

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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O tempora! O mores! in Pakistan

c/o American Consulate  
Dacca, East Pakistan  
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Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers,

When I was in West Pakistan last year, a surprising number of intelligent citizens, in considering the state of affairs in their country, were saying, "What we need in a good dictator..." "a Pakistani Hitler." These days, in East Pakistan, the same sort of people, by and large, are saying that the way to the solution of Pakistan's problems lies in "national elections as soon as possible..." "a real reference to the people."

This difference in opinion, I think, represents a difference in the make-up of the two wings---East Pakistan being more susceptible to democratic ideals---but I hope too that it represents a national shift in outlook with passing time.

Pakistan does have its troubles, whatever the solution may be. As one who bears good wishes toward a new nation which has proclaimed high religious and political ideals and has chosen democratic forms of government, I will now agonise out loud for a while.

First, Pakistan has the disadvantage of being separated into two wings lying 1000 miles apart by air, 3000 miles apart by sea. West Pakistan lies on the flank of the Middle East; East Pakistan touches on Southeast Asia. In the West, Pakistanis eat wheat, grow cotton and speak Urdu; in the East they eat rice, grow jute and speak Bengali. In the West large landowners dominate the countryside; in the East most farmers own their own fields, however small.

West and East present Pakistan with two economies, with little exchange of capital and labor, and costly and sparing exchange of goods.

Moreover, there is a bit of a tussle between East and West. The East Pakistanis regard themselves as more cultured than the inhabitants of the "desert" West. The East's jute is the nation's biggest foreign-exchange earner, though most Government investment and expenditure takes place in the West. Easterners fear political domination by the Westerners, who greatly outnumber them in the civil services. The West Pakistanis think themselves more civilized than the people of "jungle" East Pakistan, rightful leaders because of better education and more experience in government, business and warfare. They fear political domination by the Easterners, who outnumber them in population, 45-to-35 million (on one-fifth as much land).

This is not to suggest that civil war is imminent, but rather that there is imperfect understanding between the two wings and only brief practice in thinking of themselves as fellow-Pakistanis.

Pakistan's troubles, however, transcend East-West differences. Historically, Pakistan got off to a poor start even before Pakistan was born.

When the British conquered India, Muslim leaders, fallen from the noble state of the Moghul Empire, went into a long sulk, while ambitious Hindus, more adaptable, took to the English language and learning and gained a two- or three-generation advantage over Muslims by the time the nationalist movement began in earnest. Awakened Muslims worked with Hindus in the independence movement until the 1930's, when the Muslim League took up the cry for a separate Muslim state. With the split, the Congress, with the vast popular support of the leadership of the reformer-politician Mahatma Gandhi, moved toward independence even while making post-independence social and economic plans. The Muslim League, meanwhile, with a narrower base of support for the leadership of the lawyer-politician Mohammad Ali Jinnah, campaigned for Partition, while giving scant attention to post-Partition policy.

The morning-after question for newly established nations is, of course, "Now what?" In general, India had its now-what ready, Pakistan did not. India framed its Constitution in 1950, has held two general elections, and has made considerable social and economic advance. Pakistan completed its Constitution in 1956, has yet to hold a general election, and is mostly discussing rather than accomplishing its professed social and economic goals.

From the beginning Pakistan shared with India the burdens of the poverty, undernourishment, passivity and isolation of her millions of people; the debilities of long colonial rule; and the problems of caring for refugees and facing each other in quarrels over Kashmir and what-not.

But Pakistan had it more difficult than India. The areas that fell to Pakistan were not evenly developed: in the West there was a good port at Karachi, some textile plants, and a good irrigation system in parts of the Indus basin, but the rest was mostly barren; East Pakistan was a hinterland of Calcutta, a jute-growing area without a jute mill, a farm.

For Pakistani leadership, the old educational and professional lag of the Muslims now produced an acute shortage of competent public administrators. The task of converting the slogans "Muslim homeland" and "Islamic democracy" into a constituted government brought sharp conflict between orthodox Muslim elements and the secularists over the very nature of the state, between East and West over balance of representation, and between the third Governor-General and the Constitution-makers over proportions of power.

What Pakistan has decided to become, finally, is an "Islamic Republic," based on observance of "the principles of Democracy, Freedom, Equality, Tolerance and Social Justice as enunciated by Islam..." in all, a parliamentary democracy with an Islamic character, a welfare state with government planning and enterprise but with no doctrinaire ideas about socialization of national resources.

But present public affairs in Pakistan are considerably less admirable than future public goals.

Public administration has become increasingly corrupt, with bribery, graft, nepotism and influence-peddling present in ministries, construction projects and even the Anti-Corruption Department. Inefficiency of system and operation clogs administrative processes.

Top-level leadership, since the death of Jinnah in 1948 and the assas-

sination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, has failed to inspire the support of politicians or public; there have been four premiers in the past six years. Politics, at best, consumes a great deal of energy better expended elsewhere. The Muslim League has lost its old strength by schism, and public disaffection, and the present array of Parties, Leagues and Fronts are engaged daily in mutual public condemnation. Members of legislatures change party affiliation frequently on what resembles the open market. Political issues are not really debated or decided; slogans are preferred to arguments.

Dealing in an economy of scarcity, big businessmen, and little ones when they can afford it, find political influence for securing contracts, permits and licenses is the prerequisite of profit. Despite high profits to favored-treatment industries, many investors prefer to speculate in agricultural produce or put their money into certain quick gainers such as cigarettes, betel leaves and moving pictures. The black market handles foreign currency, newsprint, soluble coffee, medicines and other scarce goods, and smuggling of gold, rice and jute into India is widespread. Inflation mocks the increase in production of cloth and other consumers' goods. Former food-surplus areas have become food-deficit areas, due to poor planning as much as bad weather, and the nation has had to spend vast amounts of money to import food grains. Pakistan's troubles with India, wherever the blame belongs, have led Pakistan to invest extravagantly in armed forces, again at the expense of development programs.

In all, despite the relatively low level of popular expectation in Pakistan, there is general disappointment over slow progress and national mismanagement. There is also a national inferiority complex: there is a persistent aping of things British and American, and for all the bristling patriotism vis-a-vis India, there is begrudging admiration of Indian accomplishment.

The log-jam in the river of national life is, I think, the politics.

At the Center, Prime Minister Suhrawardy holds office at the sufferance of the Republican Party, composed of West Pakistan landlords who heavily outnumber Suhrawardy's East Pakistan Awami ("People's") Leaguers in the coalition Government. He has travelled far to make friends for Pakistan, and his favorite refrain is that his foreign policy brings the nation large-scale foreign assistance. He has fewer friends at home.

The West Pakistan Provincial Assembly is highly select: when in 1955 several provinces were merged into One Unit, the several disbanding legislatures selected some of their own number as members of the new unified Assembly. There has been no popular election. The ruling Republican Party is generally regarded as taking its signals from Pakistan President Iskander Mirza, who is expected to be aloof from politics. Last Spring, when the Republican Chief Minister was unable to muster a majority, he asked for President's Rule (Central administration) to "prevent a breakdown of Constitutional machinery." After a Summer-long breather, provincial administration has been returned to the Republicans, who have recovered their indisposition.

In East Pakistan, popular elections held in March 1954 brought a trouncing to Muslim Leaguers, who had been in power for seven years. But the victorious United Front had barely formed a Cabinet when the Central Government, charging the newcomers with loss of police control in a jute-

mill riot, imposed President's Rule for ten months. Meanwhile the United Front disintegrated, one ministry fell on the issue of famine, and now for one year there has been the "Popular Government" of a coalition of Awami Leaguers and balance-of-power Hindus.

Last Spring, Mr. Suhrawardy began promising general elections by March 1958, and by now most of the parties have joined in the demand. But the Election Commission will be unable to get ready by then, and because the monsoon will make travel difficult, especially in riverine East Pakistan, and then there must be time for a campaign, it is doubtful that the elections can be held sooner than March 1959.

Whether in preparation for elections or not, an unusual amount of shifting has been going on. In East Pakistan, the popular Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, who mixes rightist religion with leftist politics, has left the Awami League in protest of Suhrawardy's foreign policy and has assumed leadership of a newly formed National Awami Party ("NAP") composed of the considerable number of dissidents he led out of the Awami League, crypto-Communists (the Party is illegal in Pakistan), and six personal political parties of West Pakistan.

On the eve of the West Pakistan Assembly meeting in Lahore on September 14, NAP, pledged to undo One Unit and re-create the four or five old provinces "in response to the demand for regional autonomy," was bargaining with both the Muslim League and the Republican Party for support. The Republican Party, founded two years ago as the "One Unit Party," agreed to help undo One Unit in exchange for support on its budget. The "anti-One Unit" resolution passed (and must now face the National Assembly). The Muslim League sat this one out.

The anti-One Unit resolution has created a rift between Mr. Suhrawardy and the Republicans, who would like to see him pulled down, except for the fact that they need his Awami League support to stay in the Central Cabinet.

The East Pakistan Assembly convened here in Dacca on September 21, with the Awami League wondering how much of its strength had been carried away by NAP, and with three other parties in the Opposition freshly split into unfriendly camps and liable to do anything. The key issue of the week-long session has been the Opposition adjournment motion of the first day. Amidst jeering, shouting and table-thumping during which little was audible except the noise, it was reported that the Government forces turned the motion down by a 17-vote margin. After remarkably little legislative accomplishment, the Assembly adjourned yesterday by shouting itself into a Rs 100-a-month raise in salary retroactive to April 1955, a Rs 3000 lump-sum gift-plus inexplicable except for its usefulness during the election campaign.

This makes, I know, a weary recital. Perhaps I feel a little sour this morning. Actually, Pakistan is no police state, it has no populace crushed in rebellion, nor is there a rubber-stamp legislature. And there is progress in Pakistan, to be sure: There has been land reform in East Pakistan, reclamation of waste land, sinking of wells, and distribution of fertilizer and seeds. An Industrial Development Board is building new factories and there are new dam projects to provide flood control, irrigation waters and electricity. There are new schools and better health, a loyal Army, a patient citizenry, and a lot of good intentions. Pakistan has not rejected democracy. It's just hard to give it a good try.