

Bangladesh

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And now there is no alternative for the West Pakistan Army, virtually occupying Bangladesh, but to get out, and the quicker the better, especially for West Pakistan. It is pointless to dream about a negotiated settlement where Pakistan will still be a part of Bangladesh. The people do not want this anymore, they are not going to compromise either, they are prepared to fight to the finish. There are no signs that they will give up the struggle, for it has been tremendously costly, especially in terms of hundreds of lives. Too much blood has been shed so needlessly and cruelly, and too much suffering has been inflicted by the Pakistan Government for the Bengalees to forgive and forget, and to start negotiating. And another stark and brutal reality is that the Government has not let up its brutal suppression to this very day. Only a few hours ago, while writing this I happened to be talking with some Relief Camp officials who confirm once again the huge influx of refugees daily. It seems that the dreaded Razakars, mentioned previously, are terrorizing the villages, looting and killing. They have also been given wide powers of actions, including arrest. And again it is confirmed that many of the new refugees are coming with bullet wounds, and are also mostly Muslims. So, is there any hope when inhuman madness is unleashed and allowed free reign? Obviously decisive action is immediately needed, in spite of the Pakistan Government window-dressing to the contrary in the form of "Civilianization", and a Bengali Governor and Civilian Cabinet of 10. No one is fooled anymore, or are they.

Relief Aid and Work must be Political

As has been mentioned again and again, the Relief effort on the part of the Indian Government especially, and that of all the Agencies and groups, individual volunteers, etc. is simply colossal, but the world community immediately be involved much more with money and kind. Personnel are plentiful, and the Indian Government for various and obvious reasons has restricted foreign relief workers.

I have spent most of my time in relation to Relief work with the Voluntary Agencies, especially with CASA, Calcutta Urban Service, and Cathedral Relief Service, all of these doing an immense task with hundreds of volunteers involved in medical and food distribution work. The World Council of Churches channels its funds to CASA mainly. Today the Student Christian Movement of India, and Catholic Students Union just sent off 130 student volunteers from all over India to work in the camps during the month's Puja holidays. The response of the students has been tremendous, more than can be accommodated right now, so that 2 weeks from now another batch will be sent off. Many individual Colleges and Schools are involved in various ways, as many individual students, teachers, and professors. This is all well and good and very much needed.

But I want to raise perhaps the most serious and agonizing question which all of us must look at very searchingly. All the Aid that we give, all the effort that we put forth, for this kind of tragedy, should it not also be political. What I mean is, should not we take a very definite stance on the tragedy and say so

This is not a natural disaster such as a flood, an earthquake, or a cyclone, this is a colossal man-made disaster much more destructive than anything natural. And if we are simply doling out aid and effort in an "unbiased" and "open" way are we not guilty of aiding and abetting the disaster. In other words, all we are interested in is providing relief, so much needed, granted, and are careful "not to take sides". If this is a special disaster, then it requires special "aid". I strongly feel that it is wrong to simply give Aid, and spend very little effort trying to change the cause of the disaster. Our Aid effort for this kind of disaster requires a different method. We must risk being "biased", and must give as much effort, if not more to "fighting" the cause. Otherwise all our efforts add up to "providing band-aids" when radical surgery is needed.

I am convinced that it is very easy for us to give Aid, especially for the rich countries. Let us admit that Governments are firstly concerned with self-interest, and then they give out of their plenty, little mites, which collectively look like huge sums. For example, I saw a report not long ago which stated that all the Aid that Canada has given so far to this tragedy amounts to 3 cents (about 22 paise!) per person per Canadian! And just how much does America's \$70 million amount to for each American! Yet we really believe that we are giving so much. But what is even worse, and this is why I am raising this ridiculous point, is that it is very easy to give without being committed to change the disaster. Why, because this is too risky and too politically loaded, and it is an "internal matter." This is rubbish, especially when we say we do not want to get involved, the simple fact is that our countries are already involved, that is, by giving Aid and support to Pakistan be it military or otherwise. Therefore action beyond innocuous letters and diplomacy is necessary, and in this case very urgent. So I strongly feel, that our Governments, Agencies, Churches, and not only individuals must take "political" action as well, because our so-called humanitarian action seen in the total context of this disaster becomes questionable, and while we hesitate debating whether this will be seen as too "one-sided" Bangladesh bleeds profusely, continues to be raped and looted, and is laid waste. If we simply involve ourselves in giving Aid in an uncommitted way, very soon even all that we can possibly give will not be sufficient, because in a very real sense now not only are there the 8.6 million refugees here in India, there are all the people of Bangladesh being made refugees.

And then there is the alarming prospect of rehabilitating all these people again. What does this really mean again in terms of effort and cost. Aid and Relief in an uncommitted way becomes enormous waste, not only of resources, but the most inhuman waste of persons. All our Aid efforts must go into development and the betterment of human life, and how is this possible in a Relief Camp. We must then, work very strenuously for a political solution as well, maybe that is really the priority! We must risk a great deal. And if being more human means taking sides, and being biased, well then we have no

other choice.

We must also encourage our Muslim brothers to take action against the Pakistan Government. Muslims have said almost nothing openly and publicly on this matter, and also there are no Muslim organizations involved in the Relief task, though there are individual Muslims doing a great work.

Many organizations and individuals have spoken very forthrightly, and have put forth lines of action. This has happened all over the world resulting in many declarations and resolutions and articles, etc. This is all well. I strongly feel now that all our efforts must be directly at our Governments to take decisive action. Let us use all the ingenuity, resources and talents at our disposal, this is, if we really care about people. Our efforts, not forgetting Relief Aid too, must be sustained in such a way as to make our Governments really uncomfortable on this matter. For let's face it, unless we go at the real power bases where all the major decisions are made about what happens to our and others lives, all our resolutions, writings, donations, add up to naught. I suggest the following for immediate action:

- Suspend all Aid and support of any form being given to Pakistan immediately.
- Provide more Aid in money and kind to Indian Government immediately for the Relief effort.
- Provide Aid and Relief in Bangladesh only under the control of the Red Cross UNICEF, or UN, and not to the Government of Pakistan.
- Press for the immediate, unconditional release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, so that political solutions can be set in motion immediately.
- Recognition of PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLA DESH.

The only other alternative is to let things remain as they are!

Finally, it is not a matter of doing all this "before it is too late", as it is already much too late! Need one say any more. We must ask ourselves just how seriously we believe in the solidarity of the human family, for it is becoming painfully clear, especially to the East Bengalees, that some members of our family really do not matter at all.

"JOI BANGLA".



A sketch by a Bengali artist living in Calcutta. "Bangladesh must be free of the oppressor."