

The roots of the tragedy unfolding on the sub-continent lie in the very considerable differences between the two parts of Pakistan. East Pakistan is more populous than West Pakistan and produces more foreign exchange, while political power has been concentrated in the West. To this must be added the physical separation of the two "wings" by over a thousand miles of Indian territory and the generally low level of economic activity in Pakistan. These economic problems were intensified last year by the disastrous cyclone and tidal wave in the Bay of Bengal. Given the magnitude of this natural disaster, I think we were all impressed by the courageous decision of President Yahya Khan to proceed with the promised elections for a Constituent Assembly to draw up a new constitution for the whole of Pakistan and restore the country to civilian rule and democratic government. It is ironic that such an excellent aspiration could have such unhappy consequences.

The Awami League, campaigning for a very large measure of provincial autonomy, won all but two of the seats in East Pakistan but none in West Pakistan, which would have given it an absolute majority in the Constituent Assembly. The four provinces in the West Wing of the country elected parties having quite a different view of the future of their country. In this polarized situation President Yahya tried to establish a modus vivendi between the various groups within the country. His efforts did not succeed and within a few months East Pakistan was engulfed in a civil war.

There are varying estimates of the number of deaths that resulted but no question that a great many people were killed. The economy of Pakistan has suffered serious damage and the sufferings and privations of the people of East Pakistan have not come to an end. Though statistics may vary from a Pakistani estimate of about two million to an Indian estimate of 8.9 million, there is no doubt that an intolerable number of refugees have fled to India. They are still arriving, and their continued presence contains the seeds of international and communal strife. The refugees inevitably impose an extremely heavy burden on the economy of India, which itself faces chronic and intractable problems of economic development.

On the political side, there are grounds for cautious optimism in a series of steps recently taken by the Government of Pakistan, which include:

- (a) the establishment of an appointed civilian Council of Ministers, led by a distinguished Bengali civilian, Dr. A. M. Malik, to replace the military government in East Pakistan;