

Books

Pakistan Crisis

by David Loshak

(McGraw-Hill; 152 pp.; \$6.95)

The East Pakistan Tragedy

by L. Rushbrook Williams

(Drake; 142 pp.; \$5.95)

Byron T. Mook

No one who followed the events of 1970-71 on the Indian subcontinent could have remained detached from them. At least 300,000 people died in one of the biggest natural disasters in recorded history. Perhaps 2 million more were killed in an army crackdown on a popular revolution. Ten million refugees fled their homes. Great Powers took sides and threatened to become involved. What should the world have learned from such a cataclysm?

Many lessons are obvious. One is the perils of military aid. Another is the implicit racial bias in American foreign policy (cf. our aid to Nicaragua at the time of its recent earthquake). Perhaps the most obvious one, however, concerns the long-term unviability of military government. The Pakistani experience provides an almost ideal case study of how difficult it is for such a government to turn effective power back to civilians. The longer it remains in control, the harder such a transition becomes. As General Yahya Khan tried to preside over a return to the barracks in 1969-71, he discovered just how narrow his options were.

Some specifics will illustrate this point. First, the years since the original military coup in 1958 had seen the eclipse of many old political leaders and their replacement by

men whom the military system had martyred. These new men were not generally types willing to make compromises with the armed forces. Second, a related point, there was a lack of moderate politicians in the country. All those who had tried to work within the military system had been disgraced. Third, there had been an almost total destruction of political parties, with the result that contending politicians in the 1970 elections (which General Yahya had planned as the first step in the transition to civilian rule) were not bound by past commitments or organizational constraints. Fourth, General Yahya had elements of his own military who had made alliances with various minority politicians, to whose "vetoes" over future constitutional arrangements he had to be sensitive. And fifth, the campaign itself provoked a high level of popular mobilization, both as a protest against past policies and because elections were simply new and different kinds of events. Once such mobilization had occurred and hopes aroused, it was impossible to send people back to their villages without results.

These difficulties were most obvious as General Yahya tried to deal with the question of East Pakistan. The "regional" issue—relations between Bengal and the central gov-

ernment—had bedeviled Pakistan ever since its formation, but the military regime had done little to blunt it. Approximately 60 per cent of the national budget continued to go to armed forces who were composed of more than 90 per cent "Westerners." The number of top Bengali civil servants in the country stayed at roughly 15 per cent, even though Bengalis made up more than half the national population. Most economic development funds were spent in the West. When the 1970 elections gave Bengal an opportunity to register its disapproval of such "colonial" policies, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League won a majority there sufficient to command a majority in the country as a whole.

As a result General Yahya was unexpectedly thrust into the position which many military leaders and other West Pakistanis had always feared, that of turning over national government to Bengalis. He equivocated and negotiated, but finally gave in by postponing the meeting of the new National Assembly. Sheikh Mujib responded to that action by calling for a general strike in the East, which General Yahya countered with military suppression. After that, the story is well known. . . . Army brutality was met with resistance, which brought more repression and eventually guerrilla war. Refugees streamed across the Indian border into West Bengal. The Indian government appealed to Pakistan to halt the bloodshed and to the world community to help care for the refugees. But when both pleas fell on deaf ears, India intervened. The ensuing struggle was soon over. Bangladesh was declared independent, General Yahya turned over the government of what was left of Pakistan to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Sheikh Mujib was released from prison in the West to return to Dacca in triumph as the head of a new nation and a new government. The thirteen-year attempt of the military to turn political power back to civilians had been a total failure.

David Loshak became South Asia

correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* in 1969. L. Rushbrook Williams is an elderly South Asian historian, who made his first trip to the subcontinent in 1914 and who has written widely about its politics. Both of their books were completed before the final denouement of the Bangladesh crisis. Both books are essentially chronologies of events in Pakistan up to the summer of 1971.

Despite similarities in structure and purpose, however, the two interpretations are radically different. Loshak is generally pro-Bengali. His book is full of the familiar facts concerning West Pakistani exploitation of the East. His argument that the violence which engulfed Bengal in the summer and fall of 1971 was the work of the army, not of Awami League militants, is the standard Bengali one. He deplores the actions, and nonactions, of the Great Powers during the conflict.

At the same time, however, Loshak's work is much too full of a sense of inevitability. He contends repeatedly that Pakistan was never a viable political entity and that cultural and economic differences between its peoples made compromise impossible. Given this perspective, he sees all actors in 1969-71 playing their parts on a stage in which the outcome has already been determined. General Yahya was probably well intentioned, Loshak says, but his efforts were doomed from the start. Sheikh Mujib tried to find a common ground with the military, but East Bengal was bound to become an independent state anyway. Such arguments are seductive, and indeed logical, if one forgets that the constraints on the transition to civilian rule were basically military ones. Pakistan was not doomed because its two parts were geographically separated, or because its people were culturally different, or because the West had exploited the East for twenty-five years. It fell apart instead because the military could not bear to turn the national government over to Bengalis. Sheikh Mujib wanted to be prime minister of a united Pakistan.

Rushbrook Williams provides a dramatic contrast. He is militantly pro-Pakistani. An overwhelming concern that the Pakistani government has been unjustly maligned is evident throughout his book. The case rests on two key points: (1) that General Yahya and the military were genuinely disinterested in the results of the 1970 election and would have abided by whatever results it produced; and (2) that the violence in Bengal was brought about by Awami League irresponsibility and that the army acted only to contain it.

Both claims are false. Even if General Yahya himself was sincere in seeking a return to civilian government, the military had its conditions. A "Legal Framework Order" made public in March, 1970, specified that no serious political decentralization was to be permitted (as Mujib demanded) and that the military government was to approve

whatever constitution the new Assembly drew up. And on the second point, though there undoubtedly is evidence of widespread civil disorder in the period before the military crackdown on March 25, 1971, the vast majority of the slaughter in Bengal occurred *after* that event.

Nevertheless, Rushbrook Williams's book is valuable because it is partisan. It will probably stand as one of the major statements of the Pakistani position. Some of his material evidently comes from the "many and informal talks" he reports having had with General Yahya. His account of the final talks General Yahya had with Sheikh Mujib in Dacca in March, 1971, is one of the only ones available. In contrast, Loshak's book is more complete and more balanced, but also less interesting and certainly less provocative. No true Bengali version of the events of 1969-71 is yet available in an American edition.

My War With the CIA: The Memoirs of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as related to Wilfred Burchett

(Pantheon; 273 pp.; \$7.95)

Tran Van Dinh

The most revered divinity in Cambodia is the benevolent Naga. The Naga, Serpent Gods of the nether regions, are identified with the genies of the waters who held first place in the local cults. The Kings of Angkor themselves claimed descent from the union of an exiled Indian prince and the daughter of the King of the Naga, who gave to his daughter as dowry the soil of Cambodia after drinking the water that covered it. Indeed, the civilization of Cambodia has been a civilization of the water, by the water and for the water. Yet the Naga today seem to be helpless in drying up the rains of death from the American Eagle.

Until three years ago the 6.5 million people of Cambodia lived in peace, protected by the omnipotent Naga and by their leader, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, from the war that ravaged their neighbors. In March, 1970, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who has consistently maintained a posture of neutrality for his country, was deposed while he was abroad on an official visit to the USSR by a coup d'état staged by Marshal Lon Nol. In his *Memoirs* he accuses the CIA of being the promoter of the coup. To him, the coup was the most decisive chapter in his war with the CIA, a war which dated back to 1955.

According to Sihanouk's own ac-