Welcome to Bangladesh

the World's eighth most populous nation

JOI BANGLA!

THE INDO-PAKISTANI CONFLICT brings over one fifth of the world's population to war. The probable result will be the eighth most populous country in the world — Bangladesh.

Already the repercussions are changing international politics, as the Sino-Soviet split leads to open clashes in the U.N. The strategic and political link between South-East Asia and India, will have a profound impact throughout Asia. Hence the competition between the two major socialist powers has driven them to very ironical positions. For the first time since the Second World War the order-mongers of Moscow have abandoned the status-quo to support a policy which promises to redraw international boundaries. At the same time Peking aligns with America behind one of the more reactionary products of CENTO, Pakistan.

Another side of the internationalism of Bangladesh is brought out in the interview below. As the former imperialist capital of the Sub-continent, London has become a base for the major areas involved — East Bengal, West Pakistan and West Bengal — have come together to discuss the history, character and revolutionary implications of Bangladesh. Tasadduq Ahmed is from the Bangladesh Newsletter West Pakistan is represented by both N.K. Janjua, former Air Commodore of the Pakistani Airforce and now Chairman of the Pakistanis in Solidarity with Bangladesh and Kashmir, which was formed soon after the war. Janjua, I'm from the Jelem district of the Punjab, West Pakistan, I'm an ex-Air force officer, and against Pakistan. After diverging from India, China moved into the Pakistani camp, and encouraged Indian communists not to agitate against Ayub Khan.

The Chinese look at Bangladesh wrongly. They say here is Mujibur Rahman, who is not a marxist, not a man of the left, he is pro-American, anti-communist. He is leading the movement, so it is bogus and reactionary. They start with the leader. But this is wrong. As a marxist I don't just look at the man, I look at the issues. What is the issue in Bangladesh? Self-determination. Secondly, democracy, even bourgeois democracy against military dictatorship. Thirdly, a fight against exploitation. On all these three issues he has stood up. Not just as a leader. The people have participated in these issues. They gave him overwhelming support. If tomorrow Mujib said he wanted to withdraw his six points, would the people accept it? Surely not.

The movement is no longer in his pocket. This is the way the Chinese should have seen it. The good thing about Mujibur is that he consistently fought the military autocracy, and he was secular.

"My name is Tasadduq Ahmed, I came from Sylet, Bangladesh, I came to this country in 1951, since then I've mostly been involved with the immigrants in general, currently I'm associated with the Bangladesh Newsletter, and also with the left and democratic movement in East Bengal."

"My name is Hamza Alavi, I'm from Karachi in West Pakistan, I'm an editor of the journal 'Contemporary Asia', along with Mr Janjua I am in solidarity with Bangladesh, I was at the Institute for Development Studies in Brighton and I'm at the moment finishing a book on Punjab villages."

"My name is Biplab Dus Gupta, I came to this country in 1963 to complete my PhD in economics, since '66 I've been a lecturer in SOAS, as for my political activities, I've been associated with the Communist Party of India since 1953, I am working here with the Indian Workers Association, and the Association of Indian Communists which is an affiliate of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)."

"N.K. Janjua, I'm from the Jelem district of the Punjab, West Pakistan, I'm an ex-Air force officer, I came out the force in 1953, I've been in London since 1960. I am a founder member and chairman of the West Pakistanis in Solidarity with Bengal and Kashmir, which was formed soon after the army action in East Bengal on the 26 March this year."

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The most unfortunate thing about the Chinese propaganda was the uncomprehending propaganda. The masses took place in March. It was a terrible massacre, hundreds of thousands of people were killed. I have seen Maoist documents in India which say, "well in any war there will be massacres." Then they go on, saying that India has attacked Pakistan so we will have to defend it. This is one of the worst things China has caused. But it’s not the only thing. Look at the Chinese influence among the Chinese have dealt with the Ceylonese revolution. The Sinhalese in Ceylon, India and Pakistan, and America, a funny combination. They all supported Bandaranaike against the revolutionaries in Ceylon. Recently I saw a photo where he had a piece in it congratulating the Sykes of the Soviet Union, after he was bloodshed; because the Communists he killed were supported by the Soviet Union.

You seem to be saying that the open division of the party as a whole has released the militants from their political straitjacket.

I think that is correct. In India this has been happening since 1959.

Could we turn to Bangladesh itself?

Tasadduq: To understand the paradoxes of the Bangladeshi situation today you need to see what has happened. Under East Pakistan, a narrow partition in 1952 the first anti-colonial, liberation movement started with the Bengali language movement, and the first Bengali died fighting West Pakistan in 1954. It was a most severe first constitutional impact when the government of March, 1954 of national emancipation of the People of East Bengal, and they led it very sucessfully. They were so powerful that they were capable of winning the 1954 elections. The result in 1968-69 was mass militant action. Mass actions took place all over East Bengal. It was unorganised, and spontaneous, after four or five weeks, naturally, it died down, Ayub climbed down as well, and things cooled off.

The onslaught was directed against local money-lenders, thieves, anti-social elements. It was also directed against the advocates of the Ayub regime. But its character was not expressed clearly in class terms. It was an upsurge rather than a revolutionary movement.

The Awami League

In the absence of a mass revolutionary organisation, with a clear line on the Bangladesh revolution, and because of the existence, right through the period of several political groups, mass consciousness could find only one vehicle - the Awami League.

The Awami league is not a party of revolutionary change. It is a party of reformist transition, primarily run by intellectuels, students teachers etc. Yet from January to December 7 last year they led the movement for national emancipation of the People of East Bengal, and they led it very sucessfully. They were responsible for bringing forward the slogan 'Joi Bangla!' (Free Bengal) which epitomised nationalistic sentiment felt by many Bengalis for the outstanding achievement of the Awami League. They won almost 100 per cent. This led them into a confrontation, as the West Pakistani Junta realised that there was a danger that they were going to have a mass uprising of their own. From then on the Awami League, instead of seeing the dangers, tried, through January, February, and March this year, to raise a revolutionary storm through slogans, mobilisations, boycotts, non-cooperation, without ever understanding the aim.

Climbing Down

The enemy's strategy was that they were not going to hand over power unless they were forced to do so. On that day Sheikh Mujibur and the Awami League had to declare that our struggle is for one national independence. They did this without realising how to take the struggle. From that point the process was a slow one. They were forced to climb down, negotiate, settle the questions across the table. The elections were not a victory for the Bengali nation, but a victory for the struggle of the national mobilisation. The climax came on March 25 when the Awami League leadership had to make a choice and they chose the path of non-violence. The result was the chaos that we have seen. The masses were left to themselves.

This brings us to another situation. We now know that the Indian government is not revolutionary but because of its own contradictions, the danger from Pakistan, Bengali nationalism, these factors, together, meant that India had to open her borders. This is what was mentioned in fact part of the Awami League, which embraced all the popular forces in Bangladesh during the early 50’s. The first split only came in 1957. There are two traditions in the Awami League. The elitist tradition led by Mujib towards a small campaign party. Support for Mujib is widespread and deep in the rural areas.

Information from inside Bangladesh is so scant we can't generalise. Outside there is the constitutional arm, which is led by most of the M.P.s who were elected and managed to escape. They are solidly Awami League, mostly yawn carseists and time servers, some are genuinely concerned with the movement. In the armed struggle, 80 per cent of the Muktibahini are students; not committed to any party, but Awami Leaguers in the sense that they believe in Joibangla.

Hard Core

The hard core of the Muktibahini is the East Bengal regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles. Here there is a contradiction. These regiments are the creation of the bureaucratic military tradition of Pakistan, which inherited the British tradition. They are a traditional Army, allied to national interest. They have their rank and file are saying that they are not only interested in nationalism, they want social progress and were sort of socialism.

Fight As One Entity

From the beginning there was tremendous pressure to fight as one entity. But the Awami League leadership didn't want this. Under pressure from India and from the Soviet Union, however, they set up a Consultative Committee which had two meetings. I don't think they have achieved much but at least they have taken some resolutions, helping us to build up local action on an all-party basis. The Consultative Committee has opened the way for all-party activity in the lower ranks.

On the left are the smaller groups which have formed themselves into a coordinating Committee. The programme they have adopted, I think, is a correct programme. If they can carry it through organisationally there is some hope for progress.

ROMULUS ALARE

All the groups on the left that we've mentioned were in fact part of the Awami League, which embraced all the popular forces in Bengal in the early 50's. The first split only came in 1957. There are two traditions in the Awami League. The elitist tradition led by Mujib towards a small campaign party. Support for Mujib is widespread and deep in the rural areas. The enemy's strategy was that they were not going to hand over power unless they were forced to do so. On that day Sheikh Mujibur and the Awami League had to declare that our struggle is for one national independence. They did this without realising how to take the struggle. From that point the process was a slow one. They were forced to climb down, negotiate, settle the questions across the table. The elections were not a victory for the Bengali nation, but a victory for the struggle of the national mobilisation. The climax came on March 25 when the Awami League leadership had to make a choice and they chose the path of non-violence. The result was the chaos that we have seen. The masses were left to themselves.

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Forfront, Pakistan They thought their main identity was as religious communal one. Partition took place in Muslim state. I'm not saying they will stop citing the very basis of Bangladesh is undermined.

Janjua: Have the guerrillas had an independent strategy or been able to encourage communalism. If they do the stimulating communalism.

If the Bengalis Bangladesh is founded on saying that the linguistic possibility of preventing united Bengali actions by majorities W est Bengal are Hindu; there is still a tied class of Bangladesh. 80 per cent of them gained their wealth at the expense of the Hindus.

Rahman had not used the elections, if he had the majority were not allowed to take over. The main point is, what will be the line-up of forces in West Pakistan? It primarily depends on the Indian actions. If India does not interfere with the territorial integrity of West Pakistan and declares against the military Junta I have the feeling that the Junta would fall. If the Indians do try to cross into Pakistan and stay there chauvinism in the West.

To the best of my knowledge physical preparations are being made as well. There is no doubt about that. It would be unbearable, intolerable to submit to the people they thought they could subdue in their March 25 action in 72 hours.

What will the effects of a Bangladesh in the East, and a stalemate in the West, be in West Pakistan?

The military Junta has played on the chauvinism in the West. They mobilised and sustained support, at the cost of cutting off the West Pakistanis from almost all communication with the rest of the world. They have isolated the West from the realities in Bangladesh. A majority support them. But there is considerable opposition, there are thousands in jail, detained without trial, and repression has intensified since March. So there is an opposition to the Regime, but not necessarily pro-Bangladesh. Asad Kazim nation­lists who want an independent Kashmir. There are also a steadily increasing number of intellectuals who have come out in favour of Bangladesh. People are beginning to understand the nature of the Army's action there.

Janjua: Armed struggle has been thrust upon them. They had a nucleus of well trained men, but while the people were mentally prepared for a revolution, they were not physically prepared.

Hamas: The scale of their action has been small. Certainly they couldn't overthrow the might of the Pakistan army, but their presence has forced the Pakistanis to keep forces in Bengal that their economy simply couldn't sustain. This has precipitated an economic crisis in the West.

Jangla: Given the short time they have had, I think that the guerrillas have had a considerable effect, it was too soon to expect them to have big victories, but because they are fish in the water they have been able to score successes, and in the next few months they would have been able to inflict larger damage. This is one of the reasons for Pakistan's thrust in the West. For the Junta could never have accepted defeat at the hands of the Bengalis, it would be too humiliating; they couldn't have stopped the Indians rather than the Bengalis.

Janjua: In my opinion the political struggle is going to change. Some of the political cadres in the West decided after the 25th that all constitutional means of progress in Pakistan had come to an end. They were mentally prepared for armed struggle.

Tasadduq: If the West is better off because it is in its interest, and if it is willing to float the Bengali community up, take advantage of elections even though you cannot take power through parliamenary means. There was an election but the men who had the majority were not allowed to take over. Instead their people were massacred. You cannot expect to take power without an armed struggle. The second lesson is that it is useful to use the machinery of parliamentary democracy. If Mujibur Rahman had not used the elections, if he had boycotted them he would never have mobilised so many people in such a short period of time. Elections enable issues to be brought into the open. Take advantage of elections even though you cannot take power through parliamentary government.

Hamas: Bangladesh: Bangladesh should not be seen in isolation. Over the last ten years a far reaching crisis throughout South Asia has been maturing. Bangladesh is a part of this, and it will accelerate the radicalisation. Take your thesis in the last issue of 7 Days, that if Mrs Gandhi appears on the Ganges with Mujib, she will sweep to electoral victory. If she has to stay inside she will need the support of inside to create a reputation, without being able to go to the people, having solved their own problems, then it will be a sign of her utter desperation. I see the growth of revolutionary socialist forces in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
7 DAYS

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