East-West in Pakistan

(By a Dacca Muslim)

Karachi has been forced to drop Pakistan's First Five Year Plan, following persistent protest and agitation. East Pakistan's indictment against the Central Government is grave and on many counts—representation in administrative and defence services, licenses, Government contracts.

The relations between the two wings are now being straightened and some of the long standing grievances of the people of East Pakistan are being redressed by the new Government. But apart from discrimination against and apathy to the East Bengali, the pattern of trade between the two wings is increasingly showing the character for full autonomy for East Pakistan.

PAKISTAN is a geographical curiosity, if not a monstrosity. It consists of two parts standing apart at a distance of more than a thousand miles of alien soil, not so friendly. West Pakistan embraces East Pakistan, but roughly a tenth and miles of alien soil, not so friendly. West Pakistan embraces East Pakistan, but roughly a tenth.

East Pakistan is annually inundated by flood water inasmuch as it is a revered deltaic region. The important products of W P are wheat and cotton, and those of E P jute and rice. The contrast does not end there. Most areas of West Pakistan, particularly those of West Punjab and Sind, are in the possession of not more than a dozen zamindars, served by millions of landless cultivators who have no stake in the land. In East Pakistan, the picture is different. The Zamindari system has been abolished there; but even before this abolition, the tenancy was mostly permanent, and the cultivators were in full possession of their land.

Conditions in West Pakistan

The result of the prevalence of two different systems of tenancy in the two wings has been rather queer. There is no semblance of democracy in W P as the landless labourers (who are ryots) have to cast their votes according to the dictates of their zamindars. That is why in the last nine years the same set of people are being elected to the assembly. These zamindars may apparently be at loggerheads with one another; but there are ties of matrimony binding them. The officer rank in the defence force is drawn from their families, while the great majority of the secretaries of the Government Departments are nominated members of the I C S who secured their positions on the strength of the services rendered by their ancestors to the British Government. They come either from the Punjab or U P.

So the elected zamindari legislators have their own men as Government secretaries, executives and officers in the armed forces. This has advantages as well as disadvantages. Politically, they can consolidate their position and get things done more quickly and effectively. It also facilitates their getting financial sanction expeditiously, and that for purposes not always desirable. They can also secure business facilities and Government contracts for their friends and relatives easily.

But this state of affairs has its disadvantages too. If a relative gets a seat in the Central Cabinet, the rest of the clan may not view it with favour. Family jealousy may arise and lead to squabbling. This causes difficulties. Sindhis may not like Punjabis, and Frontier men may not look with favour on Punjabis. There is some sort of ill-feeling between Sind and Punjab on the one hand and N W F and Punjab on the other. For many years to come, I am sure this animosity will account for political instability.

East Pakistan Presents Contrast

In East Pakistan the picture is entirely different. People are politically more conscious. The last general elections have indisputably proved that there are really no vested interests there. Completely new faces appeared on the political scene, owing to the universal unpopularity of the Muslim League Government in E P. There are progressive elements who are out to do away with vested interests and bring about a complete regeneration of socio-economic life. The rise to power of the Awami League can be looked upon as the triumph of democratic forces in Pakistan. The Awami League will be in power in E P at least for the next ten years. Mr Ataur Rahaman's Government has successfully tackled the acute food problem and initiated several schemes to improve agricultural production there. But he will need time to reorganise the administrative system completely and to strengthen his hold on the Central Government.

Economic Exploitation by West

E P has not had its due from the Central Government. Almost all the secretaries and deputy secretaries are either from W P or U P. Their interest in E P is rather remote and lukewarm. E P's representation in the Central services, both in the gazetted and non-gazetted ranks, is less than one per cent.

(1) Karachi, situated in West Pakistan, is the seat of the Central Government. Almost all the secretaries and deputy secretaries are either from W P or U P. Their interest in E P is rather remote and lukewarm. E P's representation in the Central services, both in the gazetted and non-gazetted ranks, is less than one per cent.

(2) Ninety per cent of the Central Government's expenditure is made in W P. The place of expenditure, either developmental or non-developmental, is of importance in the context of Pakistan, comprising, as it does, of two wings situated at a great distance from each other, with little economic mobility between them. In the circumstances, the 'multiplier' effect cannot percolate from one wing to the other.

(3) The bulk of foreign-exchange earnings (almost 75 per cent) is made by E P; but as the office of the Controller of Imports and Exports is situated at Karachi, most of the import licences have come to be issued to West Pakistan importers. There has been continued scarcity of consumer goods in E P and acute pressure of inflation. E P got notes for its exports, and W P got goods against E P exports. As there is mobility of resources on the financial plan, profits earned in
trading sectors by non-E P agencies were transferred to W P.

(4) About 60 to 70 per cent of the budget of the Central Government is devoted to Armed Forces, which are manned by people from only one province. This means one-way traffic of resources from E P to W P.

(5) In diplomatic services and foreign missions, the people of East Pakistan have hardly had any representation at all. This has caused bitterness among the intelligentsia of this province.

Better Days Ahead

But it is to be hoped that under the present regime and under the able leadership of Mr Suhrawardy, things will take a different turn. The people of E P are looking for better days ahead.

Although it is quite early to speculate about the lines on which administrative reorganisation and economic rehabilitation will take place ultimately, we can note a few signs already.

On the administrative side, a number of transfers of secretarial bosses have been effected between the two wings. The efficiency of an officer lies in his ability to evoke confidence in his subordinates and other individuals with whom he comes in contact every day. A son of the soil is likely to be a better administrator than one from outside. This consideration induced the E P Government to call back most of its young men in the civil and police services posted in W P. The Government is determined to stamp out all types of corruption at all levels. Many high-ranking officials, together with a host of subordinates, are passing anxious days because of their embarrassing entanglements.

Why Joint Electorate?

It is for the first time that regular sessions of both the Provincial and Central legislatures are taking place, and important decisions are being reached after animated discussions. Recently the E P legislature gave its verdict on the type of electorate to be fostered. In spite of lakhs of rupees being spent on propaganda by the already disgraced Muslim League and other vested interests like those of Adamjee and Ispahani and the rushing in of fanatic leaders like Nadvi and Husani, the E P public stuck to the proposal for a joint electorate. A joint electorate is of fundamental importance to E P. It will bring about political stability, and cement the bonds between the two major communities. For W P and the Muslim League, however, it meant cutting at the root of all vested interests. It is not Islam that is in danger but vested interests and the licence-receiving categories. Conditions relating to government service have been changed. All the services have been thrown open to all sections of the people irrespective of caste, creed and faith. This has revived confidence in the minority community. Far-reaching improvements in the present educational system of E P are being contemplated by its Chief Minister. At the repeated insistence of Maulana Bhasani, Mr Suhrawardy has promised to place before Parliament all the treaties and foreign obligations entered into by the Pakistan Government so far. At last democratic forces have triumphed over reaction. These are really happy auguries which an objective analyst should not lose sight of.