to be a 'goodbye forever'.

Sitting next to me on the plane was a British banker going home on leave. He painted a most dismal picture of the province's economy particularly of its tea industry in which his bank had been especially involved.

The tea industry had been affected most adversely, Most of the machinery had been either damaged, or destroyed, or was simply lying idle for want of fuel, which could not be moved to Sylhet due to the

extensive damage to the communication network. The fear of the Mukti Bahinis, to top it all, was increasing. Two British tea planters had already been kidnapped and killed by the Muktis and their raids and depredations had become routine occurrences.

The prevalent situation in East Pakistan had left a deep impression on me, Six months after start of the action, which was intended to have been completed within a matter of 72 hours, things had gone from bad to worse, and innocent people were suffering greatly for no fault of their own. The real culprits were living well away in the peace and luxury of their well-appointed apartments in Calcutta. The memory of a dying child at a reception centre, haunted me like a pernicious ghost. He had suffered from rickets and had, in fact, died already. A withered woman of an uncertain age, the child's grandmother or mother, sat beside him. For her, there was no purpose of life anymore; her lightless eyes seemed never to have seen hope.

Back in Rawalpindi, I reported to Gul Hassan and briefed him on the situation in East Pakistan as I saw it. I told him it was going from bad to worse. The Bengalis had gone 'mental' as a group, They had become extremely touchy and were either sullen or passive. Average Bengalis in the various cities-intellectuals, students, professors, and government functionaries-had lost their sense of identity as citizens, They were sceptical about the real meaning of terms such as national integrity, ideology, Islam, and so on.

The uncertainty concerning Mujib's eventual fate had further darkened the general mood. The moderates still wished to co-operate with the authorities but were afraid to do so. The militants and the extremists hoped to see the day when the man would be either executed or released. However, sealing Mujib's fate one way or the other was expected to give a fresh stimulus to the anti-Pakistan movement.

Gul Hassan wanted me to prepare a plan of a psychological war for East Pakistan. I had my doubts about the utility and relevance of such a plan. I argued that such a war in the prevailing situation in East Pakistan would be an exercise in futility. The East Pakistanis, faced with the question of their physical survival, had become a mindless mass already. Psychological wars work only on those with minds and feelings.

I also argued that at the national level any psychological war plan should be equally applicable to both East and West Pakistan. It was basically wrong to isolate East Pakistan for an isolated brainwashing. What was good for the East was also good for the West, however

while the leaders in West Pakistan talked of socialism and secularism, the people in the eastern wing were lectured on ideology and Islam and were expected to swallow it whole. I concluded that a psychological war could not be fought in isolation. It had to be preceded and followed up by positive action in the economic, political, and social spheres.

I submitted my paper towards the end of September. It went from desk to desk until it was finally approved by the HQ CMLA and issued to all concerned in the third week of November-just a few days before the Indian attack on Jessore. I wonder if the paper ever reached its various destinations (General Farman was one) and if it did, whether the recipients ever had the time even to glance through it. There was just no indication of any action having being ta.ken on it.

In West Pakistan, people, by and large, liked to believe that all was well in the eastern province. This was despite all the foreign news to the contrary. Everyone with a radio set religiously monitored the BBC and the AIR news bulletins, but very few accepted their version of the situation. It was dismissed as malicious enemy propaganda. In fact, whatever was unpleasant and contrary to popular expectations was treated as pure humbug. Quite a few of the West Pakistani leaders had been to East Pakistan since the military action had started but no one had spoken his mind on the subject. Everything had been left to the army and its supposedly inherent ability to do the job well.

The situation in West Pakistan was also taking a turn for the worse. War clouds were gathering and troop deployment was under way on both sides of the border. At the same time, the demand for the demission of political power was also gathering momentum, spearheaded by the PPP. Bhutto, in a fiery speech at the Quaid's mausoleum in Karachi, on the occasion of the Quaid's death anniversary (ll September), threw a direct challenge to the army to quit and transfer power to his party. He also threatened India to be prepared for the drums of war to roll 'Dama~dum Mast Qalander' (popular folk song). 'The waters of the Jumna and Ganga,' he declared, 'will turn red with blood.'

There was much anxiety and bittemess in the official circles about PPP's demand. 'Transfer of power to whom?', was the first question every soldier and civilian in the corridors of power would ask. The majority party, they argued, had been outlawed and its leader was facing a trial for high treason. India was concentrating on the western

border and aggravating pressure in the east. Who could even think of transfer of power in such conditions?

General Umar, the national security chief came to my office one day for some photographs. He looked quite morose, and was certainly not his usual self, He said that he was not too happy with the PPP's demand for the transfer of power given that this was hardly the time for it. He said that Bhutto had disappointed him. He was not too happy with the president either. The old man was getting increasingly inaccessible, and he would not listen to anybody. Umar still believed, however, that the situation in East Pakistan was definitely on the mend and would soon be under control. In his view, all would be well if only the PPP would give the administration some time.

The president was due to leave for Iran to attend the 25th centenary of the Iranian monarchy in the second week of October. Among his other engagements was a meeting with the Soviet president, Nikolai Podgorny with whom he was to discuss the India-Pakistan situation. He was also expected to establish contact with a number of East Pakistani leaders-Tajuddin and others, to discuss means and .ways for a political settlement. War and peace, therefore, seemed to be hanging in a balance. A heavy and oppressive air of uncertainty pervaded.

On the eve of his departure from Karachi on 12 October, the president addressed the nation. Some of the key excerpts from his nearly hour-long telecast from Karachi are reproduced here: …I regret to say that India has never missed any opportunity to bring harm to Pakistan. Her hostile designs towards us have been evident _from a number of actions that she has taken and continues to take against us.

He went on to name the forcible occupation of Kashmir, the attack on Pakistan in 1965, and the construction of the Farrakha Barrage intended to divert the waters of the River Ganga and thus turn huge fertile areas of East Pakistan into an arid desert. He made a pointed reference to India's latest efforts to disintegrate Pakistan:

She has tried to cut away East Pakistan from me rest of the country, in collusion with certain secessionists in that wing, by assisting the miscreants with arms, ammunition and funds and sending infiltrators to cause damage to life and property of the patriotic East Pakistanis.

...In addition to these hostile activities, India has moved forward army formations of all types including infantry, armour and artillery all around

the borders of East Pakistan. Similarly, Indian Air Force units have been deployed in positions from where they can pose a direct threat to that wing. ln the west also, a large number of units and formations have been moved out of their peace stations and brought forward towards our borders.
Of China and the Soviet Union, while expressing his 'deep appreciation' for the support by the forner, he noted with 'regret' that Premier Kosygin would make no mention of the:
Positive steps taken by me to transfer power to the elected representatives of the people as well as to facilitate the return and rehabilitation of displaced persons. Many proposals of the United Nations, like posting of UN observers, to facilitate the return of displaced persons, and defusing the explosive situation on the borders, have been welcomed by us but spumed by Indians. This is not the way towards peace."

Dwelling on his 28 June plan for the transfer of power, he said:
The polls for the National Assembly will be completed on the 3rd December 1971. The National Assembly will be summoned to meet on the 27 of December under the chairmanship of the oldest member of the House who will be nominated by me, This will be followed by oath-taking by the members and the election of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.
ln order to accelerate the process of transfer of power, the Central Government will be formed soon after the inaugural session of the National Assembly. The 90 days period for submission and consideration of amendments will commence after the Central Government has been formed,

This was in mid-October when the military forces of the two countries had already been deployed in battle formations along the West Pakistan borders, In East Pakistan, the Muktis had already penetrated the province under the umbrella of Indian guns and with the help of deepening intrusions by the Indian infantry.

He ended his pre-war valedictory address with the usual harangue:

No power on earth can cow down a nation of 120 million Mujahids of Islam determined to guard their independence and fulfil their destiny. Hardly anything could have been more patently naive, even comical, in a cliff-hanging situation like that.

The Grand Trunk Road already hummed with the rattle of heavy military vehicular traffic on way to various assembly and concentration

areas. Tanks, guns, engineering equipment, and truckloads of troops moved to various sensitive spots around Lahore and Sialkot and areas further down south towards Multan, War seemed certain. A large number of foreign correspondents came crowding into Rawalpindi in anticipation of a war breaking out at any time.

It was in such delicate and turbulent times that Yahya flew off to Tehran to have his 'striptease' of an encounter with the Soviet President Podgorny-the subject of many a fanciful tale, without any sober record or reliable evidence, whatsoever.

Yahya had already declared that he would regard an attack on East Pakistan as an act of war on the entire country. An undeclared war had, in fact, already begin after the escalation of the Indian artillery attacks across the East Pakistan borders, particularly in the western, eastern and the north-eastern areas of the province. Reports of intensive shelling were received every day from the Eastern Command. There Was, however, a strange kind of a smugness and complacency about East Pakistan in the West-people did not seem to be bothered or worried about it. Niazi's press statement about the invincibility of the Muslim soldier and the West Pakistani rhetoric that war would be fought on enemy soil, were primarily responsible for creating this sense of complacency.

Signals from the Eastern Command spoke more and more of the Mukti depredations but reflected little sense of urgency. They only wanted more troops and artillery. The general assessment was that the rebels would not be able to hold out for very much longer. The army had secured all the border outposts and was tactically in full control of the situation, The activities of the Razakars, members of the peace committees, provincial governor and ministers, and above all, the newly elected members ofthe provincial and national assemblies, were cited as proof of the steady improvement in the political climate. It was generally believed that the situation would stabilize within a week or so if only India would desist from its blatant threats and actions. Early in November, a delegation headed by the PPP chairman Bhutto, accompanied by the CGS, General Gul Hassan, and the air chief, Air Marshal Rahim Khan, went to China for talks. There was much speculation about their mission, which was regarded as Pakistan's answer to the recently concluded Indo-Soviet Defence Pact. After Henry Kissinger's secretly planned and successful trip to Beijing from Rawalpindi, in July of that year, this was considered as the second most important move. However, the Chinese attitude towards Pakistan

in terms of the statements issued during the visit of the Pakistan delegation, caused a great deal of uncertainty about its approach to the issue. In no uncertain terms, Zhou En Lai had declared that Chinese military aid was for meeting the 'threat of external aggression and not for the repression of the people'. The reference to East Pakistan though veiled was too clear to escape notice and was generally not liked. Pakistan, it seemed, had been left high and dry by its allies. A second and decisive round with India appeared inevitable and imminent.

Politicians, including Bhutto, the leader of the majority party in the West, spoke of war and its devastating effects on the subcontinent. He conjured up the gory spectacle of the waters of the Jumna and Ganga turning red as a result of war. War with India was not only inescapable but it was also Pakistan's best chance to teach India a lesson. As a result of the Chinese military aid and the expansion in the armed forces after the 1965 war, Pakistan had militarily achieved near-parity with India. Things had never looked better. Even if East Pakistan was occupied, the army would be able to seize a sizeable chunks of the Indian territory across the Ravi and the Sutlej, perhaps even up to the Beas and the Kashmir mountains, to pull off a good bargain with India. People exuded great self-confidence about the outcome of the war. The Soviet threat loomed large but the Soviets would not risk a confrontation with China and the USA at the same time, for the sake of India.

On 3 November, the DGISI, Lieutenant General Ghulam Jilani, held a press briefing on India's military build~up against East Pakistan. It was indeed most formidable-about eight infantry and mountain divisions facing west. In addition, nearly sixteen squadrons of the IAF and one-third of its naval fleet were deployed on the eastern front including the only aircraft carrier Vikrant, within striking range of Chittagong. The maps were closely dotted with the silhouettes of Indian combat aircrafts, ships, and formation signs. The certainty of a naval blockade of East Pakistan in the event of a full-scale war, was all too obvious.

What would be Pakistan's answer to the challenge? The answer given by General Jilani was evasive and uncertain. In East Pakistan, the Muktis could be sorted out in no time, if only the Indians were not actively involved in the dispute. West Pakistan had nothing to fear. She could take on India and defeat it,

The press reports of the massive Indian build»up, based on ISI briefings, produced a depressing effect. HQ CMLA reacted sharply to

the news. Peerzada questioned the wisdom of the briefing. Other than a demoralizing effect on the public, it also highlighted a complete lack of control and coordination between the GHQ and the ISI on the one hand, and HQ CMLA and GHQ, on the other. GHQ seemed to be under a spell of relaxation, having deployed the army according to plan, with which everyone seemed to be satisfied, The war was to be fought on the other side of the border, inside the Indian territory.

Politically, there had been a complete lack of coherence and direction. Many voices were heard both for and against the war at the same time. Yahya, in an interview with Arnaud de Borchgrave of the Newsweek, called war 'military lunacy'. Bhutto said that as both he and the Indian prime minister were proceeding abroad-to China and Europe respectively-war was out of the question, The Shah of Iran, a traditional friend of Pakistan, ruled out the possibility of war, The British foreign secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Hume, had the same view. As a result the people were thoroughly confused. They did not know what was in store for them.

There was a perfect political vacuum in the country and a total war in such a situation was bound to be a disaster. Yahya ruled from his ivory tower. His personal reputation was at its lowest ebb. This was the time when the country was said to be ruled 'by pimps and prostitutes after sunseti Yahya moved out of his presidential cell only twice, to visit the troops on the Lahore and Sialkot fronts. On one of these visits, he wore a most ill-fitting and crinkled khaki shirt and sported sideburns he looked like a perfect caricature of a soldier and an army commander.

The uncertainty about war and peace leit people wondering about their own fate. They did not know what to do and whom to tum to for political direction. Except for the PPP and its leader, all the other parties appeared to have suffered a political eclipse. There was the martial law regime on one hand and the PPP on the other. The ban on the Awami League continued. Mujib's trial had concluded and the judgment was soon expected to be pronounced. By-elections in East Pakistan returned the govemment's nominees unopposed. As a foreign correspondent described it, there was something absolutely 'nightmarish' about the exercise in the context of the situation down there. Perhaps a removal of the ban on the Awami League would have helped matters politically. As the official military spokesman, I felt greatly handicapped while dealing with the foreign correspondents. They were full of questions and We were completely devoid of answers.

Politically, our stock answer was, to give the president's plan for framing the constitution and its promulgation by 25 December, a fair chance. On military matters, the strategy was to wait and see. Official briefers and spokesmen of the Foreign Ministry and the Information Ministry, tried hard to prove that the Bengali masses were still pro~ Pakistan and only a handful of miscreants were creating all the trouble with active help and support from India.

On 20 October, the front pages of several national dailies carried conflicting reports and statements about the prospects of war and peace in the subcontinent. It was a most bewildering state of affairs. During a meeting with Gul Hassan, I brought that to his notice. I told him that in the absence of any direction from the top, I was feeling greatly handicapped particularly in my dealings with the foreign correspondents.

'If you talk of direction from the top', he retorted, 'it is just not there. Even I have not been able to see the old man for two or three weeks'

He said that as far as he was concerned, he had already finished his job. The deployment was complete and the war had virtually begun. The director military operations, Brigadier Riaz, talked in a similar vein. He thought that it was Pakistanis best chance to settle the score with India. He felt sure of a straight win. The plan must work. They were all waiting for the word 'go' but nobody quite knew when it would come through. There seemed to be little contact between the GHQ and the HQ CMLA. The president, on his return from Iran, was said to be taking it easy. There was all this talk of war, and non-stop troop movement, yet an air of uncertainty pervaded the entire country. However, there was no uncertainty about the perceived outcome of the war. Pakistan was bound to carry the day in the West. That was the only way to save the East, and the country as a whole.

Political leadership, so essential in a situation like this, was totally missing. The politicians dominated the public stage but they talked more of the transfer of power than the prospects and consequences of a war with India. As for Yahya, he seemed to be living in a world of his own. He did not seem to think, even for a moment, that the break- up of the country and his own downfall was only a matter of days. He still thought, and believed, that the war could be won through propaganda.

Towards the middle of November, the Information Ministry undertook to produce a documentary on the Al Badr and Al Shams

volunteers of East Pakistan. The principal motivation behind the documentary was (a) to debunk Bhutto's persistent denunciation of the Al Badr and Al Shams volunteers as Jama'at-i-Islami hoodlums unleashed against patriotic Bengalis, and (b) to project Bengali civilians as standing firmly behind the armed forces in their patriotic war against the India-aided and misguided 'miscreants'

Either way, it was a palpably absurd idea to tackle a situation as grave as that with the help of mere PR and propaganda gimmicks,

The matter was formally referred to me by the president's secretariat under the signature of the joint secretary, Mr Abdul Qayyurn, for comments and approval. I appended my negative comments to the file and returned it forthwith. Nevertheless, the Information Ministry went ahead with the project, flying its camera crew by what turned out to the last Karachi-Dhaka-Karachi PIA flight. The team would return to a rump Pakistan in 1974, along with other POWs.

Reports from East Pakistan reflected a picture of confidence. The naval officer commanding East Pakistan, Rear Admiral Sharii said that if all went well, he should be able to sort the guerrillas out within a week or a fortnight. That was towards the end of November. Earlier on, in September, my own directorate had undertaken to prepare a documentary film on the role and performance of the frontline soldiers in East Pakistan, and to show the damage done by Indian artillery bombardment. The film was called In Defence-Defiance using a quotation from Churchill. It had been shot on location mostly in Jessore and Sylhet. The film was an honest PR effort but a hopelessly untimely one. It was already too late. By the time the film was ready for release East Pakistan had already been attacked by India.

12

THE BALLOON GOES UP!

DHAKA FALLS

N Eid day I called on the president for formal Eid greetings. The time allocated for guests was from 10 to 11 a.m. A large number of guests, including ambassadors from Muslim countries, were there by the given time. However, the president failed to make a punctual appearance, and everybody started to wonder as to what was keeping him. I heard someone express anxiety about the health of the president»he could have had a stroke or a heart attack! The delay in the president's arrival made most of us whisper and wonder. Then, around 11 am., Yahya, followed by his friend and right-hand man, General Hamid, appeared. He strode in with his characteristic measured and unhurried manner towards the lawns. The guests lined up on either side of the red carpet to meet him. Yahya was very much his usual ebullient self, warmly greeting the visitors and shaking hands with each,

Call it self-confidence or sheer cussedness, Yahya's composure was remarkable. He did not betray any anxiety, haste, or nervousness even in the face of an inevitably disastrous situation. One wondered, however, if he could have kept his cool without having taken a drink or two. Amongst the visitors that day, General Gul Hassan was conspicuous by his absence. He told me later that he had gone to Lahore on purpose to avoid the Eid visitors.

I called on Gul the day after Eid on his return from Lahore. His orderly, Akbar, offered me a drink while I waited for him. Minutes later, the general came in, and we embraced and exchanged greetings. We then settled down to discuss the prevailing situation and the drifts in our policy. However, it was obvious that nobody knew exactly what was going to happen.

Our conversation was interrupted by a telephone call; it was the 'secro' (secure telephone line) as the general's orderly announced. Gul went to take the call. He took some ten to fifteen minutes. As he returned to the drawing-room, he told Akbar to lay out his uniform.

'Sorry Siddiqi,' he said, 'it was the VCGS. It seems the balloon is up. I am going to the of`fice.'

I got up, took his leave, and drove back home.

Things in East Pakistan had been consistently deteriorating. Niazi had asked for reinforcements and had sent his COS, Brigadier Baqar Siddiqi, for that purpose. The GHQ had agreed to give another two infantry battalions, which was all they could spare without jeopardizing the defence of the West. The question of any more artillery or armour regiments simply did not arise-Niazi would have to make do with what he had.

Next day, Baqar Siddiqi called on me at my office. He was to take the next flight back to Dhaka. We talked of the situation, which he thought was well under control. One of their main problems was PR and the psychological war. 'If only we could beat India's PR and propaganda, half the battle would be won.'

I promised him full help from my side.

Siddiqi did not sound too alarmed or pessimistic about the situation.

The Razakars had been doing a magnificent job and the patriotic elements were gradually re-surfacing and coming forward to help, and to cooperate with the government. If it was not for India's interventions, it would not have taken more than a week or two to bring the situation under control. General Niazi, according to his COS, was very confident and in full control of the situation. He also thought that the installation of the civilian government and the by»elections had done a lot to stabilize the situation politically. However, if the date set for the promulgation of the new constitution, i.e. 25 December, could be put off by a couple of weeks it would be of immense help to the military.

He asked me about Salik (Major, later Brigadier Siddiq Salik, PRO, Eastern Command) who had come to West Pakistan on a short leave. Isaid I would pack him off to Dhaka by the first available flight. Siddiqi did not seem to think much about the escalation of the border clashes and the open involvement and use of the Indian artillery and troops in the operations. He was quite confident of our ability to pin down the Indian forces, Q' only the local population started to behave itself and the process of political rehabilitation was speeded up.

As we took leave of each other I promised to pay them an early visit by the middle or the end of December, Meanwhile, I had a message sent to Salik directing him to report immediately to Rawalpindi and take the first flight back to Dhaka. Salik reported on the 23rd, He looked visibly shaken by the developments over the past two days. That was the opportunity, he said, for which he had been waiting all this time. He left for Karachi on way to Dhaka the same day-a worried man visibly haunted by agonizing uncertainties.

I went on with my daily briefings on the East Pakistan situation. The briefings were beginning to look more like a social get together rather than a sombre affair. There was absolutely no direction from the top. I used to get my material from the DMI, pen it down, get it vetted by the deputy chief of the general staff, and the DMI, and read it out at the briefing session. In addition to what I read out I also gave a brief and quick rundown of the situation.

Colonel Riazul Haque Malik, deputy director military intelligence, assisted me and handled all questions of a tactical nature. The officer, however, often exceeded his limits as my co-briefer and instead of behaving as a professional soldier, often behaved as a mujahid (crusader). One evening when asked if the war could be called a jihad he said ‘yes’, I intervened to say that while the jihad theme could be used by the foreign correspondents there was no need to ascribe it to the colonel. Riaz and the majority of the national reporters, did not like my intervention. He got so annoyed with me that the next day he refused to accompany me to the briefing. How ever, I was able to calm him down and continue with our teamwork.

The news from East Pakistan was extremely confusing. From the western sector, around the important town of Jessore, the information was that war seemed to have spread out in all directions. Up north at Pachagarh, and towards north-east and east, things were heating up and the Indian presence continued to escalate. The Indians ingressed into several areas and were holding them. War was now being fought well inside the Pakistan territory although none of the major towns had yet been lost to the enemy. The situation reports from the Eastern

Command were becoming more and more confusing and self- contradictory. It appeared that the Eastern Command had not been fully in touch with the field formations and the formations with their units and sub-units. Nevertheless, overall the situation reports reflected a sense of confidence and control.

On the 28 and 29, nearly a week after the hostilities, Eastern Command reacted strongly to my briefings. A day before, I had announced the capture of Jibbannagar on the Jessore border by the Indians. The Eastern Command claimed the area to be still under their control and asked GHQ to stop the briefings on the East Pakistan situation from Rawalpindi. They thought that my briefings tended to create confusion and demoralize the troops. It was a most extraordinary situation inside the GHQ operation room. Things on the situation maps went from bad to worse while the Eastern Command continued to claim that all was well. Even a cursory glance at the maps showed an enlargement of the enemy gains and an increasing loss of initiative and force in our own counter-thrusts and attacks. The enemy took the initiative and made the Pakistanis react to its moves. Rapid tactical shifts in the pattern of the Indian thrusts to break the local superiority of our troops, also led to an overstretching of forces and made the supply and communication lines hopelessly tenuous and vulnerable.

Formations, even up to battalion levels, had lost much of their internal cohesion and central control, disintegrating into many companies, sections, and platoons. They fought well in most of the cases, but in isolation from the high command and not according to an integrated plan. There was an enormous dissipation and diffusion of effort,

It was obvious that generals and brigadiers at their tactical headquarters were hardly in command of the operation. It was the man on the spot-a lieutenant colonel at the most-who was guiding and controlling the course of the war. Higher planning had long since given way to field craft and improvisation, to delay or rather, avert the inevitable. The Eastern Command itself did not appear to be fully in the picture. As late as 8 December, just a week before the surrender, they were still holding the Rawalpindi press briefings as largely responsible for the prevailing confusion in their areas. On 8 December, Baqar Siddiqi rang me up from Dhaka to tell me that I should resist the tendency of being quick to announce ‘own’ losses in East Pakistan.

‘You should announce the gains only and leave it to us to announce the losses,’ he urged. He told me not to be influenced by what the BBC and the AIR were saying about East Pakistan. Jessore was still under Pakistani control although the picture was rather confused and communication with that sector was not too good, He seemed to be more alarmed and concerned with the PR side than with the actual course of the war!

From 22 November, i.e. since the launch of India's full-scale offensive in East Pakistan, to 3 December, i.e. the day when hostilities started off in the western theatre as well, there was hardly any visible apprehension or alarm at the GHQ. The fall of Dhaka, barely three weeks hence, was not even remotely visualized. Only the intelligence maps belied the general mood of confidence and complacency. The Indian thrusts were becoming bigger and more penetrating as against Pakistan's countermeasures. The blue arrows fell back as the red arrows advanced. The town and airfield of Jessore was well within range of the Indian artillery.

In the north-west, the Hilli salient was under great pressure; in the north-east, the town of Sylhet and its airfield at Shamshemagar had been under artillery bombardment, while further down, Feni, the vital rail-road link between Dhaka and Chittagong, was already under India's domination. Further down, the important railway junction at Laxam had been the scene of fierce fighting and the Pakistanis were forced to withdraw to 'pre-planned positions'. The seaport of Chittagong had been under intensive air attack and was already cut off from Dhaka by both land and air. After India threw its air force into the operation, it turned into a most desperate situation.

At the briefing, the PAF representative, Air Commodore T.S. Jan, in crisp convent-school English would go on waxing eloquence about the heroic deeds and performance of the PAF in the East. With the help of a toy model of an IAF Gnat, he dramatized the circumstances in which two Indian Gnats were shot down. The air commodore's light-hearted banter and comic-book description made the war look like a camival. He himself would light-heartedly refer to the briefings as 'a circus'.

War in East Pakistan, initiated by India on 22 November, went on haphazardly for Pakistan, and according to plan for India. The Indians leap-frogged, bypassing Pakistan's fortress defences, They followed the tested and proven tactics of 'leaving the highways and following the byways', to avoid, as far as possible, direct engagements with the Pakistan Army while pressing on towards their main objective, Dhaka, at a steady pace. Our twice»daily brieings on East Pakistan were becoming more of a spectacle than serious business. There was little

to report except that our forces were 'regrouping' and withdrawing to 'pre-planned positions' for the final, decisive round.

On 3 December, I returned home after my routine second daily briefing at about 4.45 p.m., feeling strangely relaxed. Personally, I

had by then gotten into the stride as far as the briefings were concerned and my stage fright and stress had considerably lessened. It had been several days since I had taken a walk, so I thought of taking one that evening. The blackout had not yet been enforced and only 'brown- outs' were being observed. I changed into my walking gear and was about to leave when the phone rang. I turned back to take the phone; it was the defence adviser, Syed Ghiasuddin Ahmad, at the other end. He sounded alarmed and asked me if I had heard the 5 p.m. news. I replied in the negative.

He told me that Radio Pakistan had announced that India had attacked West Pakistan along the border and further details were awaited.

I said that I had no information whatsoever about the news and also about who might have released it to the press. He told me to find out and report to his office in half an hour. The poor man was really upset He had to enforce, he said, the emergency provisions of the war book concerning blackouts and all.

I rang up Radio Pakistan and was told that the news had indeed been broadcast and had been conveyed to them personally by the information secretary. It was mystifying. Promptly, I changed back into my uniform. Then I rang up Major Javed Nasir, G-2 to the CGS, and was told that the boss was in the operations room. So the balloon had gone up after all. I hurried to the ministry of defence in my own car~a Ford Escort, 1971 model. The road was deserted but the street lights were still on. As I drove into the ministry of defence compound, I found the peon of the defence adviser fumbling with a whole lot of hurricane lanterns and drawing up the curtains over the glass panes of doors and windows. I walked straight into the adviser's room. He looked totally lost. He had been with the president until about 3 p.m. that afternoon but nobody had given him the slightest clue about the attack. After hearing the news of the attack he had been trying to ring up the president's house, the COS, and the CGS, but to no avail. Nobody was available and he did not know what to do in the absence of a proper authorization from the president to enforce the blackout and other relevant provisions of the war book. I asked him to try the CGS again and he did so, with luck this time. He was brusquely told that the war was on and he could go ahead with the enforcement of the various provisions of the war book. The CGS asked him about me.

'He is right here sir,' he answered. As he rang off; he sighed and told me to report to the CGS, and get one of my officers to report to him to

arrange the release of various announcements to the radio and the press.

I drove to the GHQ. The G-2 received me in his room. 'So the balloon is up after all! Sir, the old man is waiting for you. We have to prepare the press release for the approval ofthe president' He showed me into Gul Hassan's room. Wearing his reading glasses, Gul was busy drafting the press release. He was obviously having difficulty with it

'Here you are' he said, taking off his glasses and passing the piece of paper to me. 'None of my business to write up the press release. It is your bloody job! ' He fumed as he passed the slip of paper on to rne.

India had attacked West Pakistan at three vital points, namely Hussainiwala, Kasur, and the Shakargarh sectors. The Indians had started to cross the international border in the small hours of the morning of 3 December and when challenged by the rangers, had opened their artillery. They had also attacked at a number of places in Kashmir and the Pakistan Army had reacted in the Chhamb area to cut off India's main lines of communication to Jammu.

These developments raised a number of points about the Indian action. For instance, was it a surprise attack as in 1965? How were the Pakistanis able to react so swiftly and bring the Indian advance to a prompt halt? Furthermore, how had the Pakistani forces already managed to advance at a number of points into the Indian territory? However, there was little time for such subtleties. The announcement about the Indian attack had already been made and the entire nation, and the world at large, was waiting to hear more about it. I hurried with the drafting of the release, got it twed and showed it to Gul Hassan. Then we both drove to the president's house. It was pitch dark as we drove in with only the parking lights on. On the way I asked him as to how it all began. To my utter surprise, he told me that he himself did not know about it until well after the radio broadcast.

It was all so mystifying-the CGS not being informed of the H- hour. As I would come to know later, at around 4 p.m., the president accompanied by the chief of staff, General Abdul Hamid Khan, had visited the Combat Operations Centre of the air force, located in the Cambridge Barracks. The two generals were received by the air chief, Air Marshal A, Rahim Khan and his senior staff. As they went to the operations room, the air chief explained his plan for a pre-ernptive strike against a number of major IAF operational bases. His plan

included attacks on the forward bases close to Punjab and Sindh, and up in Kashmir. The farthest point of attack was the Agra base.

It took the air chief about a quarter of an hour to explain his plan and only a moment for the president to give his approval to it. By about 5 p.m., four PAF Mirages were already airborne, heading for their targets in India. The information secretary was summoned at that moment and directed to put the twelve-word announcement on air. The announcement read, 'India has attacked West Pakistan all along the border. Details are awaited.'

The secretary passed the message on to the DG Radio on the telephone from the operations room and just managed to make it in time for the 5 p.m. news bulletin. Hamid hurried back to the GHQ and from there flashed orders to the fighting formations already in their battle locations to move. The general staff at the GHQ came to know of the action only a good hour or so after the launch.

As we entered the ante-room of the President House, we found Air Marshal Rahim Khan reclining on a sofa chair. Gul Hassan and I saluted the air chief and he replied with a laconic hello. Gul seated himself next to the air chief. I took a chair facing them. The American ambassador, Joseph Farland, was with the president and General Hamid. The Chinese ambassador, Chang Tung, had already been to see the president. We waited for the US ambassador to come out before we could go in. Meanwhile, a bearer came with drinks. After a while, the air chief turned to me and asked, in what I thought to be a low contemptuous tone, as to what I was doing there. 'I have my press release for the president to see before I can brief the press. ..'

After a pause the air chief said, 'What press release? And why?' I was somewhat nonplussed and was still looking for words, when Gul intervened, 'You know, sir,' he said, 'the world press is here waiting to know all about the circumstances in which it happened. We must justify the action taken.' 'What justification? the air chief barked, 'Success is the biggest justification. My birds should be right over Agra by now, knocking the hell out of them. I am only waiting for the good news.'
He tumed his left wrist to look at the watch; it was past 8 p.m. Then he told one ofthe ADCs to call Air Commodore T.S. Jan at the COC and ask him if 'the birds' were back at the bases. The air chief exuded complete self-confidence. There seemed to be no doubt in his

mind whatsoever as to the outcome of the strike, Gul did not look so sure. He was somewhat shaky and smoked incessantly.

After about half an hour or so, the American ambassador came out of the presidential sitting room. He greeted us and shook hands with everybody. An over-enthusiastic ADC, Squadron Leader Arshad Sami Khan, gave him a glass of whisky.

'So it has happened alter all', the ambassador sighed as he sipped his whisky, 'we all wished to God that it would not happen but now that it has, I can only wish you all the very best of luck."

Gul briefed the ambassador on the ground action. The ambassador once again wished him good luck and left with his drink unfinished. As he left, the ADC led the air chief and CGS to the president's sitting room. The information secretary also came over in the meantime and was shown in while my co-briefer and I stayed back in the ante- room. I walked over to the ADC's room to ring up my staff to inform them about my whereabouts. However, I could not give them the exact time for the briefing as the press release was yet to be approved by the president. There were four or five young fellows in the ADC's room. The president's son, Ali Yahya Khan, was also there. He gave me a bear hug. The atmosphere was relaxed, even somewhat festive. The war, everybody thought, had already been won. 'We will give the enemy a bloody nose' Drinks went round in an unbroken chain. Even Colonel Riaz, my co-briefer~a teetotaller-had a couple of stiff ones and downed them straight.

Having spoken to my staff, I sank in my deep sofa chair in the ante-room and waited as the minutes ticked by. The people inside seemed to have forgotten all about the press briefing and the war. Everything seemed to be proceeding well and according to plan. The PAF had been pounding vital targets deep inside India and the land forces had already carried the war into enemy territory.
The Pakistan Army had made a concerted push from the Shakargarh salient in the northeast and the Hussainiwala headworks in the south. From the Shakargarh salient in the Sialkot area, Pakistan could cut off the Indian lines of communication to Kashmir, Akhnur, the strategic border city in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, was just about seven miles away from the 'Chicken Neck Area', a little towards the south in the Chhamb sector, overlapping the ceasefire line and the international border. Pakistan had mounted another major thrust to take Akhnur from the rear and link up there. Up north, in the Tithwal sector, fighting was raging in the Neelum valley. The desert in the south was also

heating up. A major thrust to Rarngarh would place Pakistan in an extremely advantageous position tactically. From there Delhi was not too far away.

There was much optimism in the room while we waited for the press release to be issued. At a little past l0 p.m., I told Arshad Sami to go in and find out as to what was happening inside. There had been a number of calls for me from my office and the PID, about the journalists waiting to get their first war story. Sami suggested that I go in myself.

'I am afraid, sir,' he said, 'that at this rate you will not get your press release until midnight. So you must go yourself The president knows you and will not mind.'

I immediately stood up, made for the door and entered the hall. In the middle sat Yahya, flanked by Hamid, Rahim, Gul, and Roedad. He looked completely relaxed-the very picture of self- confidence,

'Hello, Siddiqi,' he addressed me in his characteristic soldierly brusque but affectionate way. 'What are you doing here?'
I told him that I was there to collect the press release if he had approved it. It was quite obvious that he had not seen it until then. Hamid told me to have a seat, which I did, as Yahya quickly glanced through the release. He said it was okay, suggesting certain minor amendments here and there, Giving the draft back to me, he said, 'keep your bloody chin up and don't look so miserable...' Then he gestured with his raised, balled fist and said, 'See this? Well, this is what I have for the enemy! Now get lost and see me first thing tomorrow morning?
The day never dawned!
I got up to take my leave and Roedad followed ,me. The other four stayed back to continue their discussion. The meeting, I was to learn the next day, went on until the wee hours of the morning.
At about midnight, the air chief spoke to the naval chief, Admiral Muzaffar Hassan, who was in Karachi, and invited him to join them in the celebrations. That was the time when the Indian aircrafts were

already over Karachi hitting port installations and oil storage tanks. The naval chief had made an urgent request for air support but he was told not to worry himself about anything and wait for the good news in the morning.

From the president's house, Roedad, Riaz, and I, drove straight to the infomation ministry at Chaklala. It was close to ll p.m. by then. I

called Roedad's personal assistant and dictated the final draft to him, reading it out aloud for everybody to listen and approve and hastened to take my leave.
I asked Roedad to join us at the briefing but he said he was too tired. Riaz and I proceeded to the briefing room. It was a full house with over a hundred press and media men waiting. Before taking my seat at the table. I declared; 'Gentleman, it has happened. India has attacked us. , _ '
The text of the first press release given below shows the area, extent, and the drift of the war in West Pakistan, even as it started. The press release said: The Indians have escalated the war and extended their aggression to the whole of Pakistan.
Not satisfied with their aggression in East Pakistan, the Indians have attacked West Pakistan at several points. At about 12 noon, the regular Indian troops moved towards our border posts manned by Pakistan Rangers.
On being challenged, they opened up with small arms, wounding some of our men. The rangers tired back at the Indians in self-defence. The Indians opened up with artillery.
Incidents took place almost simultaneously in the Shakargarh salient, the Kasur border, the Hussainiwala Head works, Chhamb and at Rahim Yar Khan opposite Rajasthan,
The Indians also mounted military action in the Poonch area. About two hours later, the Indians started mounting attacks with massive artillery support. Our army retaliated.
The Indian ground action was supported by the Indian Air Force. The Pakistan Armed Forces are taking necessary counter-measures to meet the Indian challenge.
This evening the Pakistan Air Force bombed a number of Indian forward airtields~Amritsar, Pathankot, Awantipura and Srinagar.
All the PAF aircraft landed back safely at their airtields. The full picture of the operation is yet to emerge. Reports are still pouring in.
1965 is repeating itself
There were not many questions as the correspondents were in a hurry to tile their despatches and it was past midnight already.

I came back home by about 12.45 a.m. My wife told me that Indira Gandhi had been on the radio from Delhi. She had sounded extremely nervous and panieky. She had addressed the nation soon after an air dash from Calcutta, back to New Delhi. Things could not have been better to all outward appearances,

First thing the next morning, I went over to the GHQ to look up Gul Hassan. Luckily, he was by himself in the office and let me in immediately. He was speaking to the commander l Corps, Lieutenant General Irshad Ahmad Khan on phone, congratulating him on the capture of the Dharam enclave in the Sialkot sector. Then he spoke to General Iftikhar Janjua, commander 33 Division and congratulated on his performance in Chhamb. Aiier the call, he said hello to me. 'How are things sir?' I asked.

'Not bad at all.' He directed me to send a team of pressmen and photographers to the 12 Division area, where a major operation had been successfully fought in the Leepa valley area. The place, he said,was strewn with the bodies of Indian soldiers. As for my own briefings, he told me to leave the DMO alone and co-ordinatc with the DMI. I took his leave, came back to my office to give instructions to my staff about the coverage of the Leepa valley operation and then retumed to the GHQ. I went to the MI operations room, had a look at the situation maps and got some idea of the operations. Except for Chhamb and the Rajasthan area, where large and broad arrows indicated major Pakistani thrusts, gains elsewhere had been small, within two to three miles of the border on either side.

The enemy thrusts in East Pakistan stood in sharp contrast to ours in the West. The red arrows there looked like bloodstained, razor- sharp daggers-becoming bigger by the day. They were all over the map, proliferating, and heading rapidly towards the main target, Dhaka. Some of the strong Pakistani positions had already been bypassed. The only secure area, in blue, was Dhaka and its suburbs. At all other places, the Pakistani forces had lost their cohesiveness and centrality. They stood practically cut off from each other: each on its own and the devil take the hindmost. Contrary to Niazi's loud boast that the war would be fought on enemy soil, it had infiltrated deep inside the Pakistani territory. The Hilli salient to the north-west had been virtually eliminated, cutting off the north from the rest of the province by rail and road.

In the north-east, the Indians were well inside the province and the only airport in Sylhet, at Shamshemagar, was within artillery range. J essore was being bypassed from Chuagacha and Jibbanager. Towards the southeast, the Belonia bulge had been under increasing enemy pressure, It was a desperate situation already. In the West, the war had flared all along the international border and the ceasefire line, from Kargil to Chhamb, in sort of penny packets. The most reassuring

feature of the situation maps, even if only from the psychological and PR viewpoint, was the battle picture in the Lahore sector. There, not only had the enemy been kept at bay, but our troops had made some headway inside enemy territory.

Down in the Hussainiwala sectors, our troops had already secured the western bank of the Sutlej river and the famous Kaisar-i-Hind memorial to boot. We had also improved our defences further down in the Sulaimanki and the Fazillca sectors. The fall of the two cities~ Fazilka and Ferozepur on the Indian side, looked imminent. The situation in Sialkot, however, did not appear to be too good; and the picture around Shakargarh was somewhat confused. What was clear, however, was that our initial thrust had petered out in the face of India's quick riposte. Further down, in Rajasthan and Kutch, the enemy was making sizeable gains. These were the areas where we had gained most in 1965, and were hoping to repeat that performance. The rumour was that the Pakistani troops had suffered a good deal for want of air cover.

At the end of our briefing on 4 December, I saw Generals Hamid and Gul, followed by their personal staff walking towards the operations room. Just then the blue-plated, three-starred staff car of the air chief arrived and Air Marshal Rahim got off to join Hamid and Gul. Yahya was also on his way for a map briefing of the situation. I waited for the president's car to drive in before I drove out. Yahya looked his usual self-purple and bloated in the face-as he got off his car. He was wearing the uniform-Warm angola shirt and serge trousers. His sideburns protruded from the side of his service cap.

Such was the atmosphere at the GHQ, on the morrow of the war. It was one of emptiness rather than of intense activity, as would be expected at the armed forces headquarters of a country at war, That was on 4 December. Thereafter, there was little to report except to say that 'our defensive positions are being improved' and that minor indentations had been made across the various sectors in Punjab. Even the Chhamb sector, the pride of the l965 war, our advance had come to an abrupt halt.

I, for my part as the military spokesman, had little to report except to make a song and dance about the 'fall of the Kaisar-i-Hind Memorial' across the Sutlej, symbolizing India's eventual defeat. The news from East Pakistan was consistently alarming. Our fighting formations-divisions and brigades~had already disintegrated to regroup into fortresses for last-ditch battles. They waited for the Indians

to come and engage in battle but the Indians would not oblige. Rather than close up to the Pakistani strong points they leapfrogged in giant out lanking moves.

On 6 or 7 December, at the end of our top secret intelligence briefings at the GHQ, the Chinese military attaché, the only foreigner admitted to the briefings, gently took me by my arm to take me to the operational maps on the wall.
'Do you see what I see over there?' he asked me, while pointing to the map.
'Well?' I responded uncertainly_
'Well,' he resumed, 'as I see it, the war has virtually come to an end. There is hardly any movement from your side. The Indians are holding you on, waiting to get it over with in East Pakistani

The farthest point of our thrust across was hardly a couple of miles deep, confined to some odd villages and hamlets. That was about all.
'All to India's advantagel' he said.
Details of our tactical gains, sector-wise as marked on the map, were as follows:

Lahore Area I
I. Akbarpur
2. Balol
3. Goga
4. Veera, including Dhassan Bund
5. Bhage Kamo
6. Tooti
7. Area between Rani and Pul Kanjri

Burki
Forward line of the UBD (Upper Bari Doab Canal).

Kasur
Four outposts including the Kamkern customs post.

Hussainiwala
Line of Sutlej river.

Fazilka Sector
About eight outposts including Khanwala, Sarwar, Pakka, and Muhammad Peer.

Was this a general war or a mock exercise? Places marked on the operational maps but hard to find on a geographical map, and rarely heard of.

On 8 or 9 December, a foreign VIP, Genera] Andre Beaufre of the French Force d' Frappe and the world's leading authority on nuclear war and deterrence, called on the COS, General Hamid. Hamid's personal assistant, Brigadier Gulistan Khan Janjua, called me to place a helicopter and a senior conducting officer at the French general's disposal to take him to the various operational areas. General Beaufre spent a whole day hopping on and off the helicopter from one sector to another, or simply had an aerial view when he preferred to do so. At the end of his survey of the various areas, he was kind enough to come to my office to thank me for the help and assistance provided. He did not seem too happy with whatever he had observed taking place on the ground. There was hardly any concerted action worth a general war. It had all been too incredibly slow, easy-paced, and haphazard. In the Chamb area he saw, much to his surprise, our men sleeping in built-up areas. All he could do in the circumstances was to wish us the very best of luck and, success. It was a pretty dismal picture in his view.

My briefings went on day after day~the same theme about 'our valiant forces giving the enemy a bloody nose...' being repeated ad nauseam. The war in East Pakistan seemed all but lost, while in the West, it had practically stalemated on land and reduced to a hopelessly defensive exercise in the air, Two PAF Mirages mounted continuous combat air patrol, mainly to monitor enemy air activity without really engaging them in any decisive action. The Pakistan Navy had been the main target of India's Ossa-class Styx missile boats. They penetrated with impunity deep inside our waters and got away after the kill. In East Pakistan, the PAF had been effectively knocked out as the Dhaka airfield was put completely out of action,

On 10 December, utter confusion prevailed as news was received of General Farman's message to the UN secretary-general, offering an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of the Pakistan troops to designated areas for repatriation to the West. Yahya was simply furious. He directed the foreign office to deny the report immediately.

Gul Hassan did not seem bothered about the faux pas. He simply dismissed it with one of his four-letter mantras. Farman issued a complete denial on the 12th. An ISPR press release, on 13 December said:

Major General Rao Farman Ali, Adviser to the East Pakistan Governor, has issued the following statement in Dacca:

'I have been quoted by various sources as having offered surrender terms. I wish to state, in the most categorical and emphatic terms, that surrender has never been offered to anybody. In fact, neither I, nor my colleagues here, at any time issued or conceived, the idea of surrender. Anybody or any agency, attributing to me surrender terms, is telling a blatant lie. I would like to challenge anybody, to produce a document or statement, in which even the idea of surrender has been suggested.'

On the llth, Gul Hassan called me to come and see him immediately. I reported to him post-haste, only to find him smoking his gold-tipped 999, showing no signs of anxiety. He looked pretty normal and relaxed»may be only resigned to the inevitable. Retired Lieutenant Colonel Nasrullah, an old Armoured Corps pal of his, called to colours during the war emergency, sat next to him. Some used plates of food lay on a small table on one side. Nasrullah was then the manager of the Rawalpindi Inter-Continental.

'Siddiqi, it seems it's all up with East Pakistan. So you must do something to prepare the nation for the shock,' he said quite nonchalantly.
'But, sir, exactly what has happened? What should I tell the nation'?' I asked in a state of utter shock.

'I am afraid," he said, 'I know just about as much as you do. The Indians are knocking at Dhaka's door.'

'But what should I write ?'

'Your usual PR stuff about the army being out-numbered, out- gunned, but not out-classed. Cut off from its main base, it did what could be expected from the best of armies. And so on. You know what I mean. Now get cracking and read out to me the text.'

'Good Lord', I said to myself, as I left his office, 'is this how wars are fought and lost?'

I drove straight back to my office, dictated the piece without quite deciding for myself as to how best to describe the situation-whether it was 'g1im' or 'gloomy', or 'desperate', with or without a ray of hope? My mind was torn between two words 'grim' and 'gloomy'. I opted for the former as if a mere change of adjective would change the situation materially. I read out the press release to Gul Hassan on the phone. He approved it, telling me to read it out also to the information secretary, which I did. He had little to add except for a

few words, uttered in a state of complete shock. 'Is that really so? Is it all over? Good Lord_..' That was about all!

I went to break the news at my evening briefing. As I walked towards the podium, quite a few of my friends in the press asked me if Ferozepur had fallen to our advancing forces. They did not seem too bothered about East Pakistan. I faced them with an uncertain smile as I moved to the rostrum. ' Much as I would have preferred to use 'grin1' in my ad-libbed (though well-rehearsed) opening lines, I used 'gloomy' and then hastened to change it to 'grim'. There was a barrage of questions from the foreign press fielded by my tactical arm, Colonel Riaz. To a question, as to whether or not the Indians had secured a bridgehead across the Meghna at Narayanganj, the colonel's prompt answer was:

'How could there be a bridgehead when there is no bridge.'

I was begining to have my fill of the daily briefings. On the 14th or 15th, I made bold to tell Gul Hassan, 'No more of it, sir."

'Up to youl' Gul said something to that effect and shrugged me off I was summoned by the defence committee of the cabinet for an explanation. The war was very much on and I had, therefore, to go on with my briefings. 'But sir, there is nothing to report' I protested. The DGISI, Lieutenant General Ghulam Jilani, thought it was rank disobedience which called for a court martial and that was where the matter ended. However, the 14 December briefing happened to be my last. On the 15th, Indian paratroopers landed at Jamalpur, some thirty miles north of Dhaka. The GOC of the leading Indian division, Major General Nagra, was physically in Narayanganj and his staff was in touch with Niazi discussing the modalities of surrender.

For the past few days the Indian Army chief, General Sam Maneckshaw, had been addressing our front line troops through loud- speakers, telling them to surrender unconditionally and be treated 'honourably as POWs under the Geneva Convention or face massacre'. Leaflets, in hundreds of thousands, were also being dropped from theair, ordering surrender. There was no question of a conditional ceasefire the choice was between unconditional surrender and death. One leaflet bluntly wamed: 'If you do not surrender, we will hand over all your prisoners to Mukti Fauj for butchery'.

The message from the Indian Army commander to the Comilla garrison of the Pakistan Army was conveyed by the Indians through a Pakistani service officer taken earlier as a prisoner of war.

According to the ISPR press release dated 12 December:

The report about this dastardly Indian threat, which is against all intemational conventions, has been conveyed by the Eastern Command to General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army.

At about the same time, the necessity and wisdom of psychological operations was still being discussed at the GHQ, to raise the morale of the front line soldiers in East Pakistan on the one hand, and to tell India off on the other. The question was how to reach the front line soldiers fighting desperately for their survival; even more importantly, how to get the message heard in the midst of the thunder of the battlefield. Director-General Radio, Ijlal Haider Zaidi, enigmatic and elusive as ever, would respond with a muted 'yes' to Dr Jilani's brave ideas of psychological operations. He would be happy to provide dozens of high-powered radio sets to the front line soldiers. The question was how to deliver them?

While the details of the psychological operations were still being worked out at the GHQ, news came of General Niazi's acceptance of an unconditional surrender. Until just about a couple of days earlier, he had boasted in front of the foreign correspondents at the Inter- Continental that the Indians would have to drive a tank over his body to enter Dhaka.

16 December dawned on a doleful, funereal note for Pakistan. Foreign networks, mainly the BBC, the villain of the piece, had even announced the details of the surrender parade scheduled for that afternoon. Communication between the GHQ and the Eastern Command, extremely erratic since ll December, had been totally cut off. No one knew as to when, how and who, might have accepted unconditional surrender.

Until about 4 p.m. on 16 December, we were still at sixes and sevens about the accuracy of the news and how to break it officially. Gul Hassan was not available, so I contacted Major General Shaukat Riza, deputy chief of the general staff 'We must catch the 5 p.m. news bulletin,' I urged. Shaukat agreed, suggesting that we should go to the information secretary and seek his views,

We drove to his Chaklala office to find him and his senior officers in a huddle, looking utterly confused. He had been in constant touch with the foreign secretary, Sultan Mohammad Khan, who, in tum, had little to add to what we had all heard over the BBC. We phoned the military secretary to the president, Major General Ishaque, hoping to have a word with the president. Ishaque brusquely told us that the 'old

man' had just retired to catch a wink of sleep and could not be disturbed. That left nothing for us to do, except to put our heads together, and produce a 26-word draft as follows:

Under an arrangement between the commanders of India and Pakistan in the eastern theatre, Indian troops have entered Dhaka and fighting has ceased in East Pakistan.

So that was the end of the burlesque, which began at midnight on 25-26 March 1971, ending on the afternoon of 16 December 1971. A reprieve of full nine months-long enough to correct the course-had been cold-bloodedly and cussedly wasted away. The news of the unconditional surrender was still echoing thunderously-each repetition gaining in volume and resonance-when Yahya came on air, to tell the nation that the war would continue. He called the fall of Dhaka 'a temporary setback in one theatre of war, which, by any means did not signify the end of the struggle. We may lose a battle, but final victory in this war of survival, shall Inshaallah be ours'.

Some excerpts from what turned out to be his own funeral oration and a requiem for a united Pakistan:

...The heroic iight put up by our armed forces in East Pakistan against overwhelming odds, will go down in history as an epic of indomitable courage, reminiscent of the highest traditions of the soldiers of Islam. Though vastly outnumbered and cut off from supplies and reinforcements by land, sea and air due to enemy blockade, thes~ Ghazis of Islam held out for months against a perfidious and ruthless eneniy, massively equipped and backed by a super-power.
...We are faced by a predatory aggressor, whose designs are now clear. They have launched an all-out bid for the dismemberment and total destruction of Pakistan. ..
The people of Pakistan and their anned forces will not cease their struggle until aggression is vacated and justice prevails.

He declared in a thundering Churchillian tone while winding up his address:

This is a war, which has to he fought in the fields, factories and homes as much as on the battlefield...

That was on the 16th. On the morning of the 17th, copies of the draii constitution of a united Pakistan were distributed by the press

department of the information ministry. The text of the draft was to be broadcasted by TV and radio networks at 7 p.m. I went to Gul Hassan for his advice and orders. My own view was that this should be 'killed' there and then. Riza also joined and we all agreed to stop the broadcast at all events. Gul Hassan directed us to see Roedad Khan and so the two of us, Riza and I, drove out to Chaklala again. The information secretary was in the midst of a meeting with his media chiefs, finalizing measures to ensure airing the summary of the draft constitution as programmed. 'Well, what's up now'?' he asked as he stood up to receive us.

'The summary is not going on airl' Riza replied promptly. 'But how can that be? That's a presidential command' Roedad said. He contended that as 'a civil servant' he was duty-bound to carry out the orders given to him by the president himself

'Nothing doing' was our joint answer. East Pakistan was no longer there. Our forces had already surrendered to the Indians and were under their protective custody. India and the USSR had already recognized Bangladesh. Where then was the rationale for the constitution of one Pakistan that had ceased to exist? After a heated exchange, we left Roedad's office. Riza said that he would take it up with Gul Hassan. The broadcast had to be stopped at all costs.

After dropping Riza at the GHQ, I drove back home. PTV and Radio Pakistan, repeatedly interrupted their regular programme to tell the listeners that a major announcement would be made at 7 p.m. The programme opened on time, primed by the usual recitation from the Holy Quran. With the recitation over, the anchor announced that the scheduled major announcement had been held up due to 'technical reasons.' That was that-our successful 'coup d' radio'.

I walked over to Gul Hassan's house soon after that to have a word with him about the next move. As I entered his drawing room, I saw Air Marshal Rahim and Shakirullah Durrani, managing director PIA, one or two ADCs, and some others. I hesitated, somewhat unsure whether or not to excuse myself and leave when Gul Hassan asked me to come in.

They were in the middle of an animated discussion about who should be the next boss. Rahim was for his former chief, Air Marshal (retired) Asghar Khan. Gul Hassan was all for Bhutto. He went on to rebut Rahim on his preferred choice of Asghar Khan. 'How can you even think of a person defeated by a bloody corporal in the elections,
sir'?'

As it so happened the PPP candidate, Khurshid Hassan Meer, had defeated Asghar Khan by a wide margin of 40,000 votes in a Rawalpindi constituency. Meer had served as a corporal in the Royal Indian Air Force during the Second World War. Pressing his argument in Bhutto's favour, Gul Hassan said, 'I am afraid that we are left with no choice but to try this joker, Bhutto. After all, he is now the leader of the majority pai-ty,_.'

At this point, Shakirullah Durrani intervened: 'You don't seem to realize, Gul, what you'd be in for once you have Bhutto as the boss. The sort of person that he is he would "fix you up" at the first available opportunity_' V

'I would rather go along with Durrani Sahib as far as Bhutto is concerned!' I dared put in.

Just then, the ADC to the air chief came running in to tell him that the president wished to see him immediately at the President House. Rahim stood up promptly to leave and we all stood up with him. I asked Gul's permission to depart as well.

On the afternoon ofthe l8th, the unilateral ceasefire offered by the Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, in the Western theatre, was accepted by Yahya under President Nixon's personal advice. The GHQ was working out the modalities of ceasefire, in consultation with GHQ, India. There was an uproar in the country against the army, focusing on Yahya Khan and his drunken sex orgies. It had hardly been as violent as might well have been expected, considering the apocalyptical nature of the national disaster. The loss of East Pakistan might, indeed, have been a good riddance. What appeared to be uppermost in people's mind, was the safety of the Pakistani POWs and their speedy repatriation.

I went to see Gul Hassan first thing the next moming, 19 December, to find him a broken mari. 'There is serious trouble in Kharian. Officers of the 6 Armoured Division are up in arms against their divisional commander. They phoned me to ask me to come and see things for myself. I told them to come here instead". let's wait and see. This could be my last day in the office. I am right now in the middle of cleaning up this mess.,.', he said, pointing to the drawers of his desk which he was busy cleaning out. 'Wait for my next call. The boys are on their way and should be here soon.'

I left his office and returned to my own. There was not much to do except work on one or two press releases regarding the state of the ceasefire which was still fluid, as could be expected.

There was no call from Gul Hassan for the rest of the day. The next morning, 20 December, I called the CGS, wondering as to what might have happened in the meantime. Major Javed Nasir answered, 'Sir, I am worried myself about the old man. You know Mr Bhutto has arrived and it seems there is a war of succession going on right now at the President House.'

Things had definitely taken an ugly turn, as indeed could be expected after all that had happened. Just then a circular arrived, saying that COS General Abdul Hamid Khan would be addressing officers of the rank of lieutenant colonel and above at noon at Ayub Hall. About half an hour or so later, another circular was delivered replacing t.he words 'lieutenant colonel and above', with 'all available garrison officers' to attend the COS's address.

I reached the auditorium at around 11.45 a.m., to find it packed to capacity. Three PSOs, Major General Khuda Dad (Adjutant-General), Major General Osman Mitha (Quartermaster-General) a.nd Lieutenant General Khawaja Wasiuddin (Master-General of Ordinance), were all there in the front row.

Only Gul Hassan was missing, which exacerbated my fears about his personal safety. A minute before the stroke of 12 noon, however, Gul entered looking somewhat 'deliciously tired', I thought, like one at the end ofa day's hard but rewarding work. At about the same time, General Hamid entered from the speaker's entrance followed by an aide. He stood behind the lecture, surveyed the audience, cleared his throat and began to address the gathering. A shakier speech could not have been expected from a man of such a high rank. It was a long and rambling apology for the top planners in the army and in the administration. The country, he said, was passing through 'a grave and most serious crisis, but let us be men enough to face it'.

From the benches and the public galleries in the rear, were heard muffled angry murmurs from the young officers, i.e, lieutenant colonels and below. It was impossible for any one sitting in the front seats to make out what they were saying but the mood itself was eloquent enough to obviate the need for words. The atmosphere was explosive- like a live volcano ready to erupt. The top brass looked isolated and totally cut off from the rank-and-file. It looked as if the force was already divided into two uneven factions-the bigger one representing the rest whereas the top brass was isolated as a small minority. The junior officers were up in arms against the generals. Hamid began:

The country is passing through a serious and disturbing crisis, never before faced in the country. As a result of the happenings in the country, particularly those in East Pakistan, the people are grief-stricken, depressed and confused. It has also resulted in a lot of recrimination amongst the people.

The facts of the situation are very disheartening. But we should be men enough to face the stark realities. We must match up to the challenge of the time, otherwise we are doomed. What is required is to have a realistic reappraisal of the problems coolly and calmly. We need determination and resolution to overcome them.

When he said, 'The president did his best for a political solution. ..' the angry back-benchers burst into deafening chants of 'shan1e, shame' mixed liberally with certain expletives. (See APPENDIX 3).

At one point, Hamid broke down and withdrew from the auditorium. The general impression was that much of I-la.mid's show of shame`and grief was a put on. His actual mission was to gauge the tempers of the young officers (hence the change in invitation from lieutenant colonel and above, to all available officers), and, if favourable, to delay the transfer of power, or arrange it on more favourable terms like the return of Yahya back to the GHQ or his replacement by Hamid as the army chief Bhutto would consider neither; the rough house, during and after Hamid's address, proved to be the last straw to break the Yahya-Hamid back.

Surprisingly however, the fury and anguish of the raucous back- benchers, besides the personal misconduct and corrupt practices of senior officers, focussed more on the safety of the POWs and their speedy repatriation than on the loss of East Pakistan per se. The loss of the eastem half was accepted, more or less, as a fait accompli.

As we dispersed, Radio Pakistan announced the news that Yahya had resigned and Mr Bhutto had taken over as the CMLA, president, and the supreme commander. Curiouser and curiouser-a civilian and a democrat donning the hat of the CMLA! Later, in the evening, Bhutto appeared on TV to address the nation. He announced the immediate retirement from the army of some twenty senior armed forces officers including Yahya and Hamid. Lieutenant General Gul Hassan Khan was appointed the army chief in the same rank. Air Marshal Rahim Khan retained his job as the air chief and was placed a notch above the army chief in the order of precedence.

EPILOGUE

THUS the gory drama which started around midnight of 25 March 1971 from the Dhaka's Kurmitola cantonment, ended at Dhaka's Racecourse Greens at around 4 p.m. (EPST) on 20 December l97l. Pakistan forces surrendered to India's after a humiliating defeat. The military top brass in Rawalpindi-scripting, producing, and directing the endgame-#was summarily dismissed by Zulfikar Ali Bhu tto, pushing the tableau to its unintended but inevitable climax. Bhutto became the uncrowned monarch of the rump Pakistan. Together with most of his West Pakistani compatriots, his sense of fulfillment over the attainment of absolute state power appeared to have far exceeded the sorrow and grief over the loss of 56 per cent of the country's population.

The saddest and the most shocking part of the whole tragedy had been the deep and, arguably deliberate, silence of the West Pakistani civil society-of the general public and the political leadership- throughout its nine-month long course. Except for a few desultory voices of protest it might have been little more than muted acceptance of a cruel fait accompli. Even more than their sustained and discreetly quiescent support of the military action against the East Pakistanis, their West Pakistani 'fellow countrymen' had readily come forward to contest the mock by-elections in October 1971 to fill in the national assembly seats vacated by the Awami League MNAS, who had fled to India to save their lives. Each and every party, including the largest, the Pakistan People's Party, the minusculc but relatively liberal Tehrik- i-Istiqlal of Asghar Khan, the reputedly principled Ja1na'at-i-Islami, the various Muslim Leagues etc., unashamedly staked their claims to the empty national assembly seats in East Pakistan, where they had not won a single seat in the general elections.

Thus, while the military junta cannot be forgiven for its unwarranted use of brute force against the East Pakistani civilians, the West Pakistan-based civilian leadership, the high judiciary-in truth the civil society as a whole-cannot get away with their own share of blame and shame. Their sins of omission, in the final tally, would almost evenly balance the military's sins of commission.

A vociferous, courageous and responsible civil society in West Pakistan could have acted as a strong deterrent against military action in East Pakistan and could have at least been the force behind reducing its intensity, even if unable to bring it to a complete halt. A firm and unanimously orchestrated boycott of the by-elections by all the West Pakistani parties could have at least served as a vote of no confidence in the administration's policies which were based on political vendetta and military vandalism against East Pakistan.

However, the elections were held as scheduled and candidates elected unopposed according to plan. Thus, what might have been the administration's last chance to save Pakistan politically was criminally thrown away through sheer negligence and overweening arrogance. The Calcutta-based government-in-exile of Bangladesh was reportedly getting quite restive about India's gradually unfolding plan to break up Pakistan in the garb of helping to create an independent Bangladesh. The deepening operational involvement of the Indian Army tended to transform an unconventional guerrilla war of national liberation into a set-piece India-Pakistan war. The Muktis, instead of being on the forefront, were reduced to the status of auxiliaries under the overall command of the Indian Army. The deeper the Indian military involvement got in the Bengali Muslim's freedom struggle, the greater became the threat to its indigenous patriotic movement and revolutionary construct. There had, indeed, been some positive overtures to Islamabad from Calcutta via Washington, for the resumption of a political process--on two conditions only. First, an immediate halt to military operation and, second, the unconditional release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Yahya's curt and snappy response, in each case, was 'Nothing doing'.

The military operations, it was argued, must go on, until the attainment of the military objective. Exactly what the military objective might have been, hardly anybody cared to define; whether it was to restore the confidence of the Bengalis as Pakistani citizens and lure the defectors back home, or to defeat the Indians militarily. It seemed to be both, but without a planned strategy-national or operational- with misconceived coordinates. As regards Mujib, the administration

had found him guilty of high treason and he would be punished for that. In fact, the administration could not have been 'kinder' in providing him not only the opportunity to defend himself but also the services of one of the country's leading legal practitioners, A.K. Brohi, at the government's expense.

October 1971 was Islamabad's last chance to protect the oneness of the country, even in a loose confederal framework. Nothing would, however, persuade Yahya and his politico»military coterie, to make a mid-course correction, call a halt to the drifting military operation, and invoke the political option. By October, the military operation had created a compelling environment for a wider conflict with India, already 'poised for an invasion of East Pakistan at a time of its own choosing.

Early in the third week of November, the Indian invasion was launched at lightning speed, to make the overextended Pakistani forces reel back in sheer disorder. Pakistan's regular formations-division and brigades-broke up and withdrew into fortresses for a last ditch battle. Rather than engage Pakistan's fortress defences, however, the advancing Indians chose to bypass them. The high command in West Pakistan, instead of treating lndia's naked invasion of East Pakistan on 2l/22 November as a war on Pakistan, chose to watch and wait, almost like unconcerned spectators. They would not approach the United Nations and the world community, fearing pressure for a political settlement, and the unconditional release of Mujib which Yahya and his immediate coterie would not hear of.

By 3 December, when Yahya ordered his war machine in West Pakistan into action, East Pakistan had all but fallen to the Indians closing in on Dhaka from all directions. Even the military response from West Pakistan was little more than an array of scattered actions, without a set and focussed objective. lt looked more like a mock showdown than a serious effort to save East Pakistan. The high command had all but accepted the loss of East Pakistan as a military fait accompli. From that viewpoint, no matter how cynical, one might even call Yahya an 'outstanding strategist', for giving the post-1971 Pakistan the bulk of its armed forces, practically in one piece, and with minimum war losses.

Arguably, two parts of a country~physically, culturally and linguistically as far apart and divergent as East and West Pakistan- could not have coexisted in harmony for long. Equally arguably, however, the two had co-existed fairly well, if not ideally, for as long as twenty-four years, despite their foundational divergences and contradictions. Furthermore, the Bengalis, together with the Muslims of the Hindu majority provinces, had had a far more active role to play in the Pakistan movement than those of the Muslim majority provinces of north-westem India. But for their unflinching commitment to the

idea of Pakistan and a all out political activism for its attainment, the demand for Pakistan would have lost much of its legitimacy and strength, for want of support from the so-called Muslim India as an organic whole.

The right and wrong of the demand for a Muslim homeland, however, is best left to history. What can be said is that even if the separation of the two wings was absolutely inevitable, the rationale for the intensity of the military action and of its wanton and mindless continuation, remains highly questionable. The general elections of December 1970 offered both the opportunity to live as one nation and the option to part in peace under a constitutional arrangement. The use of force-even though limited-after the consummation of the electoral process, was nothing less than a sinful act of bad faith committed by the military with the support of the civilian bureaucracy and much of the political leadership. The break-up of Pakistan, more than an act of fate, had been the consequence of a premeditated- insouciant, if you will, political mischief and machination.

As for the self-imposed war with India, it was easily a quartermaster general's nightmare and a chief of the general staffs bete noire. Logistically, QMG's support to two such widely distant zones as East and West Pakistan-with over a thousand miles of enemy territory in between-had been as difficult as carrying the war to the desired end operationally, in an environment of internal armed resistance and cross- border raids from India. There had been little appreciation, however, at either of the two headquaxters~HQ CMLA and GHQ-of the rapidly deteriorating situation on the ground. While Niazi would still brag about establishing his security zone-'cordon sanitaire'-some tive miles across the international border to protect his rail and road network, those at the GHQ and HQ CMLA relaxed in their armchairs, hoping for a final victory as a gilt from God~without even praying for it like good men of faith.

What happened on 16 December, therefore, was the inevitable consequence of gross human negligence, misconduct and mismanagement inviting Divine wrath. If anything like poetic justice exists, it did intervene to make a grim example of the principal players--Yahya, Hamid, Bhutto, Gul Hassan, etc. in Pakistan, Indira Gandhi and Mujib in India and Bangladesh respectively. Alter his dismissal from the army in disgrace, Yahya was put under house arrest, became paralysed, and died after a prolonged illness. When I last saw him at his brother Agha Mohammad Ali's house in Lahore,

he lay in bed completely immobilized. His eyes were wide open, staring blankly into space, hardly recognizing me. He died early in August 1979.

Hamid outlived Yahya by a number of years and died at his Lahore home, unsung and unmourned.

Indira Gandhi suffered her worst electoral defeat in 1977, in the aitennath of her draconian rule under the national emergency she had imposed in 1975. She staged a dramatic comeback in 1979, launched the infamous 'Blue Star' operation in June 1984 against the Sikh militants holed up inside the Golden Temple, Amritsar, and incurred the wrath of the Sikh community. She was assassinated by her personal security guard, a Sikh, in her own official residence barely four months later, on 31 October 1984.

Gul Hassan, promoted as commander-in-chief of the Pakistan Army on 21 December 1971 by President Bhutto, was summarily retired on 2 March 1972. Disfigured by a rash of leukoderrna, he died in 1997 at the CMH, Rawalpindi after a long bout with cancer. Mujib was gunned down by his own people in a coup in August 1975 and his politics died with him. '

Like juridical justice, poetic justice too is blind, even inimically selective, in identifying and visiting upon its transgressors. Quite a few of those in Pakistan-sharing with Yahya his deadly sins of omission and commission as a part of his team»would not only escape the drag-net of poetic justice, but also flourish in high public offices in the rump Pakistan. They have been named and identified in the text, too often and in detail, to warrant a repetition. Let it be between them and -their Creator to decide what and where they might have erred or failed to rise to the dictates of their own conscience to do their duty to their country and the nation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Chronology of Events through the Critical Period

(February 1969-January 1972)

1 969 22 February	Afier tive months of open revolt against his regime Ayub announces that he will not stand for re-election as president. He acknowledges that the 'people want direct elections on the basis of adult franchise'.
23 February	Bhutto given a hero's welcome in Dhaka.
26 February	A round table conference between Ayub, Bhutto, and Bhashani, Bhashani stays away.
5 March	The 'second phase' of revolt against Ayub begins when 10,000 workers in Karachi go on strike.
8 March	Ayub Kha.n's supporters from the Hazara district attack lefi-wing demonstrators in Rawalpindi.
ll March	Sheikh Mujib arrives in Rawalpindi to attend the round table conference. He says he will not compromise on the six-points.
12 March	Air Marshal Asghar Khan warns that 'the imposition of Martial Law will only benefit the enemies of Pakistani
13 March	Ayub announces acceptance of the principle of parliamentary fomt of government and direct adult franchise, He refuses to restore d1e four provinces in West Pakistan, or to grant autonomy to East Pakistan.
15 March	More than a million workers throughout Pakistan go on strike; factory workers were joined by doctors, lawyers, technicians, teachers, postmen, and others. Bhashani attacked in a train in West Pakistan.
17 March	General strike in East Pakistan in protest against the attack on Bhashani. Government confirms reports that 'ships loaded with troops, tanks, and armaments had sailed for East Pakistan.
19 March	Official sources begin giving out reports of 'people's courts' and 'instant executions' of 'wrongdoers' in East Pakistan.
21 March	Bhutto accuses Ayub of attempting to engineer a coup.
25 March	Ayub Khan resigns; Yahya Khan appointed martial law administrator; strikes, marches, public meetings, and political activity banned.
27 March	Asghar Khan is refused permission to call a political convention.
30 March	Bliashani proposes a 'national government`widespread defiance of martial law reported from East Pakistan; thirty strikers arrested in Dhaka,

31 March	All-India Radio wrongly announces Bhashani‘s arrest.
l April	Troops shoot and kill leaders of miners on strike at a coalfield near Quetta
4 April	Ayub Khan’s Constitution partially restored, but ‘fundamental rights’ remain suspended,
s April	Ayub Khan’s Constitution partially restored, but ‘fundamental rights’ remain suspended,
10 April	Yahya says task of restoring democracy ‘should not take years, but it could not be accomplished in days‘.
7 May	Kosygin tums down Mrs Gandhi’s appeal to stop the supply of Soviet arms to Pakistan.
23 May	Bhutto calls for Pakistan’s immediate withdrawal from SEATO, CENTO, and other mutual defence pacts with the United States,
30 May	Kosygin arrives in Islamabad for talks with Yahya.
23 June	Pakistan Democratic Party formed in Dhaka.
4 July	Pakistan and India sign agreement to end Rann of Kutch dispute.
17 July	US ‘spy base’ near Peshawar closed down. Asghar Khan demands inquiry into the ‘conduct of Field Marshal Ayub Khan‘,
28 July	Shamsuddoha, editor of Interwing, sentenced by military court to a year’s rigorous imprisonment ‘for criticising the continuation of a Martial Law Administration’. Yahya Khan says in a broadcast that the press in Pakistan was free and that he will ‘always welcome healthy and constructive criticism
30 July	Martial law Regulation No. 51 bans publication of ‘any statement which is offensive to the religion of Islam or which is disrespectful to Quaid-i-Azam (Mr Jinnah) or which is calculated to have a prejudicial effect on the integnty of Pakistani
5 August	Yahya Khan appoints a civilian cabinet of seven.
8 August	Mujib says in Karachi that he wants to ‘start afresh on the basis of the Lahore Resolutioni He denies deviating from ‘the path of Islam or the Pakistan ideology’.
29 August	The ‘silk route’ between China and Pakistan is re-opened for trade.
24 September	Yahya Kha.n walks out of the Islamic summit at Rabat in protest against the seating of an Indian delegation. Bhutto accuses the bureaucracy of trying to sabotage the plan to hold elections.
3 October	After a week of student unrest in Dhaka, Yahya orders the release of four students who had been arrested on charges of trying to organize meetings.
Z6 October	Sheikh Mujibur Raiunan arrives in London. The British govemment sent an official car for him and allowed him the use of the VIP lounge at Heathrow airport.
2 November	6 killed and 101 injured in Bengali~Bihari riots in Dhaka; Mujib says election must be held within six months.
19 November	Atter three months of strikes in most industrial centres in Pa.kistan, the industrialists offer ‘partnership with labour’. Nur Khan, govemor of West Pakistan, announces steps ‘to ensure that workers do not take out unlawful processions or hold illegal meetings at public places’.

28 November	Yahya Khan announces that elections will be held on 5 October 1970; West Pakistan to be broken into four provinces; representation to be on the basis of one man-one vote; assembly to settle issue of 'regional autonomy'.
1970	
1 January	The Industrial Advisory Council meeting in Dhaka recommends that the fourth Five-Year Plan be deferred until l972-3. The council noted a 53 per cent shortfall in investment and growth targets for East Pakistan under the Third Plan.
6 January	Bhashani calls for an 'Islamic Cultural Revolution' to establish 'the rule of the peasants and labourers'. He appeals to Yahya to settle the issue of 'regional autonomy' before the elections.
ll January	Mujib, speaking at a rally in Dhaka, asks Yahya not to grant autonomy to East Pakistan before the election; rejects electoral alliance with other pro-autonomy parties in East Pakistan.
8 February	The East Pakistan Provincial Islamic Conference held in Dhaka.
7 March	Mujib says he will launch a 'movement` after the elections to achieve 'autonomy'.
28 March	Yahya rejects demands to defer the fourth Five-Year Plan; defines basic principles of future Constitution; says 'uncompromising positions adopted by certain political parties will have to be changed.
30 March	The Legal Framework Order (provisional Constitution) published.
June	ll3 ulema (men of Islamic learning) issue a fatwa (religious decree) denouncing socialism as 'a great evil and danger for Pakistan.
21 June	Yahya arrives in Moscow for talks with Kosygin.
23 June	Awami League manifesto published.
l July	One Unit in West Pakistan dissolved; the provinces of the Punjab, Sindh, North-West Frontier, and Balochistan restored.
2 August	Floods in East Pakistan cover 15,000 square miles, affecting 10 million people; Yahya tlies to Dhaka and announces that elections to be postponed to 7th December.
20 September	Bhutto claims that a majority of the political prisoners in the country are his party workers.
21 September	Mujib says the election will be 'virtually a referendum on the six-points plan for autonomy(
24 September	Mujib accuses 'bureaucracy and vested interest' of trying to hinder the transfer of power to the representatives of the people.
8 October	India protests against the United States decision to resume the supply of arms to Pakistan.
22 October	Yahya Khan, speaking in the UN General Assembly, says 'people's mandate is already taking shape' in Pakistan.
l November	A van ploughs into a line of dignitaries at Karachi airport, killing the deputy foreign minister of Poland and three other people.
ll November	A cyclone and tidal wave hit the Ganges Delta in East Pakistan, killing 2,000,000. It takes Yahya a week to declare the Delta a 'major calamity area'.

14 November	Yahya Khan retums after a visit to Beijing with more promises of Chinese aid.
23 November	Bhashani calls for an 'independent East Pakistan. Mujib offers 'a million more lives' to achieve autonomy.
7 December	The counrry's first general election since independence held in Pakistan; Mujib's Awami League captures 160 of 162 seats in East Pakistan; Bhutto's Pakistan People`s Party captures 81 of 138 seats in West Pakistan. In terms of votes cast, the Awami League victory is less impressive. Only 39.8 per cent of the East Pakistan electorate voted for Mujib's candidates. (Polling in the nine cyclone affected constituencies to be held on 17 January 1971).
14 December	Professor Ghulam Azam, leader ofthe East Pakistan Jama'at-i-Islami, says in Lahore that the people of West Pakistan should support Sheikh Mujibur Rahman 'who has never raised the slogan of secession and would never take any such step'. Bhutto appoints a 'commission' of his party to prepare a draft Constitution. Mujib, replying to a telegram of congratulations from Yahya, says 'only a Constitution based on six-point formula can ensure justice between region and region and man and man'.
17 December	Polling held to elect provincial assemblies.
20 December	Syed Najiullah, a reporter of the Pakistan Observer, and Shamsuddoha, arrested.
21 December	Tajuddin Ahmed, general secretary of the Awami League, denies Bhutto's claim that 'neither the Constitution could be framed nor a Central Government could be fonned without active co-operation of the Pakistan People's Party'.
21 December	Bhutto repeats, in Lahore, that any Constitution framed, or government formed, 'by ignoring the Peoples' Party will fail'. He proposes 'a grand coalition' between the Awami Leagnie and the Pakistan People's Party.
22 December	Ratique Ahmed, an Awami League mt 'ber of the East Pakistan Assembly, assassinated at Pabna.
23 December	Maulvi Farid Ahmed, vice-president of the Pakistan Democratic Party, says that Bhutto`s pronouncements 'could tum the situation into an East-West confrontationi
25 December	Bhutto again says that his party 'could not be deprived of sharing power in the Government'.
1971	
3 January	At a public ceremony watched by a million people in Dhaka, Mujib administers an oath of allegiance to his party MPs ensuring that they adhere to the Awami League's six points. The ceremony is attended by the diplomatic corps.
14 January	After talks with Mujib in Dhaka, Yahya calls him the 'Future Prime Minister of Pakistani It is rumoured that Mujib has promised not to cut the army's budget.

25 January	Indian airliner 'hijacked' to Lahore where, after letting the passengers leave, the culprits blow it up on 27 January. India uses the incident to ban overtlights by Pakistani airplanes between East and West Pakistan.
15 February	Yahya announces that the National Assembly would meet in Dhaka on 3 March.
15 February	Bhutto says in Peshawar that he and the Pakistan People`s Party would not attend the assembly session on the date announced by the president. _ Shaikh Abdullah, the Kashmiri leader, in a letter published in the Indian Express accuses Hashim, the principal hijacker of the Indian airliner on 30 January, of being an Indian agent. He discloses that the 'plot' to hiiack the aircraft was known to the Indian authorities and that the incident was deliberately engineered as a pretext for baning Pakistani overflights.
21 February	Yahya Khan dissolves his civilian cabinet 'in view of the political situation obtaining in the country',
28 February	Bhutto demands the postponement of the national assembly and calls for a general strike 'from Khyber to Karachi'.
1 March	Yahya postpones the national assembly session sine die. This, he says is 'to give more time to political leaders of East and West Pakistan to arrive at a reasonable understanding on the issue of Constitution making'. Dhaka paralysed by strike; curfew imposed, police fire on mob, killing one.
3 March	Eight Muslims killed in communal riots in the Indian city of Aligarh. Mujib rejects Yahya's invitation to an all-party conference to resolve constitutional problems; says the postponement of the Assembly was at the behest of 'vested interests and bureaucratic lackeys' (meaning Bhutto), and an 'intolerable insult to the people`; riots continue throughout East Pakistan, directed against West Pakistani civilians and Bihari Muslims.
5 March	Mujib denies the All-India Radio report that he had asked the United States to put pressure on Yahya to stop 'repression' in East Pakistan; he calls the report 'mischievous and a iigment of the imagination'.
6 March	Yahya meets Bhutto and announces that the national assembly will meet on 25 March; Bhutto agrees to attend; Lieutenant General Tikka Khan appointed governor of East Pakistan; Mujib expected to declare independence at a rally the following day.
7 March	At a rally in Dhaka, Mujib announces four conditions for attending the assembly; immediate transfer of power; withdrawal of martial law; return of troops to the barracks; inquiry into the conduct of troops.
8 March	Mujib's non-cooperation movement in full swing; government offices closed down; no taxes to be paid.
9 March	Foreign governments begin evacuation of their nationals from East Pakistan. Bhashani tells a rally in Dhaka that 'no power on earth can stop the march of the Bengalis towards freedom and independence.

14 March	Bhutto says 'power in East Pakistan should be transferred to majority party there and in West Pakistan to majority party here'.
14 March	Yahya arrives in Dhaka for talks with Mujib. Bhutto says in Karachi, that the Awami League and the Pakistan People's Party should share power in the central government while controlling their own regions. 'Only such an arrangement will ensure the unity of Pakistan'.
16 March	Yahya and Mujib meet in Dhaka for two and a half hours.
16 March	Chittagong dockers, on orders from Mujib, refuse to unload MS Swat carrying Chinese arms.
18 March	Deadlock reported in Yahya-Mujib talks. Mujib rejects commission of inquiry into army shootings.
19 March	Mujib says he is hopeful that a settlement would be reached.
20 March	After another meeting with Yahya, Mujib says 'we are progressing in our discussions'.
21 March	Bhutto arrives in Dhaka with twelve of his party 'advisers'.
22 March	Dhaka Radio respons that 'President Yahya and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman have reached a compromise formula to end the country's political crisis'. In a broadcast to the nation, Yahya says: 'I have no doubt that we shall succeed in resolving the current political crisis'. Bhutto joins talks in Dhaka. National Assembly session again postponed 'in consultation with leaders of political parties with a view to facilitating the process of enlarging the area of agreement'.
23 March	Republic Day in Pakistan; Pakistan national flag hauled down from buildings in Dhaka, the new Bangladesh flag flies over hundreds of houses including Mujib's, schools, and many govemment offices. The Awami League calls it 'Resistance Day' and Bhashani dubs it 'Independence Day'.
24 March	On instnrctions from Bhutto in Dhaka, the Pakistan People's Party in the Punjab launches a non-cooperation movement. In Lahore, the party says it will 'never forgive t.he present regime', if power was transferred to Mujib. The PPP chief in Lahore says in future he would issue 'day to day orders to the administration from his residence The 'Peoples Guard'-a militia raised by Bhutto-announces that it would start a week-long 'show of force'. In Chittagong, troops attempting to unload arms from a ship were trapped when local people erected barricades at the dock gates. Final meeting of advisers held in Dhaka. Bhutto says in Dhaka that it would be better if he and Mujib entered into direct talks. Other West Pakistani politicians retum to Karachi and report that the talks had ended in a 'hopeless mess'.
25 March	Yahya flies back to Karachi. Mujib accuses the amry of 'atrocities and the killing of unarmed people'; asks the people to prepare for the 'supreme sacrilice'; issues directives to foreign companies to negotiate all export deals through two East Bengal banks-the Eastern Banking Company and the Eastern Mercantile Bank; foreign posts and telegraph agencies ordered

26 March	to route communications through Manila and London. East Bengal Regiment, East Pakistan Rifles, the armed reserve police, and the civil police pledge support for the Awami League, Bhutto says ‘what is sought for East Pakistan is beyond autonomyfit borders on sovereignty’. Army convoys move into Dhaka. Mujib arrested.
28 March	Yahya, in a broadcast from Karachi, calls Mujib a traitor, bans the Awami League, and says he has ordered the army to ‘fully restore the authority of the Govement’ in East Pakistan. Confused reports of heavy fighting from all parts of East Pakistan. Foreign correspondents expelled from Dhaka.
30 March	Indian parliament debates the civil war in Pakistan. Prime Minister Gandhi says Indian sympathies for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rise from the fact that he stands for ‘values cherished by India-democracy, secularism, and socialism‘. Tikka Khan says in Dhaka that ‘complete peace has been restored and life is returning to normal in East Pakistani Bhutto says, ‘Thanks to Allah, Pakistan is saved`.
31 March	India asks U Thant to intervene in East Pakistan civil war,
1 April	Indian parliament passes a resolution calling on other governments to put pressure on the Pakistan regime to stop ‘the systematic destruction of the people, which amounts to genocide`.
2 April	Twelve Punjabi civilians hacked to death in Jessore’s marketplace, watched and filmed by foreign correspondents, among them Nicholas Tomalin of We Times. President Podgomy of Russia, in a message to Yahya, asks the Pakistani president to ‘end the bloodshed and seek a political solution in the interest of peace in the region’.
12 April	Yahya receives message from Zhou Enlai promising support and accusing India of interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan.
14 April	India protests to Pakistan alleging that Pakistani troops had tired on Indian border villages.
15 April	India accuses Yahya‘s regime of ‘savage and medieval butchery’ in East Pakistan.
17 April	Bangladesh proclaimed at a ceremony at ‘Mujibnagaf-a small village on the Indian border.
18 April	Pakistan’s deputy high commissioner in Calcutta announces his defection to Bangladesh.
23 April	Pakistan asks India to close down its mission in Dhaka.
10 May	Radio Pakistan claims that the army has secured control of Chittagong,
12 May	Yahya Khan announces the beginning of ‘political talks’ with East Pakistan leader, Nurul Amin,
14 May	India reports refugees arriving at the rate of 100,000 a day. Total to date given as two million. Pakistan crisis debated in the British House of Commons.
15 May	Bhutto says, ‘now is the time to talk to the East Bengalis’ M.M. Ahmed, Yahya’s economic adviser, is given a cool reception in London.

21 May	Yahya asks all 'bona fide Pakistan citizens' to return to East Pa.kistan.
24 May	Tajuddin Ahmed, 'prime minister' of 'Bangladesh', says in Calcutta, 'We wanted to keep Pakistan together and I assure you there was no thought of secession until the army cracked down on us on 25 March'.
29 May	India asks all aid-giving countries to suspend aid to Pakistan. Refugee total reported as more than four million.
l June	First reports of cholera in refugee camps.
4 June	2500 reported dead from cholera.
5 June	Mrs Gandhi flies in to 'inspect cholera affected areas'.
7 June	The Awami League in Calcutta admits that Mujib has been arrested and is not in hiding 'somewhere in East Pakistani
9 June	Sir Alec Douglas-Hume, the British foreign secretary, says in the House of Commons that 'peace will not return to East Pakistan until civil government has been restored'.
14 June	Bhutto says the visit of a British parliamentary delegation is an 'insult to Pakistan`.
I5 June	Refugee total reported as 5,5 million.
I6 June	Peter Cargil of the World Bank arrives in Rawalpindi to tell Yahya that no more aid would be forthcoming until the end of the civil war in East Pakistan.
20 June	Refugee total reported as six million.
2l June	Swaran Singh, the Indian external affairs minister, holds talks with the British prime minister and foreign secretary in London. Aid Consortium meeting in Paris adjoumed without considering allocations to Pakistan.
24 June	Britain announces suspension of all aid to Pakistan. Uproar in Indian parliament over the continued shipment of US arms for Pakistan.
28 June	Yahya announces his plan for the transfer of power in 'about four months'.
7 July	France announces ban on the sale of arms to Pakistan.
I3 July	New York Times publishes extracts from the World Bank's confidential report on the situation in East Pakistan.
15 July	The US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee votes to halt military and other aid to Pakistan.
19 July	U That suggests the stationing of UN observers along the India-East Pakistan border to supervise the repatriation of refugees. India rejects the suggestion.
5 August	Fifteen East Pakistani diplomats in the US announce their decision to recognize Bangladesh. Yahya's White Paper on East Pakistan published.
9 August	Indo-Soviet Treaty of 'Fi-iendship, Peace, and Co-operation' signed in New Delhi,
ll August	Mujib put on trial in West Pakistan. Russia and India make a joint demand for 'urgent steps to be taken in East Pakistan for achievement of political solution'.
17 August	Pakistan proposes that a 'good offices committee' of the UN Security Council should visit both India and Pakistan. India says such a move by the UN would not be acceptable.

18 August	Ninety-four of the Awami League members of the national assembly cleared by Yahya.
31 August	Dr A.M. Malik, an elder Bengali statesman, appointed governor of East Pakistan. Bhutto calls the appointment an 'eyewash'.
5 September	Yahya announces 'general amnesty'.
13 September	Bhutto and Yahya meet in Islamabad. Bhutto reported to he pressing for the transfer of power to him.
14 September	Awami League in Calcutta agrees to from a 'consultative committee' that would include the National Awami Party and the Communist Party.
15 September	M.M. Ahmed, Yahya's economic adviser, stabbed in his office in Islamabad.
23 September	Bhutto threatens 'other means' to achieve democracy in Pakistan.
26 September	The National Awami Party of West Pakistan calls for the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
29 ' September	Mrs Gandhi and Kosygin, in a joint statement issued in Moscow, call for 'urgent measures towards a political solution of problems in East Bengal'.
5 October	Mahmud Ali, the Bengali leader of the Pakistan delegation to the UN General Assembly, accuses India of waging a 'clandestine war' against Pakistan.
9 October	Yahya Khan withdraws ban on political activity in the country but the Awami League remains proscribed.
12 October	Yahya Khan announces that the new Constitution draded by experts would be published on 25 December, the by-elections for the national assembly would be completed by 3 December, and the assembly would meet on 27 December, followed by the fondation of a civilian government. I
14 October	Abdul Monem Khan, a former govenor of East Pakistan, assassinated in Dhaka.
17 October	Iagiivan Ram, the Indian defence minister, says that if war comes, India 'would not withdraw from captured Pakistani cities'.
19 October	Mrs Gandhi rules out talks with Yahya Khan. 'What is there to discuss between India and Pakistan7` she asks.
29 October	Mrs Gandhi arrives in London at the start of her world tour.
5 November	A Pakistani delegation headed by Bhutto arrives in Beijing.
7 November	China promises Pakistan 'resolute support' but advises Bhutto to seek a political solution.
8 November	US revokes licences for the export of arms to Pakistan. On his return from Beijing, Bhutto says: 'We are now in full preparedness to maintain territorial integrity against foreign aggression.
10 November	Three Indian battalions, supported by tank and artillery, attack at Belonia in Noakhali district of East Pakistan.
12 November	Bhutto says he will not tolerate an East Pakistan-dominated government aiter the by-elections. 'We will topple it in 40 days,` he said. India accuses Pakistan of more intrusions into its territory.
l7 November	Edward Heath, Willy Brandt, and Richard Nixon send a joint appeal to Yahya urging him to embark on a 'political initiative

I8 November	Mrs Gandhi, in a letter to U Thant, says Pakistan was 'seriously preparing to launch a large-scale armed conflict with I.ndia'.
22 November	Indian troops cross into East Pakistan at several points along the international frontier. Pakistan declares a state of emergency. Yahya calls Bhutto and other Ieaders talks in Islamabad. General Niazi says in Dhaka that Indian troops had occupied 'three or four areas in East Pakistani
25 November	Yahya says that Indian military activity in East Pakistan is leading the two countries to the 'point of no return'.
3 December	Pakistan Air Force strike at Indian airfields. Indian and Pakistani land forces cross each other's borders in the Punjab, Rajasthan, and Kashmir.
4 December	The Security Council meets to consider ceasefire. The US president says in Washington that 'India bears the major responsibility for the war with Pakistan'.
6 December	After three Russian vetoes had blocked a ceaselire resolution, the Security Council agrees to transfer the question to the General Assembly. India recognizes Bangladesh.
7 December	The UN General Assembly passes a ceasefire resolution by 104 votes to eleven with ten abstentions.
8 December	India says it regards the General Assembly resolution as 'impracticable and unrealistic A spokesman for President Nixon says in Washington that the US had secured Yahya Khan's agreement for the grant of 'virtual autonomy' to Bangladesh and negotiations with the Awami League before the Indian offensive began. The US had kept Mrs Gandhi informed.
14 December	As Indian troops close in on Dhaka, Dr A.M. Malik, governor of East Pakistan, and his cabinet resigns,
I6 December	Surrender in Dhaka. Yahya says: 'We may lose a battle but final victory in the war of survival shall be ours. _.the armed forces will not cease their struggle until aggression is vacated and justice prevails'.
17 December	Yahya accepts ceasefire in the west.
20 December	Bhutto succeeds Yahya as president and chief martial law administrator.
21 December	Mujib moved out from prison to be put under house arrest.
1972	
7 January	Mujib flies to London on his way to Bangladesh. Yahya Khan put under house arrest.

APPENDIX 2

Transcript of Speech of General A.M. Yahya Khan

April 1970

Gentlemen,

I am very happy that I am back with you, I feel very much relieved that I am among the family. In fact these days my position is like a non-combatant soldier and I am dealing with problems which I never wanted to deal with, but what can I do? One fine morning I was told that I should take over the country. Everything was in chaos and I have to put it on some sound footing. First requirement was to finish the administrative corruption, because as long as we have got corrupt administration and officials, nothing can be put right, You all know the long list of 303 and I have dealt with this matter.

The second requirement is to put the country on healthy political lines and restore democracy. I am facing an uphill task, because some of our politicians are just agitators and they have very frankly told me that they are living through this agitation. They want political chaos because they thrive on such conditions, So whether we like it or do not like it the defence forces have to provide an umbrella to this nation for quite a long time or at least for some time, To control these politicians, I have issued the Legal Framework Order, Some of them very much criticise it but slowly and slowly they have now started speaking in favour of it, I must make it clear that I have got no desire to remain the president and if anybody tells you that there are not going to be any elections he is talking nonsense, I am bent upon holding fair elections and then I would like to be relieved as a sentry is relieved in the quarter guard.

You all know how a sentry is relieved. Because I am the sentry of this country, I want that I should be properly relieved by another sentry in peace and in a ceremonial manner as a sentry is relieved in the unit quarter guard. But if anybody thinks that he could relieve me through political chaos, pressure or other methods, he is very sadly mistaken. In that case, if I feel the situation has gone out of my hands and I am no more able to stand as sentry, I would like to hand over this country to another soldier who I feel can look after this country. I would not like to go into the details of what these politicians say. They tell me something and when they go and address public meetings they say something else. When I question them about this they say, ‘Sahib it is politics and in politics everything is fair‘. Others try to show that they are my men and some even dramatise that this telephone call was from the president. Others While talking to their own people say that president wanted to talk to them but they had no time to talk to the president.

Well, gentlemen, I have been dealing with these sorts of people but I assure you that I understand them and I will be able to deal with all of them. I also make it clear that there are a lot of Hindus in our country, I do not mean really Hindu but I mean those persons who are playing the game of the Hindus. You should be careful about these people because these persons say something but their actions are somewhat different. Gentlemen, I have not come here to do all the talking. In fact I came here to listen to what you people say. So tell me frankly as you feel about the whole situation.

APPENDIX 3

Transcript of Speech of General Abdul Hamid Khan 20 December 1971

1. The country is passing through a serious and disturbing crisis, never before faced in the country. As a result of the happenings in the country, particularly those in East Pakistan, the people are grief-stricken, depressed and confused. It has also resulted in a lot of recrimination amongst the people.
2. The facts of the situation are very disheartening. But we should be men enough to face the stark realities. We must match up to the challenge of the time, otherwise we are doomed. What is required is to have a realistic reappraisal of the problems coolly and calmly. We need determination and resolution to overcome them.
3. There are many factors which have contributed to the present crisis. There was political turmoil in the country which generated a lotiof hatred amongst the people of various regions. Parochial feelings and linguistic jealousies made things worst. The political turmoil in East Pakistan and the differences between East and West were exploited by the Indians. The Indians cashed in on this turnoil and division among the people.
4. The president tried his best for a political solution of the problem. When this failed and the administration was illegally taken over by the Awami Leaguers in defiance of Central Government, resulting in serious law and order problems, the president had to take military action on 25 March. This military action was hailed by everybody except the extremist elements of the Awami league. In the clearing operations undertaken by the armed forces against the rebels and anti-state elements after 25 March 1971 action in Dhaka, a number of refugees crossed over to India, This gave an opportunity to the Indian propagandists to raise hue and cry over this matter. The Indians also proclaimed to the world that they were involved in East Pakistan because of the refugee problems, But there were deeper reasons for the Indians to resort to aggression in East Pakistan. The refugee problem provided them a ready- made pretext.
5. The Indian plan to annex East Pakistan can be divided into four main categories: (1) they had been planning to get East Pakistan peacefully through political rnanoeuvring. This they wanted to achieve through extremist elements of the Awami League after their success in the elections; (2) if they could not annex Pakistan politically, they intended to create a military situation there and occupy it militarily; (3) another alternative was to create rebellion and insurgency in the rank and tile of East Bengal Regiment, East Pakistan Rifles and para military forces and make use of them in occupying the province; (4) yet another measure was to take advantage of Hindu population in the province which numbered about a crore.

6. After the rebellion, the Indians trained the rebels and launched them into East Pakistan for fighting, sabotage and disruption of communications. The Indians were in a great hurry to occupy the province. When the rebels failed, the Indians openly attacked our border outposts and invaded the province under various pretexts. The president never wanted war. He tried to defuse the situation. He asked the UN for help and appealed to the international community to stop India from naked aggression. The Indians refused while Pakistan accepted all the measures suggested internationally to defuse the problem. Conditions in East Pakistan started deteriorating in view of the overwhelming strength of the Indian armed forces. Our supply lines by air and sea were cut. The local population was not only uncooperative but hostile. The internal conditions were such that even if four more divisions would have been sent to East Pakistan, they would not have made much difference. The fall of East Pakistan became inevitable.
7. There were two choices before the government. If fighting had continued, our troops would have fallen into the hands of Mukti Bahini and butchered by them mercilessly. The other alternative was to surrender to the Indian army and retun home later, alive.
8. Our troops in East Pakistan fought in isolated garrisons without getting any help from abroad, The United Nations also did not intervene. Ultimately, the president had to agree to ceasefire negotiations with India. The negotiations were held at Dhaka between Commander, Easten Command and tI1e Indian forces. The following conditions were accepted by India as pan of the ceasefire negotiations/settlement:
   a. All troops in uniform will be treated under Geneva Convention and other international conventions.
   b. All civilians will be looked after and protected. `
   c. All those settled in East Pakistan will be given protection.

d. All elements who have been loyal to the government of the day will be safeguarded.

9. The strategy adopted in West Pakistan took into consideration the following aspects:
   a. Heavy loss of tanks in Shakargarh area.
   b. Attrition by Indian Air Force in Rajasthan area.
   c. Despatch by India of its air force squadrons previously being used in East Pakistan,
   d. Despatch of Indian troops from East Pakistan theatre to West Pakistan front,
10. In fact Pakistan was fighting both India and Russia. There was a continuous inflow of Russian arms and equipment to India. In these circumstances, Pakistan would have fought on against overwhelming odds and would have gone down. The second alternative was to accept the ceasefire offer by India. The ceasefire offer was accepted and the Americans also advised in its favour, Although Mrs Indira Gandhi had offered the ceasefire on West Pakistan front, she was sure that Pakistan would not accept it.
11. The hostilities have ceased, but the war on western front can flare up again.
12. The army will continue to remain the backbone of the country and shoulder the responsibility for ensuring a unified Pakistan. The army, therefore, had to remain firm like a rock to help the country overcome the present crisis. The army should equip and train itself to become a more cohesive force with or without foreign help. Whenever an opportunity arises, India will go all out to subjugate West Pakistan. The army should, therefore, prepare itself to meet this challenge.

APPENDIX 4

Transcript of Speech of Lieutenant General Gul Hassan Khan 28 December 1971

The nation and armed forces are faced with a great crisis. A crisis more serious than any faced by us ever before. We are bewildered, grief-stricken and possibly angered. There is biftemess and recrimination. At this time, if we are not men enough to face these realities then this country is doomed. We need to consider the present situation realistically, coolly, calmly and give it a determined thought. How can we do it? Are we brave enough to go about it?

Political turmoil in our country based on various factors prevented us from our defences. India cashed upon this situation. Theory of one Pakistan failed on 25 March this year. The military action was taken to restore order and together with this action refugees went over to India. This was all done by India under a very well-planned scheme. The master plan of the Indian Scheme was as under:

a. Dismember Pakistan through internal instability.
b. If that failed, get Pakistan through political means.
c. Failing that, achieve their objective militarily.

They carried out this plan meticulously. The present regime had ensured a peaceful transfer of power. Elections were held, constitution was being prepared and the government was moving according to its schedule towards this objective. But India went out in a big way to stop this restoration of civil government. They brought in their military might to impose their will on us.

President did not want this war. This war was not of our choosing. He always said, 'Wars don't solve problems? That is why he asked UN to intervene. We tried to tell the world about the Indian designs, Eventually the majority ofthe world realized as to what was the Indian game,

We were against heavy odds in East Pakistan. Indians had amassed 8 divisions around it. We sent our troops there, even more help to East Pakistan would not have helped. Indians attacked us with thousands of rebels, the so-called 'Mukti Bahini Force', Our force was fighting in pockets trying to stop the Indian forces to enter East Pakistan. Under these circumstances the fall of East Pakistan was inevitable.

The Indians had now two choices: '

a. A naval attack along with rebels who would have had a heroes' welcome.
b. To make sure that they establish a puppet government.

Would it have been better for our soldiers to become a victim of Mukti Bahini and be butchered by them or become POWs of the Indian army to he repatriated later under the Geneva Convention and some international agreement?

Forces in Eastern Command fought gallantly. We were in constant touch with them. They unfortunately could not get one place to fight but were fighting instead in isolated garrisons. We hoped for an international intevention by UN and by our friends, China and USA. But nothing was done immediately. In fact, we were asked by the US to hold another 36 hours. Governor of East Pakistan and General Niazi were sending frantic messages for a ceasefire. They negotiated the terms which were as under:

a. All troops will be treated under the Geneva Convention.

b. All the civilian government servants and citizens will be properly looked after.

c. All those who had settled in East Pakistan would he assured freedom.

d. All those elements who were loyal to Pakistan would be safe-guarded.

Fighting stopped and the Indians entered the city of Dhaka. However, later on, the situation got confused.

Govement had ensured that as many foreigners as possible were allowed into
Dhaka so that they could see for themselves, the conditions prevailing there. This was also to ensure the safety of the people left behind.

We can assure that all the amenities will be provided to the personnel let? in Dhaka. .. Coming to the western sector, we had near parity with Indian troops in this area though they had a little edge on us.

a. 1 Corps consisting of 3 Infantry Divisions and 3 Armoured Brigades was concentrated between the Ravi and the Chenab.

b. 1 Armoured Division and ll Division were located in area Ferozepur. They were to involve and commit on 1 Corps between the Ravi and Suflej with the support of Air,

c. 2 Corps, our striking forces with its elements and Air were to latuich attack.

d. 6 Armoured Division and 17 Division were available as reserve to stabilize the situation or for re~employment where needed.

e. Air force did a wonderful job and their achievements were tremendous as compared to their size. They were able to destroy more than 140 Indian planes in air and ground combat. This does not include the damage they inflicted on enemy planes and on the ground in their initial attacks.

f. In the Rahim Yar Khan area, our 18 Division was operating against the Indian‘s 11 Division. Both the sides had moving targets. However, the Indian air force was very active in this area. They hit us. They attacked trains. They attacked every moving target. They mauled our 18 Division very badly in this area. We received message from them that there was utter disaster.

g. To retrieve the position in this area we had to move another division in this area thus lowering the striking capability of our 2 Corps. We were not able to move 1 Armoured Division due to enemy air activity. We had to modify our strike plan.

h. In the Shakargarh salient, enemy 1 Corps came, as was anticipated by us. Orders were given to 2 Corps, as planned, to move. But next morning when we took account of Shakargarh salient we had to call off this move. We had lost nearly 100 tanks in this area and were now planning to bring in our 6 Armoured Division to operate in this area.

Then we came to know that Indians had 100 planes at Dum Dum airport. They had received another 100 tanks at Bombay. We were not fighting against India alone; in fact we were fighting both India and Russia. Indians were getting help throughout this period while we were looking forward towards our friends to come to our help.

The option for us was to fight and get destroyed completely or live to fight another day.

The Americans said, accept ceasefire and we will make up all your losses and give you help, China gave us help in material.

Iran and Turkey promised help and it came in trickles.

While Indians offered us a unilateral Ceasefire (CF) but they were hoping we will not accept it,

Unfortunately we have to accept defeat. We are not the first country to be defeated. This CF is temporary and we must be fully prepared for this fact. CF may continue for months. The war with India is inevitable.

We must remember one fact that the Army will continue to be the backbone of this country irrespective of the type or form of government. We have to work for a unified country and a unified Pakistan,

We have learn lessons, let us not forget them in a hurry. This army had to function as a rock on which this country rests. You have to see that this rock survives.

We have to give a deep thought to the strategic rethinking. We will have to function with or without foreign help.

India will attack us once again to achieve this aim of bringing about an Akhand Bharat.

We must accept and take on this bitterness of defeat. This is our hour of trial. We must take this bitter pill or otherwise we are doomed.

India would like to capitalize on our situation. We do not want them to resort to the other sources of black-mailing us. We have to see that those who are in captivity are treated well. If not, then we have to pressurize them in doing so. Because if we do not, they will feel that this is our sensitive point where it huns us most. l do not want them to have this feeling.

APPENDIX 5

Photocopy and Transcript of the Flash Message from Major General M.I. Karim, Commander 6 Armoured Division to the Chief of the General Staff, 18 December 1971

From: Maj. Gen, M.I. Karim, GOC 6 Armoured Division, personal for Lt. Gen. Gul Hassan Khan. All my formation commanders categorically state that they and their officers and men have lost complete faith in the present government and army leadership, They state that they and their troops will not take up arms against the people to protect the present regime. In case of resumption of hostilities will not fight under present military directive. To preserve integrity and cohesion of country and army absolutely essential immediate change be effected in regime and military leadership. Government must be handed over to leaders acceptable to the people. Events causing acute dissatisfaction among officers and men and situation fast deteriorating,

Message Ends

FLASH

PHOTO COPY OF MAJ. GEN. M.I. KARIM,
COMMANDOR ~~[illegible]~~ 6 ARMOUR DIV. TOPSEC
DATED: DECEMBER 18, 1971

from ~~[illegible]~~ gen M I KARIM GOC 6 ARMD DIV

~~for CGS from~~
personal for
~~for~~ lt gen GUL HASSAN KHAN ⊙ all my fmn
comds categorically state that they and
their offrs and men have lost complete
faith in present govt and army
ldrship ⊙ they state that they and their
tps will not take up arms against ~~present regime~~
~~the people to protect~~ ~~against~~
~~any peoples uprising~~
⊙ in case of resumption of hostilities
the army will not fight under present
mil dir ⊙ to preserve integrity and
cohesion of country and army absolutely
essential immediate change be effected
in regime and mil ldrship ⊙ govt
must be handed over to ldrs acceptable
to the people ⊙ ~~[illegible]~~ ~~present~~ events causing [illegible] dissatisfaction amongst
offrs and men and [illegible] fast deteriorating [illegible]

[illegible]

APPENDIX 6

Acts of Violence and Lawlessness after 25 March 1971 (Annexure to the White Paper of August 1970)

District	Date and Area	Incident
Chittagong	26-30 March 1971 Chittagong town	The town remained under control of rebel elements of East Bengal Regiment (EBR), East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) and Awami League (AL) volunteers, who went on the rampage looting, massacring, and setting fire to entire colonies in the main town as well as in outlying areas, Slaughter houses were set up, including one in the Chittagong office of AL, where men, women, and children were systematically massacred. In many cases blood was drained through syringes before bodies were dismembered (10,000 to 12,000 killed).
	27 March 1971 Usmania Glass Works.	West Pakistani st ff tortured and killed (17 killed).
	15 March 1971 Amin Jute Mills, Bibirhat	Managing partner and manager kidnapped and believed to be killed. A number of other employees missing, reported to have been taken hostages (casualties could not be ascertained).
	l9 April 1971 Isphani Jute Mills and adjoining areas.	Women and children brutally murdered. West Pakistani officers and workers missing/ kidnapped (about 000 killed).
	27-28 April 1971 Hatiz Jute Mills	Mill premises attacked and a number of employees killed. House of the owner set on fire. All inmates burnt alive except some minor children who escaped (about 150 believed to be killed).

	26-30 April 1971 Kamaphuli Paper and Rayon Mills, Chandra-ghona and adjoining areas.	Large-scale looting, arson, and killing. Women locked up in houses; rescued later, and narrated unmentionable stories of rape and brutalities (about 2000 killed).
	27-30 April 1971 Rangamati.	West Pakistanis all over Rangatnati rounded up, tortured, and massacred (about 500 killed).
Jessore	29-30 March 1971 Jhumjhumpur colony.	Entire population of Biharis subjected to general massacre by rebel EPR personnel. Women and children dragged towards Narail. About 400-500 women also kidnapped and sent to India by river route. Human skulls and other part of human bodies were found lying strewn all over the area (about 3000 killed, 2000 missing).
	29-30 March 1971 Ramnager colony.	People from Jhurnjhumpur Colony took shelter in this colony, which was also set on fire (over l50 killed, 448 in destitute camps).
	30 March 1971 Taraganj colony,	AL volunteers and rebel EPR personnel massacred entire colony. Very few survived. All houses destroyed (about 500 killed and 400 missing).
	30 March-5 April 1971 Hamidpur, Ambagan, Bachachar, and Puratan Kasba of Jessore town.	Most of the population of the area was wiped out. Houses were first looted and then destroyed (about 1000 killed/missing, 175 in hospital, and 172 in destitute camps).
	30 March-5 April 1971 Mobarakganj	Men, women, and children subjected to torture and killing; their houses looted and set on fire (over 200 killed, 10 in hospital, and 27 in destitute camps).
	30 March-5 April 1971 Kaliganj.	Several localities attacked, women raped and men and children killed. Large-scale looting and arson (about 300 killed and 132 in relief camps).
	30 March-10 April 1971 Kotchandpur.	Indiscriminate killing and arson. (About 200 killed, 5 injured, and 55 in relief camps).
	30 March 1971 Tastidanga	Sangram Parishad volunteers attacked a number of houses that were pre-marked; killed men and old women, and took away younger women (about 200 killed and 72 in relief camps).
	30 March- 1 0 April 1971 Narail,	Pathans were the main target of atrocities. They were rounded up from all over Narail and brutally done to death (60-70 Pathans including women and children massacred).

	25 March-4 April l97l Jhenidah sub-division.	AL volunteers attacked a number of houses that were looted and set on tire. Heavy loss of life and property (more than 250 killed, 50 missing, and 10 in hospital).
	Khulna 28-29 March 1971 Khulna town-Crescent Jute Mills, Khalispur and Star Jute Mills, Chandi Mahal,	AL para-military training camps established in Khulna. Organized murder and arson unleashed against so-called 'brokers' of West Pakistan. Houses destroyed and large-scale massacre carried out, Before being guillotined, victims were tortured. Innocent women and children were dragged on the road and killed. Survivors found swimming in the river were fished out, their stomachs were slit open, and then they were again pushed back in the river, which ran red with blood. Extensive damage to mill property. Some officers spared on paying ransom (about 5000 killed).
	28-29 March 1971 People's Jute Mill, Khalispur, Khulna,	EPR/Ansars/AL workers indulged in wanton massacre irrespective of their victims' age (467 killed).
	28-29 March l97l New Colony, Khalispur, Khulna.	Colony surrounded by about 10,000 AL workers. Rebel police also joined in. Firing continued for over six hours (about 300 killed).
	30 April 1971 Satkhira Sub-Division, Khulna,	West Pakistani SDO captured and taken prisoner. The area was subjected to mass killing, atrocities, and large-scale looting of the town (about 1000 killed).
Kushtia	29 March-10 April 1971 Kushtia town.	Rebel EPR/Mujahids/local miscreants resorted to indiscriminate firing on Biharis and West Pakistani forces. Reign of terror continued for 13 days (1000 to 1500 killed).
	26 March-1 April 1971 Chuadanga, Kushtia.	Biharis and West Pakistanis rounded up and killed. Women subjected to inhuman treatment. West Pakistani SDO mercilessly tortured and his pregnant wife beaten (about 500 killed and 100 missing).
	23 April 1971 Zafar Kandi, Kushtia.	Bihari colonies attacked by rebel EPR/local miscreants. After large-scale looting of property, the colony was set on fire. No survivors. Women raped and later killed. Their dead bodies were found with breasts cut and wombs slit open (about 500 killed).
	Bogra 30 March-23 April 1971 Bogra town	Jail broken open by AL volunteers and prisoners let loose to commit acts of violence and plunder. 7000 men, women, and children huddled into the jail premises which was to be blown up by

		dynamite but timely arrival of the army rescued them. Eyewitnesses narrated stories of mass murders, rape, and arson (about 2000 reported killed).
	26 March»2 April 1971 Naogaon/Santahar.	AL miscreants set up roadblocks to prevent movement of Biharis. Banks looted. Young women raped and paraded naked before being shot dead. Dead bodies strewn all over the town. Many burnt alive. Some nailed and shot dead. Surviving injured reported that mothers were made to drink the blood of their own children. Almost the whole of Bihari population wiped out (about l5,000 killed).
Pabna	23 March-10 April l97l Pabna town.	Awami League reign of terror continued for two weeks until the town was secured by the army (about 200 killed).
	23 March-10 April 1971 Sirajganj.	Miscreants lodged 350 men, women and, children in a building and then set it on fire (all inmates trapped and killed).
	10 April 1971 Paksey,	Railway colony residents deceived under the pretext of forming peace committee, and later confined in a high school building and burnt alive (about 2000 killed),
Rangpur	23-31 March 1971 Saidpur (Rangpur).	Hundreds of houses burnt along with their inmates (more than 100 people killed).
	23 March-1 April 1971 Nilphamari.	More than half the refugee population of 5000 was brutally massacred (about 700 killed).
	Dinajpur ZS March-1 Aprill971 Dinajpur town	Atrocities began with the revolt of EBR, followed by mass killings. Men, women, and children slaughtered. Stray survivors consisted mainly of old women and children, Heads of victims were hung on treetops. About 400 girls abducted to India (about 5000 killed).
	28 March-13 April 1971 Thakurgaon	EER revolted and most of Bihari population wiped out. Young girls abducted. Women were raped and those pregnant bayoneted. Stillborn babies tom to pieces. Corpses dragged naked along the streets (about 3000 killed).
	Parbatipur, Ponchagarh, Chaur Kai, Phulbari, and Hilli.	Railway colonies were the main target of rebel EPR and Awami League volunteers. Grenades, light machine guns, and small arms were used to terrorize the residents before unleashing orgy of rape and murder (survivors estimate more than 5000 victims).

Rajshahi	28 March-16 April 1971 Rajshahi town.	Police and EPR revolted. Indian infiltrators also joined in and started killing indiscriminately. Army unit secured the town on 16 April 1971, Massacres also reported from Natore and Sarda (about 2000 killed).
	27 March~l8 April 1971 Nawabganj.	Rebel EPR elements, supported by Indian infiltrators, broke open Nawabganj jail, released prisoners, and incited them to acts of violence and arson. An accounts clerk buried up to waist for refusing to accept 'Bangla Desh' and killed by Iathies (total deaths estimated at about 1000).
Comilla	Marcl1~April 14, 1971 Brahmanbaria.	Bihari men, women and children in Brahmanbaria rounded up and lodged in jail before being killed by automatic tire under orders of rebel company commander of EBR on 13 April 1971 (about 500 killed).
Mymensingh	27 March 1971- Mymensingh Cantonment.	EBR/EPR revolted and killed their West Pakistani colleagues, including officers and men resting forthe night in their residential quarters and barracks.
	16-l7 April 1971 Shankipara and other colonies.	Violent mobs, armed with rifles, swords, spears, daggers, and ramdaas, attacked and killed the bulk of the male residents of Shankipara and nine other colonies in and around Mymensingh town. About 5000 reported killed. Women collected in a mosque and a school building, later rescued by the army when the town was secured on 21 April 1971.

APPENDIX 7

Transcript of Maj or General M.I. Karim's Letter to General Gul Hassan Khan, C-in-C Pakistan Army, dated 2 February 1972

As desired by you, I am enclosing herewith a transcript of the notes I made soon after the events of 18th and l9th, more or less in the sequence in which they occurred, Apart from correcting a few grammatical mistakes, I have made NO alterations to what had been recorded then.

My own impressions, as communicated to you verbally, were, and I hold the same view even now, that the events of the l6th and 17th December had so touched the sentimental chord of the people at large and the military personnel in particular that frustration, despondency and utter disgust at the government's handling of the whole situation led to tl1e emotional upsurge which in the case of certain individuals, found expression in their unusual behaviour. As you will see from my letter of l8th December addressed to you as CGS (copy attached), all these were reilected.

I would like to bring to your notice, as I verbally submitted to the CGS (yourself) in one of my visits to GHQ soon alter the occurrence, I was in complete control, except for a few minutes on the morning of l9th December when (Brigadier) F.B. Ali, in his misguided judgement, wanted to spare me the embarrassment (because I was an East Pakistani) of having to send the signal to GHQ (mentioned in the report on the sequence of events). I do not have the signal now, but in substance it was more or less the same as the contents of the letter, except that it stated categorically that this formation would disobey orders to shoot own civilians if called upon to quell civilian riots. Incidentally when the signal was shown to General R.D. Sharnim Commander 17 Division (who had himself become very emotional) who said that he agreed l00%. My objections to sending the signal were firstly; as disciplined people, we could NOT question the orders of the Goverment and moreover we had NOT been called upon to aid Civil Power; so why jump the gun? and secondly; the signal would pass through signal channels where other personnel would see it and therefore it would go around and thus damage the reputation of the Division, Therefore, being the Commander in Charge, the responsibility is mine and it would be wrong to put the blame on other juniors who acted NOT independently but on orders, I had to show patience and overlook certain laxity in discipline because I felt that any hasty action would precipitate a crisis in which tho Division's good name, nay the army`s, might be tarnished. General Bashir‘s order to F.B. Ali to report to the Corps HQ very nearly brought on a crisis therefore I had to move deliberately and cautiously to diffuse the situation.

You also desired that I should give you my views on the conduct of the persons involved:

a. Brigadier F.B. Ali

He was posted as my C Arty (Commander Artillery) only a day or two before the War. So I had NOT known him before but during the period I found him highly intelligent and a very able gunner, His colleagues and juniors seem to hold him in high esteem for his intellectual prowess and therefore came under his influence when he eloquently recounted the failure of the regime. However, he did not hatch any premeditated plots but thought of taking the law in his own hands on a sudden impulse and once I pointed out to him the seriousness and told him that as GOC I was the best person to handle the situation he immediately saw the point and thereafter took all orders from me.

b. Col. Alim Afridi

He was Col, G.S. (Colonel, General Staff) to Major General Mohammad Bashir Khan (designated Commander Army Reserve North), so I had very little to do with him. From what I saw of him I would say that he came under the influence of Brigadier F,B. Ali and went to Pindi to see tl1e CGS as Bashir's emissary. He certainly did not appear to me to be a conspiratorial type.

c. Col. Agha Javed Iqbal

My Col. Staff-a very honest, straightforward and competent officer-who is a disciplined soldier and he merely kept me informed of the tensions building up, though he had his sympathies with them. His fear was mainly for the good name of the division and therefore he urged me to send the signal. He spoke to the CGS and when told to go over and explain the position, took my letter and that of General Sharnim to CGS.

d. Brigadier I.M.D. Shah

I am afraid I have NOT been able to fathom his motives. The story of his being put under arrest over the telephone, was a figment of his imagination because no one from Division HQ made any such calls. Later, when I asked him to explain his conduct, he could NOT do so. He ordered his COs to come over to the Division HQ and also ordered the deployment of 9FF platoon near tl1e Division HQ.

My reading is that he thought F.B, Ali had taken over and so was playing up to him but when he realised that it was NOT so, he tried to get out of the situation by inventing that story and making it out as if he was concerned about my safety!

e. Lt. Cul. Khurshid (0.C. Z4 Sig. Bn-Officer Commanding Signals Battalion)

He is emotional and certainly came under Ali's spell but when I confronted him and asked him if the deployment was meant to intimidate me, he immediately assured me of his personal loyalty and on my orders controlled the telephone exchange. A very tine officer who is highly religious and extremely devoted to his profession.

The above is my honest assessment. The whole episode was so amateurish that one should not read too much into it; but I suppose from a distance and with our typical flair for lending colour and mystery to every story, the incident became a mutiny and I have heard people remark that two brigades from the Sixth Armoured Division had already marched on to Pindi to force the hand of the government, Nothing could be farther from the truth nor more absurd!

APPENDIX 8

Transcript of the First Address to Army Officers by President/CMLA Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in February 1972

1. I have come here without notes. I did not want to talk to you from a prepared text because I wanted to talk to you frankly. The last time I talked to you, I was a minister, Then we came in contact with each other very oiien. We used to have ma.ny occasions for conversation. But then this conversation was cut ofL this contact was broken. I was not allowed to be near you. We lost touch with each other,
2. Now the people have chosen me for my present position. Now there is representation of the people. Armed forces come from people, The people come from soil, so do the armed forces, But the previous government kept us apart.
3. I am happy now that this conversation and dialogue has been resumed. The gulf has been narrowed. Now everyone is accountable and unless someone is accountable, no progress can be made. Till such time certain difficulties are overcome we have to continue with the martial law, Not that I feel happy about it, not that I want it; in fact, I have fought for its removal and I can assure you that I will not let it continue for a moment longer then necessary. I cannot definitely say as to when it will be lifted. I cannot give a fim1 date, for it may be lifted by March or April, but I am not sure of it.
4. I am trying to move very fast, in fact as fast as is humanly possible. Only yesterday I started talks with Mr Mujib, He had received mandate from his people to fight elections. I-Ie succeeded. We had meetings to resolve various problems faced by us but systematic efforts were made to frustrate them to continue to rule the country. I must speak the truth; I am obliged to speak truth, for too long there has been deception and deceit. It is very important for the country to know all this, for you to know all this particularly in view of our present relations with India. It is very essential that there should be arrangements between the people of East and West Pakistan. We do not want any decision to be imposed on us. An imposed decision cannot be ever-lasting. We want a permanent solution ro our problems. I have discussed these things with Mr Mujib. I said we must have some arrangement; it may be as loose as he wants but it should be within the framework of one Pakistan. We want unity.
5. This can be achieved with your cooperation. I need the cooperation of the armed forces, I want unstinted cooperation. If I get it, Insha-Allah we will succeed. Pakistan came into being through immense sacrifices, we are still sacrificing, we

need to sacrifice more. But side»by~side we have to deal with corruption, nepotism, and many such evils. As a result of this also, martial law will have to continue though for a short period. This will be for a very short period because certain reformative measures have to be taken. For other things and more important matters we will be taking measures through the parliament. We have to improve the socio- economic conditions of the masses, we have to mend the moral fibre of the people. This we are not going to achieve by standing on the shoulders of China, or US, or USSR. We will have to stand on our own shoulders. Only when we are strong then we will be in a position to negotiate with our enemy, only then we shall be in a position to do something about our various problems. Therefore, for some time martial law shall have to continue. I cannot give an exact date when it can be lifted, maybe it may take some months, three or four. But I can assure you I do not want to be a dictator under this martial law. We have seen the fate of two dictators; I do not wish to meet the same fate. I do not want to go back home in disgrace. I do not want people to say he met the same fate as other dictators did. I do not want my children to call me a dictator. We have to can out certain political negotiations, we have already made certain progress, hut I need some time, certain delays are bound to occur, we will have to bear them.

6. I would like to be frank about the armed forces. They have seen hard times, they are still facing hard times. They have suffered reverses, which were not due to their fault. Our soldiers have done very well. They have fought well. But certain measures were necessary to be taken. These measures are not designed to be vindictive. Sooner this pruning will come to an end. I want security to return. I want to allay your fears. Our army is a very fine army. Their mettle has been appreciated even by foreign generals. General Auchinleck has said that this is a very fine army, our soldiers are brave, they know how to face odds, and they are capable of taking any enemy howsoever it may be strong. You have not failed this country nor our people have failed but it is the system that has failed us. Many tongues are wagging, armed forces are being implicated and many stupid things are being said. I called some of the naughty boys and have told them to stop it. I do not want any harm to come to our armed forces, I have taken various measures in this direction and for obvious reasons we are not publicizing them. I have told ministers for presidential affairs to take necessary steps in this regard and these steps have already been taken. I will even talk to the people. I am an elected representative of the people. I have been chosen by them. I have got an overwhelming mandate from Punjab, They have given tremendous sacrifices for Pakistan. They have chosen me, a person who belongs to a small province of Pakistan.

7. I do not want unnecessary hatred to take root. I will not allow the virus of provincialism to flourish. I will not indulge in parochialism. Every thing has to be decided on merit and accountability. There has been no accountability for long, now all we do will be accountable as is customary in a democracy. We are answerable to people.

8. What happened in East Pakistan is known to you. Our forces in East Pakistan are now unfortunately under die control of India. India is a mean and treacherous enemy. In its treachery it lacks vision. Presently they are intoxicated by their military victory. A military victory is a temporary phenomenon; it cannot be permanent. They cannot gloat over it for long. They have got these prisoners over

whom they would try to blackmail us. This is their meanness and on this they would like to capitalize. We do not want them to resort to the other sources of blackmailing us, We have to see that those who are in captivity are treated well. If not, then we have to pressurize them into doing so. Because if we do not they will feel that this is our sensitive point, where it hurts us the most, I do not want them to have this feeling. Only yesterday I met the families of those who have been left there. India will use it as a lever to compel us to accept her terms. We have to find counter-levers, both to have our men repatriated and to effect disengagement. We have to move diplomatically. If India thinks that we will agree to a humiliating settlement then they are sadly mistaken. If India thinks it can pressure us into accepting degrading terms they will know we will not. If they continue to insist on a humble settlement then they will find every one of us up in arms. We will rather die fighting than accept a future of disgrace.

9. This defeat has taught us formidable lessons, It has given us much to ponder on, We are faced with a difficult time and an unfortunate situation. But I am quite confident the dark clouds will disappear. I would like to know your views. I would like to share your thoughts. We will have many more such meetings. We will understand each other. We have the same goal before us and the same objective, i.e. the prosperity, well being, and economic uplift of the country.

10. Great powers are concerned about us. We have to devise our own foreign policy, our own defence policy. Some people try to brush us off by saying these are extremely technical matters, that we should not indulge in policy making for foreign affairs, for defence. But may I tell you it is not so. It requires common sense to understand various problems and devise various policies, In 1962, when Mr Duncan Sandes came to Pakistan, the then President, FM Ayub, told him to go to the GHQ where the officers could tell him what plans we had to liberate Kashmir which we did not adopt. He said I cannot go to GHQ, I represent a democratic state, and I am answerable to my people, If they have something to show to me they should come to me, This is the manner in which nations answerable to its people act.

11. All the generals have not come from ranks. They have not been trained soldiers. Take the example of Gengis Khan..,, he also came from among the people, They leamt things through experience. We have also tried to learn things through study, through experience. We have the right to say in the international forum what is right, what is in our interest, what is needed, and what is not needed. Neither the realms of foreign policy nor of armed forces are ivory towers open to few claiming to be the technical experts in the field. We understand the problems of both and we will try to tackle these problems accordingly.

12. We have to leave India alone for some time, it is as much in our interest as in theirs, As far as we are concerned, it is an effort to rebuild our whole society, We need to do much, both in the army and the civil arena, I am not an appeaser. I had to swallow my words not because I wanted to but because I had to, because of the reason that I wanted time. You wanted time, We are prepared to do all we can do for you. We will place all the resources at your disposal. We have to accept certain facts, We have to show some flexibility.

13. Presently there are three great powers in the world, US, China, and USSR. UK and France are no longer big powers. We have to accept this fact, We have to foster good relations with them. On 9 August 1971 when India, itself a much bigger

country as compared to us, concluded a pact with Russia, I met the president, I talked to him and told him that a qualitative change has occurred in the subcontinent. Things are not as they were. The whole complexion has changed. When on l8 October I announced in Lahore that we have no danger of war from India it was not because I did not expect aggression from India. I did. I said so because we were not ready, we were not fully ready for a war with India. In view of the situation prevailing in the country, the national spirit was so low, I thought we will not come out of it successfully. I tried to defuse the situation in order to enable both armed forces and people to get prepared for it.

14. By just raising the slogans and displaying the 'CRUSH INDIA' banners you could not cmsh India. In those days, I saw many cars showing 'Cnish India' stickers running towards Swat. We were not facing India alone in this confrontation. There was also Russia. In this war USSR succeeded in retaining its honour, which they had lost in Cuba and Middle East, They had to re-establish their prestige in the world.

15. I resorted to an orthodox step and paid a visit to all the three embassies in Islamabad. There has been a new change in US-China relations. There had to be. The same ocean washes the coast of these two big powers. China is trying to extend its influence in the Third World. Russia and US have common interests in Europe. They also have their interest in Middle East. The Russians have succeeded in this subcontinent. This steamroller has to move in other directions as well. They have already concluded a treaty with Iraq. They want to contain Iran. This has been necessitated after the dispute over Shat-ul-Arab and the islands off their coast on which they have had deep disputes. They will want to extend their influence further. For the time being, if some criticism does not appear in the press do not be dismayed. We need time to straighten our affairs. I will also try to persuade people to understand these things. They will understand.

16. I am trying to do many things, correct them, set them right, The civil government is being established. The genuine difficulties of the people are being removed. There have been demands. We are trying to meet them, There was thil demonstration in Balochistan. Things are likely to go at tangents some times, We have to be patient. If trouble continues, we will be sharing. India is already trying to encash upon it, Mrs Indra Gandhi said we are prepared to have dialogue with the people of West Pakistan and Balochistan. But we will overcome our probleml We will succeed, We need your help, we need your cooperation. Your help, your cooperation will be the help and cooperation of the people.

Question Answer Session

Q. Sir, this country was created in the name of God. We professed there will he Islamic ideology. We have been told this time and again but these have proved In be hollow promises. Unless and until we accept this direction, we will continue ln face these reverses, Let us re-aftimi our faith in this ideology and it should come from you first of all?

A. I salute your courage as a Muslim. I have always said I am a Muniilnmn. ll' yl\lI remember, I started my speech in UN with the holy Kalima.

Q. Sir, we know your economic philosophy, an eco-philosophy is subservient to political philosophy. As soldiers we have to obey your philosophies. May we know what is your political philosophy?

A. This country was created in the name of Islam. There will be no compromise on the basic principles of Islam. But unfortunately, too much exploitation has taken place in the name of Islam. Some have done business on it, Outside they have a neon signs of Islam, inside they have exploited t.he people.

Q. Peoples' Party has been saying there should be no songs of Karnail-ni, Jemail-ni but of peasants and labourers only. This will ..,.

A. I have already taken them to task; there will be no more such utterances.

Q. There are vested interests in all walks of life. These interests play a dominant role in bringing misery, corruption, and nepotism. Efforts should be made to eliminate them. They are not only in the army, they are in civil and in all other departments?

A. I agree, these are deep-rooted problems; given time they will all be sorted out. Very good pruning is being done in all the spheres. A long list of such civil servants is in the making. It is coming out soon. Some of the culprits have already been placed under arrest, you know of Standard Bank.

Q. The present system of selection boards for promotion is not correct. You should create a civilian cell consisting of people of integrity to End out about the methods with which traits of initiative, honesty, and forthrightness are killed?

A. ….

Q. Import of wine should be banned?

A. I do take drinks a little. I work eighteen hours a day. I have to smooth my nerves, which are under pressure. Some take tranquillisers, some other medicines, I d.rink. Though I have reduced it considerably. I know I am damaging my liver. I will further reduce it.

Q. There should be a law to ban it?

A. There is already a Quranic law about it. I cannot make a law more effective than this.

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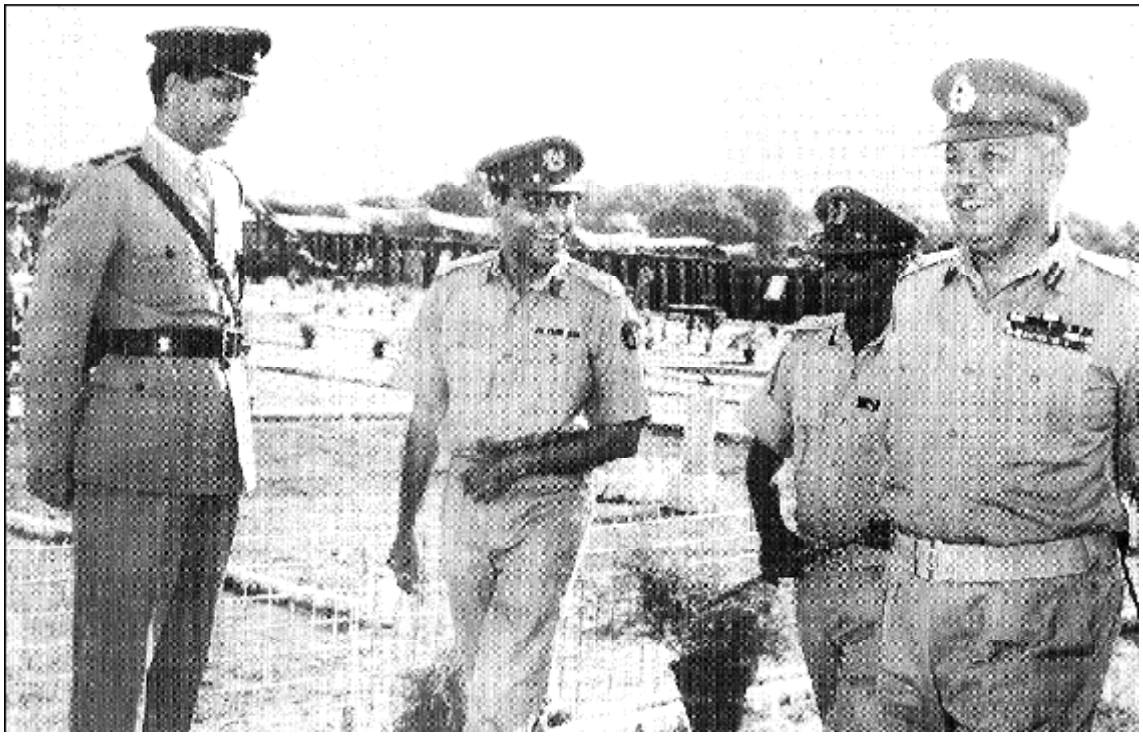
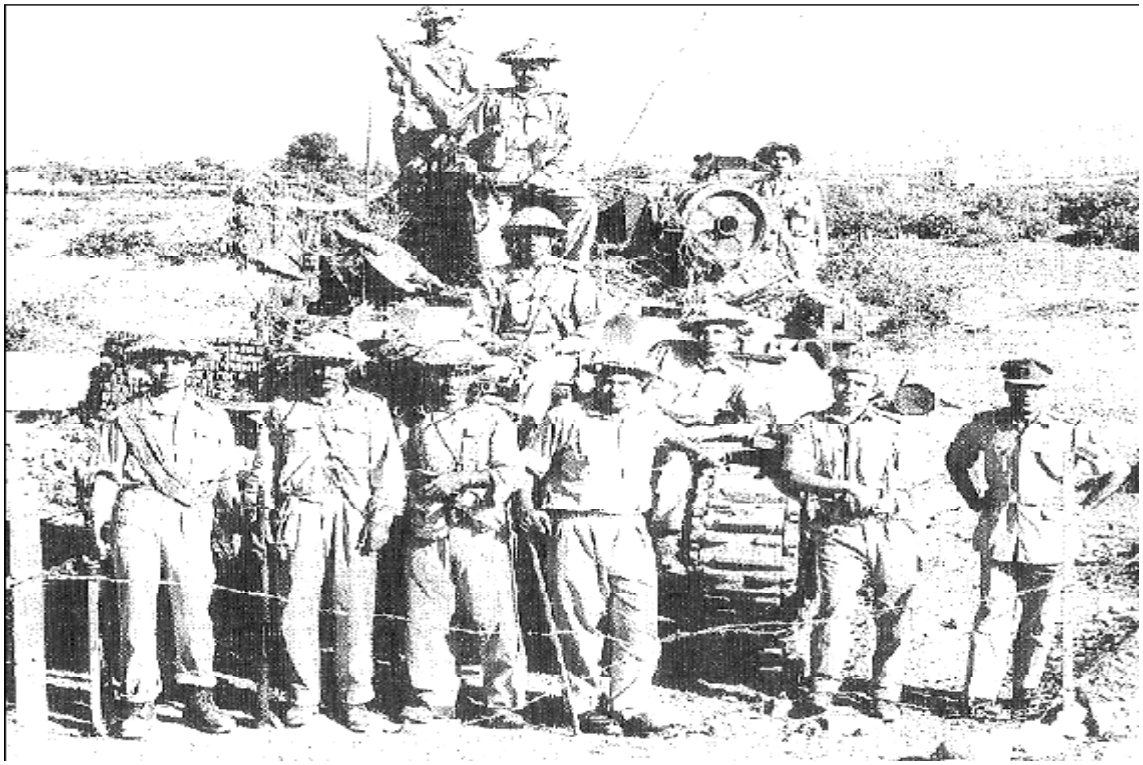


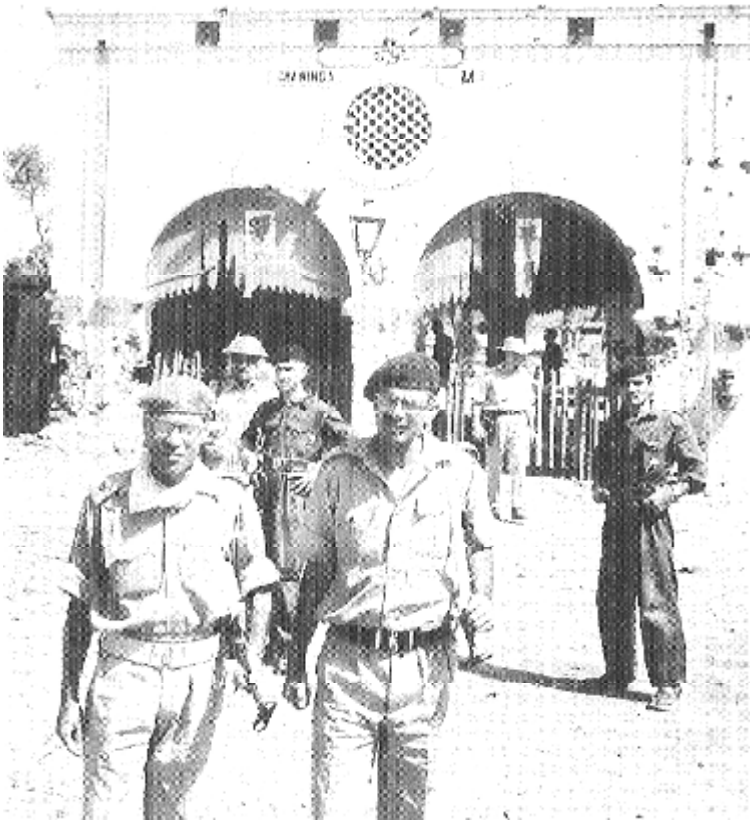
With General Abdul Hamid Khan, Chief of Staff, Paksitan Army

Bidding farewell to Lt-Gen Hassan Khan on the eve of his retirement.

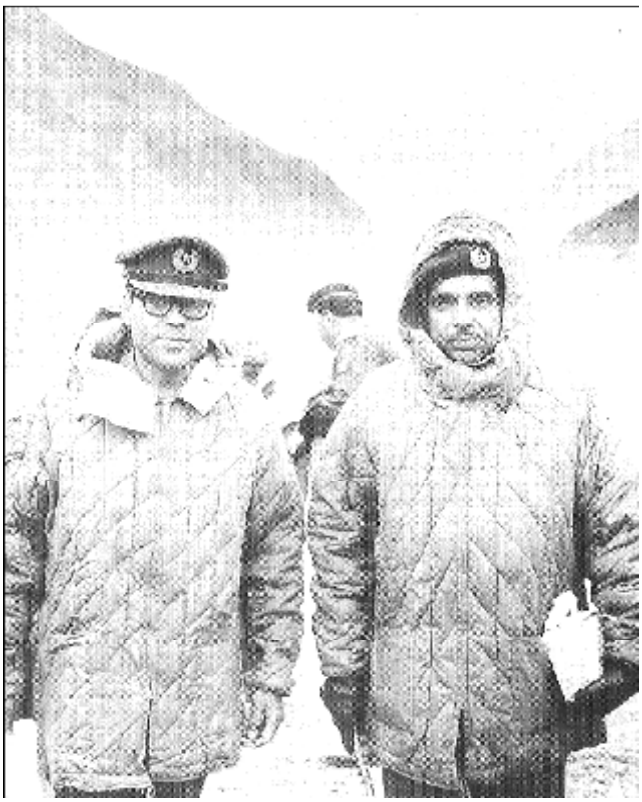
A fateful handshake with General Tikka Khan, Chief of the Army Staff.

As a Major (also see facing page)in various operational area during and after the 1965 war.





In brigadier's uniform with full medals and decoration



In Hunza on the occasion of the inauguration of the Friendship Highway, February 1972

On a tour of duty with the Paksitan Air Force, 1961-1963.

Talking as a reporter to Sir Owen Dixon on his arrival in Rawalpindi as a Special UN envoy to advise on the question of plebiseite in Jammu and Kashmir, 1949.

Welcoming he French General Andre Beaufre on his visit to Pakistan during the 1971 war.