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THE INTERNATIONAL CHESS GAME

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With the dominant wing of Pakistan choking the other which it considered "lesser", a war was raging within the subcontinent during 1971. Not only were there major differences on both sides, but the years of oppression which culminated in a genocide called for a liberated East Pakistan. It wasn't just a regional affair though; there were greater powers at play that deserve to be heeded. The initial lack of global talk regarding the genocide happened for a reason – the war had become a power struggle between international powers. Besides this being Bangladesh's war for survival, the nation was also trapped in the Bermuda Triangle of policies and politics between global powers. This Victory Day, we decided to look back at how internal problems of a region became interlocked with the interests of major players around the globe.

USA

Everyone knows how the USA sided with West Pakistan in 1971, and how fervently Nixon and Kissinger opposed the liberation of Bangladesh. Nixon's friendship with Pakistani rulers by 1971 had reached passionate, almost eerie levels. Millions of dollars worth of military equipment were sent to Pakistan as an irrefutable token of love. Six months before the Bangladeshis faced the March 26 military crackdown, Nixon had promised USA's support in whatever moves were made by West Pakistan on their Eastern wing.

The alliance with Pakistan was crucial into making the USA look a bit more intimidating to its foes. For the U.S., taking a stance against the genocide would mean supporting "commies" (the USSR). On the other hand, Kissinger had a knack for calling people names to appear high and mighty – including referring to Indira Gandhi as an "old witch" and Bangladesh a "basket case" after its liberation.

Archer Blood, with his highly critical telegram, had ensured that the world knew what was really happening within the diplomatic circles. "Concert for Bangladesh", held at Madison Square Garden, with its lineup of stars like George Harrison and many others, gave widespread acceptance to the fact that genocide was happening and the world needed to do something about it.

INDIA

Despite what people might say about India, it's undeniable that without having them as allies, Bangladesh would have been in a situation worse

than what it already was in. Being neighbours, they took the burden of housing the refugees who streamed past the border in their thousands every day. The government-in-exile was also operating from Kolkata, West Bengal and many guerrilla training camps were also across the border, like the one in Melaghar.

Indira Gandhi, who was the Prime Minister of India during 1971, was the true iron lady for her active effort in aiding Bangladesh. She flew around the world talking to countries and spreading the message about the genocide taking place. She also gave Bangladesh vital recognition as an independent country.

India was at odds with China due to border conflicts and strategically attained support from the U.S.S.R., which was crucial in fending off the U.S. intervention. India also saw Pakistan as a threat, following many skirmishes and a war in 1965. On the Bengali side, when 'Mukti Fauj' (later 'Mukti Bahini') was having difficulty in fighting against the more advanced Pakistani military, India assisted in further training and supplied arms to Bengalis. The final countdown came when India intervened with full force in the last two weeks of the war. India might have had their own motives for entering the war, but that doesn't tone down their contribution to the victory we achieved. In comparison to the other parties, their intentions were far more acceptable, especially as they answered (or had to answer) the humanitarian calls.

SOVIET UNION

The U.S.S.R. was in favour of Bangladesh's independence, supported the Indian Army as well as Mukti Bahini and wanted stability in the region, but their initial motives were questionable. In the early '60s, they were interested in gaining an upper hand in South Asia and tried to please India and Pakistan at the same time, failing quite miserably and making both of them quite unhappy.

Following this failed love triangle, India worked strategically to create an exclusive relationship with the Soviet Union. They signed a treaty which would allow for military intervention in the case of either party coming under threats. Strategically, this also enabled the Soviet Union to have an upper hand by having an edge over their arch-rivals – the U.S. and China.

All of this definitely squeezed a reaction out of Nixon and his minions. Fearing the

Red Army would march over South Asian soil, he sent an aircraft carrier to Bay of Bengal. The Soviet navy, seeing this as a nuclear threat, dispatched two groups of ships armed with nuclear missiles. We were basically sandwiched between two superpowers fighting over who had the biggest missiles and nuclear heads (during the very public break-up we call the Cold War).

CHINA

It is commonly accepted that the Chinese government sided with West Pakistan, didn't like the leadership in East Pakistan and found the option of a unified Pakistan more amiable. However they were extremely cautious about putting their chopsticks into the crisis. China got themselves into trouble through several border conflicts with India and the Soviet Union during the '60s. If they had made a direct intervention in East Pakistan, it would mean a tag team pounding from both of them.

As if these troubles weren't enough, there were internal problems too. There was a clash between Mao, the supreme leader, and his heir apparent Biao, regarding who would get the bigger slice of the Chinese army. It ended with a failed coup against Mao, and Biao's plane crashing in Mongolia after he tried to escape to -you guessed it – the Soviet Union.

Despite China's stance, they wanted the conflict to be settled in accordance to East Pakistani wishes. Nixon and Kissinger misjudged this strange position, and were waiting for China to intervene, which obviously did not happen. But what if it did? What if this conflict was appropriated into the plates of even greater warmongers? We're grateful it didn't.

In retrospect, looking at the Liberation War from an international context, it brings about the question of whether anything is ever free from the clutches of bigger, global powers. There is always a complex combination of motives that drives these powers, often at the cost of lives, of dignity and of sovereignty. In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, we mustn't lose our own voice to the ones who seek to silence us.

