

Mrs. Nixon answered.
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Mary Frances Dunham
520 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
May 24, 1971

Mrs. Richard S. Nixon
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mrs. Nixon:

Like funerals, the recent disasters in East Pakistan (the cyclone and revolution) have brought together Americans who once lived and worked there. We are deeply concerned that our country not repeat past mistakes and that we act more wisely and more firmly than we have in the past in view of the present tragedy.

Widely scattered geographically, informally silenced by organizations for whom we work, it has been especially difficult to make ourselves heard. Yet we have insights and information which only persons who have lived for some length of time in Bengal can have. We are educated and intelligent Americans, former employees of the U. S. Government, of international agencies, of a wide variety of missions, private foundations and companies -- professors, doctors, specialists. Some of us have been taking time from our work and risking our chances of ever returning to Pakistan in our efforts to counter-balance the readily accessible representatives of West Pakistan in Washington. Bengalis themselves are not permitted to speak through official channels. Most official Americans who are specialists in Pakistan are, in effect, specialists in West Pakistan and ill-informed on the vastly divergent Eastern province. We who have lived there have witnessed the chronic misunderstanding between the West and East Pakistanis and the over-simplified aid pattern from America which only encouraged an economic rift between them. We were not heeded in Pakistan, and we desperately want to be heeded now. The lives of many million people and one of the world's richest cultures hang in the balance.

Today, thanks to press coverage of the present tragedies, Bengal has appeared on the horizon of informed Americans. However, there are very few foreigners who know this region well and still many who have difficulty in understanding that Pakistan consists of two different countries. Americans in charge of apportioning funds were generally stationed in Washington or in West Pakistan. They visited the East infrequently and briefly, and were generally unaware or misinformed about conditions there

which are too complex to appreciate in a short stay. Policies involving millions of dollars were formed in Washington or Islamabad on the basis of these brief and infrequent visits to the East. It has been obvious to us for years in East Pakistan and to most others stationed there that this misguided use of aid was contributing to the forces leading to the present conflict and that we would be in part responsible for the eruption that was bound, sooner or later, to take place.

It is understandable that America may wish to return to the apparent stability that was superficially evident before March. Recognizing that our past mistakes and ignorance have contributed to the present troubles, we should realize that a restoration of those policies--even in the name of peace and humanity--will only prolong the basic conflict. No matter how much America may desire to restore the deceptively simple aid pattern that preceded the present conflict, it will no longer be possible. Considerable knowledge and imagination will be required to develop a more productive policy. We would like the Bengalis themselves and those Americans who know the region best to be heard before decisions of the government become final. So often in the past decisions have been made for political and "economic" reasons in ignorance of the social and cultural factors. But these factors are vital components of an effective aid policy for Pakistan.

Now there is no way to revive the ricksha-walla who died on his gaily painted ricksha, who could sing some of the most beautiful songs to be found anywhere. We can not revive the students who gave us their sweetest thoughts, their longings to see the outside world some day, their eagerness to acquaint us with their own country. It is too late to save the professors chosen for execution who contributed their wit and individualism to the university communities in Pakistan and abroad.

Peace and universal love have been a tradition in Bengali culture from high to low, from great poets and philosophers to illiterate boatmen. The tremendous losses which East Bengal has suffered, is suffering, and will suffer for a long time are a loss to the world at large of a highly cultivated people. There are few areas that can boast the level of culture we are now in danger of losing even before it has been properly recorded.

We hope that the tragedies that the Bengalis have had thrust upon them in the last months, sacrifices which have brought the condition of Bengal before the notice of the world, will not be brushed aside for temporarily expedient solutions. The concern that was exhibited by America generally and by people like yourself and the President after the tragic

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storm of November is once again required to mitigate the effects of the current complex situation. We feel sure that the U. S. will not regret a thorough and more realistic look at the problems of East Pakistan.

Until now the administration and its agencies have been extremely difficult for our group to reach directly. I make this personal appeal to you and your husband in your capacities as prime representatives of this country abroad. We were grateful to you for your cyclone relief and I take advantage of this previous expression of sympathy to make this further appeal to change our policies. Without wisdom our generosity will be misused again.

The enclosed book, a guide book of Dacca, was compiled in 1963 by U.S.A.I.D. wives (p. 185). It has since undergone two more editions. It may give you an idea of East Pakistan's capital as it was before the present conflict. We tried to present a brief picture of Bengali culture. This had to be done with some delicacy since the Hindu and Buddhist (pre-Pakistan) aspects of Bengali culture were not conforming to the state Islamization of the province. Nevertheless, you may be able to read between the lines enough to see that the heritage of the East Bengalis is rich and very different from that of West Pakistan. If nothing else, you may be interested in the book as an effort by American women to introduce new foreigners to their adopted city.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Frances Dunham

MFD:bd

Enclosure: 1 book