had a vital stake in peace and progress, and stressed the desire of their governments for normalisation of relations, and a durable peace.

Incidentally, some friendly development partners -- who most certainly did not condone the war-time atrocities -- had been tepid to the idea of war crimes trials. Trials, they felt, would prolong tensions, make for complications and could also undermine Pakistan's newly revivified democracy. Instead a forward-looking policy, to promote and underpin cooperation and peace, would be to the benefit of all.

In November 1973, Dr. Henry Kissinger went on his sixth trip to China. Extracts of declassified transcripts of his discussions with Prime Minister Chou En-Lai on November 11 afford some insights into the issue of war crimes trials in Bangladesh:



Chou: "In my view, South Asia is always an important aspect. What do you think of the developments there?"

Kissinger: "India is making a major effort to improve its relations with us; and we assume also with you."

Chou: "Why do they insist on detaining those 195 POWs?"

Kissinger: "That is the problem -- the problem is that I think they want to keep them until Pakistan recognises Bangladesh and until Bangladesh gives up the claim to try them. Now, as part of this negotiation which brought about the settlement, we obtained from India an assurance that those 195 would not be turned over to Bangladesh. We would make it a matter of American government policy if they broke this agreement."

Chou: "There is the need to exert a certain pressure on them in this aspect because it is too unreasonable. Because in Pakistan they have already passed a resolution in their national assembly agreeing to the recognition of Bangladesh, giving the prime minister the authority to recognise Bangladesh at the right time."

Kissinger: "We are supporting Pakistan on the return of the 195. We have made this clear to India."

Chou: "We also discussed this issue with Mr. Whitlam (Australian prime minister) when he came this time."

Kissinger: "That is an issue in which he may be willing to support you. Whitlam, I would suspect, would support you on this."

Chou: "At the beginning, he expressed his opinion, being more favourable to Bangladesh, and that he did not understand our position. But later, after we explained our position, he did not say anything more."