

Sixty Years of Partition: Celebration or Lamentation

Sixty years ago the sub-continent was partitioned, bringing forth onto the world stage two new independent countries: India and Pakistan. The partition shaped the world we in the sub-continent all live in today, and reckoning with our Bangladeshi, Pakistani, or Indian identity means reckoning with partition and its aftermath. In this magisterial two-part essay, renowned columnist **K. Z. Islam** looks back after sixty years to provide a provocative, thought-provoking, and, above all richly researched and deeply considered analysis of how and why partition came about and what the consequences were for the sub-continent. The concluding part of this essay will be printed here tomorrow.

WHILE assessing sixty years of partition let us examine the ground realities existing in this South-Asian sub-continent today. South-Asia is the least integrated zone in the world. In this age of globalisation and regional cooperation which has led to prosperity of European Union, Asean, Apec, instead of cooperation we have been content with confrontation. Endeavours towards cooperation in the shape of Saarc, Sapta and Safta the progress is zero. Regional conflicts between India and Pakistan and Kashmir hardly promotes friendly relations.

When I attended the Saarc Businessmen Conclave in Bombay in February 2007 the fact that stood out conspicuously was how similar in appearance, English/Urdu/Hindi accent and friendly interpersonal warmth the six hundred delegates were from the Saarc countries. It was difficult to tell which delegate came from which country. At the personal level there was abundance of friendship and goodwill.

The most appropriate document to pore over first would be the Sachar Report on Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India (November 2006) The very fact that the Government of India thought it fit to enquire into the Muslim problem is a testimony enough to reflect how the Muslims are being left behind. This four hundred page report is an exceptionally candid document which details the backwardness of the Muslims in India.

Just one or two statistics to highlight the state of affairs. The current Muslim population is over 150 million about the same as Pakistan and Bangladesh which at the time of partition was about 50 million. At the current rate of growth

tion for special consideration for backward classes excludes most of the Muslims. The Mandal Commission report for the prosperity of Other Backward Classes (OBC) remains largely not implemented. There is an abundance of literature on the plight of Muslims in India. The prominent authors are A.G. Noorani, Mushirul Hasan, Bimal Prasad, etc.

Let us turn to the situation in Pakistan. It must be recalled that none of the provinces had Muslim League government in 1947; therefore, their concept of Pakistan is nowhere near what Jinnah had in mind. In the last 60 years Pakistan has had martial law government for 32 years and for the rest of the time political turmoil.

The very existence of Pakistan is threatened by Islamic extremism. By many Pakistan has been declared a failed state. In the present era of secular democratic governance can a state be based on religion?

Bangladesh fares slightly better as the country is ethnically, religiously and linguistically uniform. But still even Bangladesh in its 36 years existence has had 16 years of martial law.

M.C. Chagla, Jinnah's junior in his legal chamber once asked him what would happen to all the Muslims who would be left behind in India. Jinnah looked at Chagla for a while and said: "They will look after themselves. I am not interested in their fate."

Genesis of Partition

The Morley-Minto reforms of 1909, by requiring communities to vote separately accordingly to their faiths, had poisoned the atmosphere with communalism and encouraged the formation of political parties on religious lines, thus undercutting the support of a secular party like the Congress.

Montagu Chelmsford reforms 1919 and later Ramsay McDonalds

The ultimate outcome of the Round Table Conferences was the definitive Government of India Act 1935. The chief aim of the act was to maintain the unity of India by federating the Princely States with the British-Indian provinces, and by granting responsible government to the provinces. These measures were the initial steps to grant full dominion status to India.

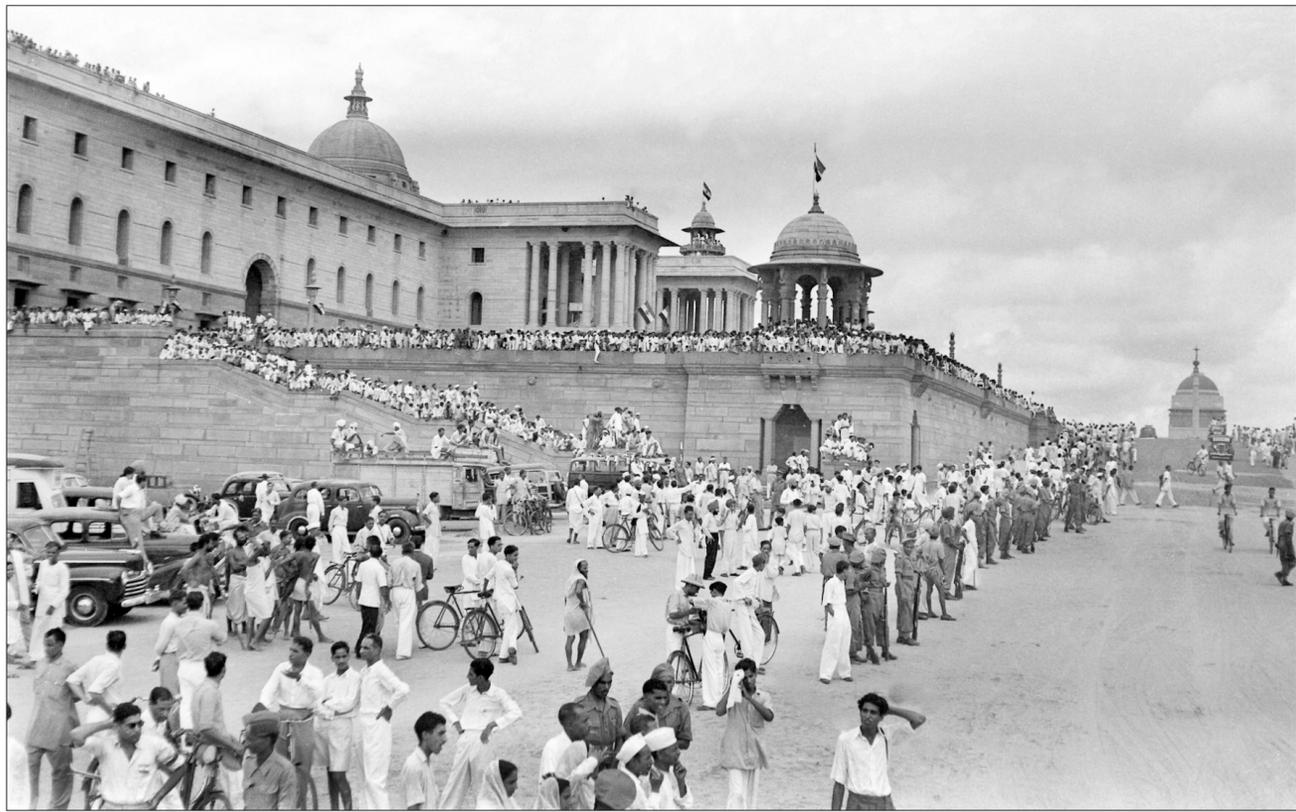
If the 1935 Act had been fully implemented and responsible government had been established at the centre before the outbreak of the war, the story of the Transfer of Power in India might have been different. Independence would have perhaps come no later than it did, but partition might have been avoided.

In the elections held in October 1936 Congress emerged as a majority party in five provinces and largest single party in two others. On the contrary the Muslim League's showing was extremely poor with the League gaining only 105 seats out of 489 reserved for Muslims. At first Congress refused to form ministries in their majority provinces but finally joined in July 1937 in order "to destroy the constitution from within."

At the same time Congress, in its hesitation to accept office missed chances of forming coalition government in Bengal and Punjab. Had the Congress shown some flexibility and tolerance with the League and the Princes there was a good chance of forming the Federation.

For various factors the Federation envisaged in the 1935 Act never took off. One of the factors, which helped to kill the Federation, was the hostility of the Muslim League towards the Federation as the League failed to form a government in any of the provinces.

The elections in the United



August 15, 1947: Crowds of revellers gather to celebrate independence from Britain around Rasina Hill in New Delhi.

A very strange incident occurred at this time as the Congress offered a coalition government to Muslim League in UP provided the UP League agreed to cease to function as a separate group in the legislature. This would be the price for taking one or two members in the UP cabinet.

Naturally this condition was unacceptable to the League, which resulted not only in the withdrawal of the offer but had countrywide repercussion heralding the parting of ways between the Congress and the League.

In Bengal out of the 119 seats reserved for the Muslims, Independents got 43, Muslim League 39, and Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party 36. The obvious choice before the parties was a Congress-KPP coalition, which

other Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. In the League-KPP coalition Fazlul Huq became chief minister, Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin were also included in the cabinet. This was just the beginning of Jinnah's scheme.

During the Muslim League-KPP government Fazlul Huq tried his best for communal harmony. In fact, in the cabinet Hindu-Muslims were equal in number. Also with Muslim League pressure, KPP was sidetracked. On December 5, 1941 Fazlul Huq was expelled by Jinnah for writing an outspoken letter regarding his membership of the Viceroy's Defense Council. Actually this was not a major issue since Jinnah was helping the British government in defence matters.

Fazlul Huq's Shyama-Huq

was treated on the same basis as Mr. Gandhi. I was wonderstruck why all of a sudden I was promoted and given a place side by side with Mr. Gandhi."

Congress started agitating against the British government for taking India into the war without consultation with the Indian leaders. To meet the exigencies of the war Viceroy Linlithgow set about strengthening the League so that it would be on an equal footing with the Congress.

The British government via Linlithgow began to urge Muslim League to put forward "concrete proposals" to counteract Congress's demand for independence. Linlithgow spoke to Jinnah on several occasions, telling him that unless he took some positive actions the League's case would

1942 to 1950 Stafford Cripps was a powerful member of both Churchill and Attlee cabinets. In fact, it will be seen that Cripps was in the driving seat in Indian affairs and played a pivotal role in the independence of India. Nehru and Cripps were old friends Cripps was publicly calling Nehru's friendship, the greatest privilege of his life.

On Nehru's visit to Europe in 1938, he and his daughter Indira stayed with Cripps one weekend at Goodfellows. On that weekend the other house guests included Attlee, Bevan, and Laski. It was here that the basis of the plan for Indian independence was first formulated.

On the intervention of the US president to placate India, British government sent Stafford Cripps in March 1942 with a proposal to give assurance about self rule by the

Indian problem was put on the backburner. Jinnah's position remained firm throughout the remaining years of World War II and the League was given equal status as Congress. In June 1943 Linlithgow was replaced by Lord Wavell as the Viceroy of India. Wavell's tenure was a benevolent sympathetic and neutral period of governance.

Wavell tried his best to keep India united. Not much happened till the end of the war when the Congress leaders were released from jail when Labour Party came into power in Britain. In an endeavour to form a totally Indian interim government, Wavell summoned some prominent leaders to Simla in June 1945. Twenty two political leaders of India assembled in Simla.



Left to Right 1: Mahatma Gandhi (C) visits Muslim refugees at Purana Qila in New Delhi, as they prepare to depart to Pakistan, September 22, 1947. 2: Governor General Lord Mountbatten (C) salutes the national flag as it is hoisted at India Gate in New Delhi, as Lady Edwina (2R) and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (R) look on, August 15, 1947. 3: Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Father of the nation of Pakistan poses for photographers during an interview in Karachi, Pakistan, September 18, 1947.

in the decade of 2030s the Muslim population would stabilise at about 320 million. The presence of Muslims was found to be only 3% in the IAS, 1.8% in the IFS and 4% in the IPS.

Communal Award gave it further extension. The 1919 Act provided that its working would be reviewed in ten years. This led to the holding of three Round Table Conferences in 1931-32 to frame a scheme of a Dominion Constitution for India.

Provinces (UP) caused a serious rift between the Congress and the Muslim League. Congress had won 133 seats out of 228 against only 27 by the League. Till the elections in 1931-32 to frame a scheme of a Dominion Constitution for India.

totalled 96 and another 30 to form a majority could have easily been obtained from the Independent members. But the largest party Congress (60 seats) could have initiated a proposal for a coalition had it not been for the indecision of the All India Congress Committee (AICC).

Nevertheless, Congress-KPP coalition had been reached but at the signing ceremony Congress backed out on a flimsy ground no doubt following orders from Congress high command. This event is elaborately recorded by eyewitness Abul Mansur Ahmed.

Then began the story of Muslim League-KPP coalition with the masterly intervention of Jinnah. Muslim League which had no footing in the rest of India used Bengal and its Muslims to establish the League India-wide. For details read the voluminous *Jinnah-Ispahani Correspondence*.

Not a leaf moved in Bengal without Jinnah's directive via M.A.H. Ispahani. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Jinnah rode on the backs of the Bengali Muslims to create Pakistan.

At that time apart from Jinnah there were only two Muslim leaders with the potential of All India leadership. One was Fazlul Huq and the

ministry sworn in December 11, 1941 collapsed on March 28, 1943 due to consistent and persistent sabotage by the Muslim League, making way for Nazimuddin to take over. Jinnah had conveniently got rid of Fazlul Huq who had no role to play after that.

A prominent leader like Suhrawardy was never inducted into the All India Muslim League Committee. This was a deliberate strategy of Jinnah not to allow Suhrawardy to become a national leader. In fact, had the Muslim League used leaders like Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy at the national level, the story of partition may have been different.

Jinnah's rise

There was nothing absolutely inevitable about the partition of India: prior to 1939 and the demand for the partition of the country on a communal basis had never been seriously considered. The outbreak of war in September 1939 and the subsequent resignation of the Congress ministries introduced a new element in the Indian politics: the Congress lost its bargaining power.

Jinnah was not slow to recognise the changed situation. He remarked: "After the war began ... I

go by default.

It is to counter this situation that the Muslim League passed the Lahore Resolution on March 23, 1940, which became known as the Pakistan Resolution. Very shrewdly Jinnah used Fazlul Huq to table this resolution in the Muslim League meeting. In retrospect we see that Linlithgow was the real author of the Pakistan Resolution.

All solutions hitherto thought of -- separate electorates, composite cabinets, reservation of seats -- suddenly became out of date. Undoubtedly, the Muslim military personnel helping the British war effort were by far out of proportion to the Muslim population. The great friend of the Muslims Winston Churchill held the view that 75% of the soldiers from India were Muslims.

No sooner had the Congress resigned from eight provinces Linlithgow promptly promulgated Section 93 Governor's rule and all was well for the British. Meanwhile, in the war the British forces suffered serious setback in the European sector and in South-East Asia also the British were on the retreat.

It is generally not appreciated the role Sir Stafford Cripps played in the Indian partition period. From

Indians after the war and to Indianise the viceroy's council.

The Cripps proposal was frustrated by Gandhi's infamous uttering: "a postdated cheque on a failing bank." Although all credit must be given to Gandhi for being consistently and persistently against partition of India, yet he must be given the accolade of being the first communalist Indian leader.

In 1915 when Gandhi returned from South Africa the Gujarat Society gave a welcome garden party chaired by Jinnah. Gandhi's response was: "I am glad to find a Mahomedan not only belonging to my region's Sabha but also chairing it." That first communal statement of Gandhi set the tone of their relationship, always at odds with the tensions and mistrust underlined its superficially polite manners.

With the failure of Cripps's mission ended another chance of keeping India united. Immediately afterwards the Congress launched their Quit India movement which compelled the British to incarcerate all the Indian leaders including Gandhi.

Meanwhile, the war situation had improved both in the Eastern and the Western Fronts and the

The general idea was to form an Indian interim government with the various contenders balanced. Jinnah took the stand that the only Muslim League would nominate the Muslim members of the cabinet. This proved to be impossible as Jinnah refused to relent.

The utter failure of Wavell's Simla conference served only to underscore the intensity of communal distrust that had become India's key political problem. Many British officials expected that this failure would weaken Jinnah's power over the League, but his presidential position seemed instead to grow stronger. Wavell wrote in his diary: "Jinnah ... narrow and arrogant ... actuated mainly by fear and distrust of the Congress ... constitutionally incapable of friendly cooperation with the other party."

Jinnah's intransigence appeared to be the main obstacle to a solution and a golden opportunity missed to keep India united. It is incredible to imagine now that in that conference Congress was prepared to concede parity of numbers between Hindu and Muslim members of interim government. What a chance missed by the League!



August 15, 1947: New Delhi.