

Failing Conflict Management between Federation and Unit: An Analysis of Conflict Management between the Federation of Pakistan and East Pakistan

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Abstract

The history of Intergovernmental relations in Pakistan is full of conflicts and clashes between Center and its federating units since the creation of this country. At the time of creation the federation of Pakistan was composed of Center and five federating units. Those federating units were home of distinct ethnic sub-nationalities which included Bengalis in East Pakistan, Punjabis in Punjab, Sindhis in Sind, Pukhtoons in NWFP and Baluch in Baluchistan. The people who migrated from Muslim minority provinces of undivided India had different culture and language from indigenous sub-nationalities who resided in the cities of Sindh and few cities in Punjab, such as Multan and Lahore. But the majority of those migrants settled in major cities of the province of Sindh.

The multi-ethnic federal structure of Pakistan needed a delicate balance among units and with center. The leadership of the federation failed to develop a balance among them not only through action but also through unjust policies. Pakistan complex ethnic structure and typical geography, that is, two part of a country are twelve hundred kilometer away from each other, in fact posed a serious threat to the national integration in the nascent state.

The ruling elites of Pakistan, by and large, failed to produce an accepted legal document that could have cemented the unique physical and political structure of the country. Pakistan's successive failures in decentralizing the administrative machinery proved fatal for the country's territorial integrity in 1971 and later on perpetuate the forces of disintegration among the remaining federating units.

Keywords: Conflict management, Pakistan, East Pakistan, Bangladesh, Analysis.

1. Socio-economic Roots of the Conflict

Pakistan has long been enduring conflicts and clashes within and amongst their own federated units. Beside the structural reasons, this conflicting situation between Center and Provinces was the outcome of the policies that failed to meet the expectations of the people. These policies provoked the sense of provincialism and parochialism that eventually inflicted below in 1971. Such feelings can also be seen even in post 1971 Pakistan among its smaller provinces.

Religious rationale for the creation of Pakistan could not prevent further division of the homeland. It was the great challenge for the Muslim League (the party that led the struggle for Pakistan) to define and reorganize the nation in accordance with the realities of the new state of Pakistan. By and large Muslim League was failed in this task. The reasons of failure were many. First, Muslim League did not establish its roots in the provinces, which later on had to form West Pakistan (Punjab, Sind, NWFP and Baluchistan). Second, Pakistan movement was overwhelmingly launched in the Muslim minority provinces of undivided India. Third, at the time of partition of India the pendulum of power moved towards West Pakistan and the Muslim League leadership had ignored the Bengalis' role in the struggle for Pakistan. Fourth, in the sphere of political mobilization, Muslim League, after the independence, failed to interact with the local

population. Moreover, the social and class composition of the West Pakistani political elite made the Muslim League subservient to the military-bureaucratic oligarchy.

The province of East Pakistan East, twelve hundred miles away from the West Pakistan, was entirely different in so many ways. Bengalis were proud of their rich cultural and literary heritage, which has evolved through centuries. During the colonial period, Bengal had gone through successive land reforms that paved the way for socio-economic changes in the Bengali class structure. The means of production, crops, topography and even climate were also different from West Pakistan. Bengalis' aspirations from the new state of Pakistan were first met with disappointment when Jinnah announced Karachi the capital of the new state and Urdu as the national language. The Bengali middle class sensed in the early phases of Pakistan that the Center's tilt toward West Pakistan's feudal elites to protect and promote their economic and political interests.

In the idea of Pakistan, the Bengali middle class viewed emancipation from well-established Hindu domination in economic sphere. The economic rational was also the source of enthusiasm among the middle class of the both wings of Pakistan. Lahore resolution in fact touched the heart of the people of East Pakistan because of its unambiguous stance on provincial autonomy. But this dream never came true. The twenty-three years of domination of West Pakistan over its Eastern wing can be described as policy failure in political and economic sphere of the country. Let us take the economy first.

Transfer of resources was the major issue between Center and East Pakistan. In the two decades of 1950s and 1960s Rs.113,340 million was spent in the West Pakistan on revenue and development account compared to Rs.43,400 million in the East Wing. Out of total inflow of external resources (grants and loans) of 65,070 million, East Pakistan's share was Rs. 19,333 million or 30 per cent (Sobhan & Ahmad, 1980). Such policies and the modes of surplus extraction from East Pakistan to West Pakistan injected disparities between the two wings and the political economy of such intergovernmental relations led to final break up of East Pakistan from West Pakistan.

The capitalist class in Pakistan shows a clear domination of West Pakistanis in private sector. For example, in manufacturing sector at the time of independence Non-Bengalis business houses controlled 47 per cent of fixed assets and 72 per cent of private industrial assets. Like in financial sector, banking and insurance, non-Bengalis controlled foreign trade and construction industries. West Pakistani entrepreneurs had the capital and skills to penetrate the economy of East Pakistan. Because of the government policies, they were also in better position to take advantage of from the allocated resources of East Pakistan (Papanek, 1969). For example, 29 per cent loans advanced by IDBP and 37.4 per cent of loans advanced by PICIC went to Non-Bengali entrepreneurs before 1971 (Sobhan & Ahmad, 1980).

Few business families from West Pakistan monopolized the economy of the country. According to Lawrence J. White, 43 families controlling 72.8 per cent of all assets of Pakistani controlled firms operating in Pakistan in 1962, listed on the stock exchange. In manufacturing the same families controlled 73.7 per cent assets. In private sector these families controlled the 45.1 per cent of the total assets (Papanek, 1969). Under such colonial character of the Central government in Pakistan, the Awami League became the center point of hopes for the Bengali people and the struggle for dominance in economic domain crossed the threshold of the political sphere of Pakistan.

2. Political Causes of the Conflict

The political development in Pakistan was largely shaped by the structural disparities in size, population, and resources and in other social indicators like poverty, employment and education. Punjab being the big and resourceful province intended to take the leadership of newly independent state of Pakistan. Its main competitor was East Pakistan, which was bigger than Punjab in population and also far ahead in education. Punjab's feudal leadership viewed the demands of the Bengali people for their constitutional rights as threat to their monopoly over power (Ziring, 1980).

Contrasting class structure in East Pakistan and Punjab was also a factor of recurring conflicts between the two provinces. The growing tussle between Center and East Pakistan had reached to such intensity that repeatedly disrupted the democratic system of government.

Following the murder of the Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan on October 16, 1951, and the feudal elites decided to remove old comrades of Jinnah from power. Ishphahni, Chundrigar and Ghazanfar Ali were

removed from their positions as ambassadors to foreign countries. Mandal went back to India and Abdur Rab Nishtar was forced to resign (Ziring, 1980). Bengali Prime Minister Khawja Nazimuddin's removal from office was resented widely specially in East Pakistan. It was taken as an anti-Bengali measure, indeed as it was. The Muslim League (ML) as a political party was not in a position to resist this step which was allegedly supported by the Army and could not mobilize the masses against this unconstitutional decision. The worst outcome of this resulted in the widening of the gulf between Bengali and the Punjab-dominated Center. By removing Khawja Nazimuddin, the political leadership went into the hands of former Unionist (Ziring, 1980).

Not only in East Pakistan, anti-Punjab-dominated Center feelings were gaining grounds in the smaller provinces of West Pakistan. The veteran Sindhi leader, G.M. Syed, who launched struggle for Pakistan in the province of Sind, later on, lamented on his action and described it as great blunder. He was convinced that the Punjab's domination was the sole cause of Sindhis' misery. In an interview he said in reference to the solution of Sindh's problem "that Sindh should become autonomous, and second, Punjab should not foisted by the Center at the regional level. Then no power on earth could separate Sindh from Pakistan (Syed, 1995). NWFP and Baluchistan had also long list of grievances with the Center.

The people of East Pakistan tried to win the support of smaller provinces of the West Pakistan because of their criticism they often leveled against the policies of the Center (Sayeed, 1980). But strong triangle among military, bureaucracy and feudal made all effort futile for combined opposition by the smaller provinces. The alliance of the feudal, military and bureaucracy influenced the civilian governments in sensitive policy areas of national integration and economic development. The civil servants had become instrumental in strengthening the troika of feudal, military and bureaucracy (Parmanand, 1988). Punjab's propaganda of national integration and the ideology of Pakistan viewed by the smaller provinces as a cover to its power-grabbing policies at the Center (Ziring, 1980). The ruling bureaucracy was never interested in true democracy rather it used political governments as its subordinate institutions.

With the backing of General Ayub Khan, Mohammed Ali Bogra was appointed as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Within a short period of six months, Bogra presented his constitutional formula on 17 October 1953 through which Urdu and Bengali were declared the nation's official languages. It was an attempt to create harmony between the two wings but all was in vain. The main aspect of Bogra's formula, the principle of equality, was taken as a step to diminish the East Pakistan majority and make it equal to West Pakistan in terms of equal presentation in the upper house (Mahmood, 1992).

Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra attempted to reduce the power of the Governor General through constitutional amendment. Governor General Ghulam Muahammad, a furious old man, asked General Ayub Khan for Martial law to deter Bogra's move. General Ayub was not in favor of Martial Law at this stage, however he gave his tacit approval for the dismissal of Bogra government. Ghulam Muhammad dissolved the Bogra government on December 26th, 1954.

It was not the first time. Prime Minister Khawja Nazimuddin was already removed the Governor General in 1953. There was no political power and institutions to raise voice against this illegal act of the Governor General. Moulvi Tamizuddin a Bengali Speaker of the dissolved assembly, in his personal capacity challenged the decision in the Sind High Court. The High Court announced its decision in favor of Moulvi Tamizzuddin and declared Governor General's action illegal. The Government brought this issue to the Federal Court where Chief Justice Munir endorsed the decision of the Governor General under the "Law of Necessity". However, after his retirement, Justice Munir confessed that the Federal Court's decision was taken under tremendous political pressure.

The helplessness of the Judiciary paved the way for one man dictatorship in the politics of Pakistan. The impact of this trend in Pakistani politics resulted into the military coup of 1958 by General Muhammad Ayub Khan. Hamza Alvi pointed out that the coup d'état of October 1958 was not a seizure of power; Iskander Mirza as President and Ayub Khan as Commander-in-Chief already held the reins of effective power. It was rather a dismissal of the politicians and a dismantling of the constitutional apparatus on the eve of the first general elections (Alvi, 1966). Myroner rightly concludes that the president's proclamation abrogating the constitution, eliminating the Central and Provincial legislatures and abolishing all the political parties actually brought Pakistan's political theory abreast of its political realities (Weiner, 1960).

General Ayub Khan, instead of bridging the gap between East and West Pakistan, adopted coercive policies against East Pakistan. He introduced a Presidential system of Government based on what he called 'Basic Democracy'. Elections were held under the new legal framework in which Electoral College of 80,000 basic democrats, hand picks of Ayub Khan, elected General Ayub Khan as President of Pakistan. Moreover the Centralist tendencies in President Ayub's policies further widened the gulf between East and West Pakistan. His views about Bengalis were based on racial discrimination. He once expressed his views in following words:

"East Bengalis probably belong to the very original Indian races... until the creation of Pakistan they had not known any real freedom or sovereignty... In addition they have been, and still are, under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence. As such they have all the inhibitions of downtrodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the newborn freedom".

Such views clearly indicate that Ayub Khan's regime was not sincere in genuine efforts to bridge the gulf between the two wings of Pakistan. Other measures under the 1962 constitution for removal of economic disparity between the two wings of Pakistan proved futile and provocative. For example on the working of the National Economic Council which was established to remove East-West economic disparity, MahbulHaq's, member parliament from East Wing, resentment in the assembly may be noted: "Now, Sir, 1962 is gone, 1963 is gone, and 1964 is going. Although it is a constitutional obligation that the National Economic Council must submit a report to the National Assembly every year, it has not been done even once, and this is the way we are working our constitution.

3. Demand for Provincial Autonomy

The claim of parity in the federal Budgets was seldom manifested in fiscal years. The federal government responses to the natural calamities like flood and cyclones came under severe criticism by the political leadership of the East Pakistan. In 1965, a devastating cyclone hit the coastal population affecting 10 million people. Tidal waves washed away about 30 thousand persons. Private property damage was estimated at Rs. 300 crores. The Governor of East Pakistan did not visit the affected areas in a week. A grant of Rs. 1 crores and 75 lakhs only was made for purposes of relief work. Federal government did not take appropriate steps on permanent basis to prevent from natural catastrophes in East Pakistan. This showed the indifference of those who held the power at the Center to the incalculable distress of East Pakistanis. Economic disparity between East and West Pakistan is a topic, which needs a dissertation to itself. However we can estimate the gravity of inter-wing disparity by the speech of MahboobulHaq in the National Assembly in 1964. He said:

"In respect of agriculture, transport, industry and other sectors, everywhere the position was in favor of East Pakistan in 1947 which has been reversed by 1964. There is a pure colonial practice. There is a sort of colonization of East Pakistan by different ways which I would enumerate in brief...."

1. By transferring East Pakistan's surplus foreign exchange resources with which West Pakistan meets her consumption and capital goods requirements.
2. By buying raw-materials from abroad with East Pakistan's foreign exchange, reprocessing these raw-materials into finished products and exporting these manufactures to East Pakistan.
3. By directly concluding bilateral barter deals with individual countries to obtain development goods for West Pakistan in exchange of East Pakistan's jute.
4. By importing, in some cases, raw-materials from East Pakistan, processing them into finished products and sending these back to West Pakistan market for sale. This is happening in the case of hides and skins and leather goods in particular.
5. By 'sheltering' the East Pakistan market against competition from abroad because of which East Pakistan has to pay higher prices for west Pakistan manufacturers.
6. By transferring the profits of West Pakistan business enterprises and industrial establishments [located in the East Wing] to West Pakistan.

7. By employing more West Pakistanis in various government, semi-government, trade and commercial agencies in East Pakistan and transferring a part of their monthly income to West Pakistan¹.”

This situation convinced Bengalis to rid themselves of the economic stranglehold of West Pakistan only if they would have to enjoy political autonomy. The extent to which Ayub's regime mishandled East Pakistan was evident in the Bengali response. By 1966 the mainstream political parties of East Bengal had adopted a platform, with a one point agenda of lose nonfederal structure of the country. The proposals for confederation between the two geographic units were summarized in the six-point formula of the Awami League. The six points were originally put forward in 1966 and later amended and incorporated in the 1970 election manifesto of the Awami League:

1. The character of the government shall be federal and parliamentary.
2. The federal government shall be responsible for only defense and foreign affairs.
3. There shall be two separate currencies mutually or freely convertible in each wing.
4. Fiscal policy shall be the responsibility of the federating unit.
5. Separate accounts shall be maintained of the foreign exchange earnings of each of the federating units.
6. Federating units shall be empowered to maintain a militia or parliamentary force.

Six points formula of Awami League demanded the political structure of the country that falls between provincial autonomy and confederation. The ruling elites of the West Pakistan and Federal government were not ready to decentralize power. Center adopted oppressive measure to suppress political agitation in the East Pakistan and country was heading towards anarchic situation.

When the state of affairs ceased to work, President Ayub stepped down from the power and handed over the charge to another military general, Mohammad Yahya Khan. Failure in addressing the genuine grievances of the people of East Pakistan, Yahya Khan ordered armed forces to suppress what he called Bengali insurgency on March 25, 1971. This decision proved fatal for the very existence of Pakistan and the war ended with the emergence of Independent state of Bangladesh.

5. Conclusion

In 1971, the remaining four provinces formed the federation of Pakistan. Now this Pakistan was a new Pakistan, territorially integrated but culturally and ethnically divided. It was best time to revise the wrong policies that resulted into a secessionist feeling, deprived feeling and left small units with strong sense of alienation from mainstream.

But when we look at present Pakistan and start counting events from 1971, a neutral observer of Pakistan's politics will comment that the federation of Pakistan did not learn much from the 1971 tragedy. Let take quick look on events: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's action in NWFP, and Baluchistan, Bhutto's eliminated through judicial decision; federation used force to curb MRD movement in interior of Sindh; federation used force in Karachi in the decade of 1990s twice to curb the growing power of a regional party; the disparity with in Punjab; Abbottabad killings to curb the demand of Hazara Province; and recently denial of the demand of the people of South Punjab for their own provinces and last but not least what is going on in Baluchistan.

Federation of Pakistan and people who controlled the federal policies is infected with ethnic discrimination which earlier proved fatal for the country. Federation of Pakistan and its custodian must realize that people's genuine demand for participation in decision making and development ought to be materialized in time. The continuous denial and rejection of district local government in true constitutional spirit by the so-called democratic parties eventually resulted in the demand of more provinces in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtoonkhaw and in Northern Areas. Federation has to devolve the power to local governments which is the best strategy to integrate Pakistan as one nation. Federation must rebuild its trust among its subject and always remain above of ethnic, sectarian and regional identities. The relationship between state and its citizens has to be reconstitute according to the constitution of Pakistan which commensurate with international standards of human rights.

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