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Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971
Voices Raised at *Pakistan Forum*

Abstract

Pakistan Forum was a significant, progressive, and left-leaning journal founded in the United States in 1970 and branched out into Canada by Feroz Ahmed, then a Ph. D. scholar in demography at Johns Hopkins University. Soon, other Pakistani scholars and activists like political scientist and anti-war activist Eqbal Ahmad, anthropologist of rural Pakistan Saghir Ahmad, and Marxist philosopher and literary theorist Aijaz Ahmad, joined the journal's editorial ranks. The journal also featured a substantial roster of contributors, including Islamic philosopher Fazlur Rahman, journalist and editor of the *Pakistan Times* Mazhar Ali Khan, and sociologists Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid. In fact, the journal came out challenging *Pakistan Student*, a Pakistan Embassy-backed right-wing journal in the USA. Despite its name, *Pakistan Forum* became a critical voice supporting the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971. The journal emerged as an important platform for dissenting Pakistani voices in the diaspora, challenging the official narrative propagated by the Pakistani military establishment regarding the crisis in East Pakistan. Across its issues, *Pakistan Forum*'s editorials lent support to the Bangladesh liberation struggle. The journal played a crucial role in exposing the brutality of Pakistan's suppression of the Bangladeshi uprising, publishing a series of articles and news reports on the Pakistani military's atrocities in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). In 1971, the *Forum* published a compilation of articles and news reports detailing the violence, which was heavily advertised in its October 1971 issue. It highlighted the political failures and injustices of the West Pakistani establishment, arguing against the violent military crackdown initiated on 25 March 1971. Arguably, the most significant component of the journal was its editorial section, which advanced positions that were quite unpopular at the time but have, in hindsight, proved quite prescient. In one, Pakistan's military atrocities of 1970-71 in East Pakistan were condemned in no uncertain terms, and unequivocal support was lent to the nationalist aspirations of Bengalis. In its brief three-year stint, the journal published 24 issues covering an impressive range of topics that reshaped public opinion and policy debate in Pakistan.

Keywords: war of independence, atrocity, Bangali, Bangladesh, Pakistan army, genocide

Objectives

The study explores how some Pakistani scholars stood by the side of the struggling Bangladeshi people during the war of independence in 1971. In the crisis, they raised voices and extended intellectual supports to organize protest all around. They drew the attention of the world humanitarians to help Bangladeshi people. The paper also aims to justify the roles

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of *Pakistan Forum* supporting the logical war waged by the Bengalis.

Introduction

The period from 1962 to 1971 in Pakistan was marked by extreme political instability, military rule, the alienation of East Pakistan, and ultimately the secession of East Pakistan to form Bangladesh. Key events during this era included the promulgation of the 1962 constitution, the education movement, the arrest of Suhrawardy, the provincial election on a non-partisan basis, the Rajshahi massacre, the 1965 Indo-Pak War, the 1970 elections, 6 points demands raised by Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Agartala 'Conspiracy case ', the uprising of 1969 and the nation's independence which ended in the nation's breakup.

President Ayub Khan introduced a new constitution on March 1, 1962, which took effect on June 8, 1962, replacing the 1956 constitution and ending the 1958 martial law. Ayub Khan sought to legitimize his military rule and create a 'controlled democracy' named Basic democracy. The constitution established a presidential republic, concentrated power in the executive, and introduced 'Basic Democracies', which favored centralized, bureaucratic control over popular suffrage. It failed to satisfy East Pakistan's demands for autonomy, increasing tensions between the two wings. In the same year, students across East Pakistan staged massive protests against the Sharif Commission Report, which recommended making English and Urdu compulsory, increasing the degree duration, and restricting student politics. The movement culminated in a violent police crackdown on September 17, 1962, during which several people, including students, were killed. Before these events,

Ayub Khan arrested Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, which sparked widespread protests in East Pakistan and strengthened student movements against martial law. In April 1962, widespread atrocities against minority Hindus, Buddhists, and Santals occurred in Rajshahi and Pabna after a rumor that a large number of Muslims had been killed in Malda. Exaggerated media coverage provoked the Muslims, who killed 3 thousand minority people.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took leadership of the Awami League in 1963 and launched the six point demands for autonomy in 1966. The 1962 constitution ignored Bengali demands. Economic disparities, the lack of political representations for East Pakistanis, and the death of H. S. Suhrawardy created a leadership void filled by Sheikh Mujib, who demanded political and economic autonomy.

A comprehensive conflict between India and Pakistan occurred in August-September 1965, primarily focused on Kashmir. Pakistan initiated 'Operation Gibraltar' to infiltrate Jammu and Kashmir, operating under the assumption that a weakened Indian military would refrain from responding at the international border, thereby liberating Kashmir. The war culminated in a stalemate; however, Ayub Khan faced political humiliation and was accused of betraying the Kashmir cause following the signing of the Tashkent Declaration.

Mass protests and riots erupted against Ayub Khan, resulting in his resignation and the transfer of power to General Yahya Khan in March 1969. The public's discontent with the 1965 war led to economic difficulties, and the increasing demand for regional autonomy in East Pakistan prompted Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to establish the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and

galvanize anti-government sentiment. The first general election based on adult franchise took place in December 1970. Under mounting pressure, the military regime led by General Yahya Khan pledged to conduct elections to restore civilian governance. The Awami League, under Mujib's leadership, secured an absolute majority in East Pakistan, while the PPP emerged victorious in West Pakistan, resulting in a political impasse.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Awami League won an absolute majority in the 1970 general elections, capturing a significant number of seats in East Pakistan and a majority in the National Assembly of Pakistan. In contrast, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, became the dominant political force in West Pakistan. Despite the Awami League's clear electoral mandate, the central government, with support from Bhutto and other political elements in West Pakistan, refused to transfer power to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League. In response, Mujib initiated the historic non-cooperation movement in East Pakistan, which began on March 1, 1971, after the National Assembly session was postponed. On March 7, addressing a large public gathering at the *Racecourse Maidan* in Dhaka, Mujib declared, "This struggle is for independence. This struggle is for emancipation."

On March 25, 1971, the Pakistan Army launched 'Operation Searchlight' to resolve the deadlock and suppress the political movement in East Pakistan, and Bangabandhu declared independence, which ultimately triggered a war of independence. The military government's and West Pakistani leadership's refusal to transfer power to the Awami League following their electoral success incited widespread violence and genocide. The nine-month-long war concluded with the surrender of Pakistani forces to the joint command of Bangladesh and India on December 16, 1971; Bangladesh became a sovereign country (See Ray & Mamoon for a detailed discussion).

Protesting Roles of *Pakistan Forum*

In the editorials of different issues, the *Pakistan Forum* effectively expressed its support for the liberation struggle in Bangladesh. It also featured a collection of articles and news reports concerning the crisis in East Bengal and the atrocities committed by the Pakistani military in that region. Following the army's crackdown in East Pakistan, Feroz Ahmed adopted a strongly anti-army and anti-West Pakistan stance. They even produced a special publication entitled *East Bengal: Roots of the Genocide*, which chronicled the abuses perpetrated by the Pakistani army against the Bengali population. Additionally, Feroz published a letter in the *New York Times* advocating for the right of the Bengalis in East Pakistan to self-determination. The editorial stance in favor of Bangladesh rendered the *Pakistan Forum* quite unpopular. Consequently, Feroz became effectively *a persona non grata* among Pakistani students in America. Previously, he was invited to speak on campuses, but now he was perceived as extremely unpatriotic, and other students were prepared to physically assault Feroz in New York.

Before the declaration of Independence by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, regional autonomy for East Pakistan was the Awami League's central plank, and this position was supported by NAP (Wali Khan-Muzaffer Ahmed), though they added 5 more points to the AL's 6-point demands. G. M.

Syed of the Sind United Front also supported East Pakistan's autonomy, along with a separate identity for Sind. Among others who supported the issue was Maulana Bhashani of NAP. Nurul Amin and Nasrullah Khan of the Pakistan Democratic Party had no clear-cut program and offered only lip service to the autonomy demand. On the contrary, Mumtaz Daulatna of the Council Muslim League, Qayum Khan of the Quaid-e Azam Muslim League, Z. A. Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party, and Maulana Maududi of Jamat-e Islami were consistently opposed to granting regional autonomy and greater powers to the provinces. 'Pakistan Muslim league (A.K.M.F.Q. Chowdhury), National Progressive League (Ataur Rahman Khan) and Justice Party (Manzar Bashir) appear more like personality problems of some individual leaders and do not represent any significant force in national politics' (Political Parties ... 6).

In 1970, there was a devastating cyclone in Bhola that claimed 3 lakh lives and left 5 lakh homeless, who suffered from disease and starvation. While humanity around the globe was moved by this tragic event and rushed to send relief supplies, the government's negligence and inefficiency were on such a scale that it could not even handle the supplies. The government's stance was strongly condemned in the editorial of the *Forum*. 'It is a matter of utter shame that a nation which spends more than 60% of its budget on military has to wait for foreign troops to start relief work. This very army has in the past been used very efficiently to fire at the striking workers, but now there seem to be all the odds in the world against it to come to people's rescue?' (The Pakistani Tragedy 1).

The political analysts describe the landslide victory of the AL from two distinct points. 'AL's incredible margin was probably made possible by the vacillating attitude towards the polls and the eventual withdrawal from the contest by East Pakistan's second most popular party, Maulana Bhashani's National Awami Party. The initial failure of the military Government to provide relief to the cyclone affected People reinforced Bengali suspicions about the West Pakistani power structure and virtually sealed the outcome of the elections' ('Islam Lovers' Routed 9).

The editorial in the February-March 1971 issue of *Pakistan Forum* conveyed optimism for an improvement in the circumstances of the populace as they exercised their right to vote for a change. 'Another harvest of hopes has been raised by the blood and sweat of the toiling people of Pakistan. The masses have given their verdict for the parties which promised them an end to exploitation and oppression and a new era of social justice. The rich have panicked and the poor are eagerly waiting for the day of deliverance' (The Harvest… 2).

The role of the army was condemned in the April-May 1971 issue. The military, bureaucracy, and capitalists formed a nexus to rule the country by exploiting and depriving the people of their civil rights, and they were very keen to protect the interests of the West Pakistanis. '…those who had any idea about the power and the class basis of the armed forces could not believe that the army would allow any constitution that did not provide adequate safeguards for maintaining the privileges of West Pakistani military, bureaucracy, and capitalists' (Rulers Against People 2).

Before the genocide committed by the Army, the people were optimistic and thought that they would not neglect the verdict of the people and leave the politics to the politicians and go back to the barracks, but what they did was really inhuman and shocking to them. '… the demonstration of an unusual political consciousness by the masses gave a hope even to the skeptics that the army probably would not violate the verdict of the people. Now the army has not only violated an electoral verdict but engaged in a venture which could be termed without exaggeration as a genocide of the Bengali people' (2)

The *Pakistan Forum* held a different view of AL's six-point demands, arguing that the proposed solution to the problems of East Bengal's people was inadequate, yet they felt that the unjust social order in both parts should be changed. Despite this view, they strongly supported the regional autonomy of East Bengal. They also believed that the Pakistan Army, which had committed genocide against the Bengali people, would carry out the same carnage in West Pakistan if its vested interests were seriously threatened there. They unequivocally supported the war of independence initiated by the Bengalis. 'East Bengal today remains an occupied colony, struggling for its liberation. Unity can be achieved only with equal and willing people, not with a population terrorized into submission. Independence of Bangla Desh is a fact of life which must be recognized not only by all freedom-loving people but also by all those who have any political sense' (2).

The editorial strongly criticized the Government's inhumane actions for preventing the International Red Cross from carrying out medical and relief efforts. Instead, they focused

on obtaining statements of support from China, which feigned concern for all liberation movements. 'But neither American weapons nor Chinese oratory will diminish the spirit of Bengali People who must now prepare themselves for a protracted people's war against their colonial masters' (2). They also predicted that the conflict would not last long, as Pakistan lacks the capability to sustain war expenses of $70-80 million per month, especially given their $4.6 billion debt to creditors and a foreign exchange reserve that has plummeted by $184 million.

In an article titled 'The Second Cyclone,' Feroz Ahmed compared the military atrocities against the Bengali people to the Nazi terror in Europe and the American genocide in Indo-China. Here, he focused on the cultural dissimilarities between the two parts of Pakistan that had started in 1947 as one country. Their common destiny was turned into a colonial occupation of one region by the other. "Tanks and bombs are being used to 'unite' a people who have said no to the alien rule with such unanimity that it is hard to find a parallel in the history of colonialism. Hitler had his collaborators in Europe, the British found their stooges in India, and the Americans have their Thien and Ky in Viet Nam. But the West Pakistani occupational army has not been able to find even a quisling in Bangla Desh" (Ahmed 4).

Here, Feroz Ahmed committed a blunder in assessing the people of East Bengal, because at least 5 collaborating groups, called the Razakars, Al-Shams, Al-Badr, Peace Committee, and Mujahid Bahini assisted the Pakistani Army against the independence movement (See Mamoon for a detailed discussion). They were no less cruel than the Pakistani Army in creating violence and atrocities against the

Bengalis in the name of upholding the unity of Pakistan. Feroz Ahmed rightly mentioned the economic and job discrimination between the two parts and the cultural aggression, disregarding linguistic realities. The power structure of the West Pakistanis believed in and perpetuated the stereotype of Bengalis as lazy, promiscuous, semi-Hindu, timid, and ignorant, but the Pakistanis who lacked anthropological or cultural knowledge of the Bengalis were the ignorant ones. 'Contemptuous of Bengali passion for song and dance, the West-Pakistani elite asserted that Bengalis could not become good Muslims and good Pakistanis unless they renounce their culture and conformed to the standards established by their West Pakistani masters' (4). East Pakistan was demeaned both intellectually and politically, and people with honest insights acknowledged this. Protests took place throughout the United States, Canada, and England against the slaughter of the Bengali people by the West Pakistani military.

Along with the East Pakistan League of America (EPLA), West Pakistanis also formed committees and supported the Bengali war of independence. Saghir Ahmed carried out protest activities in Canada. A committee was formed in England called 'West Pakistanis in Solidarity with Bengal.' A similar committee was formed in America by A. Iqbal Bukhari, Feroz Ahmed, Aly Ercelawn, and others. Eqbal Ahmad, Aijaz Ahmad, Feroz Ahmed, and Saghir Ahmad wrote a letter to *The New York Times* on 10 April: 'As West-Pakistanis, we are shocked and shamed by the recent developments in our country. We decry the denial by West Pakistani leaders of East Pakistan's right to self-determination. We condemn the current policy of brutally suppressing the home rule movement in Bengal. West

Pakistan military and civilian leaders must be held responsible for the crisis, which culminated in the declaration of East Pakistan's Independence. The vested interests in West Pakistan never accepted East Pakistan's electoral verdict in favour of regional autonomy. The systematic killing of civilians and the wanton destruction of property by the West-Pakistani rulers hold the Bengali people. The ruthlessness with which the army has intervened is an admission by West-Pakistani rulers that they view themselves as colonial conquerors' (Bengali Struggle Supported 10).

In the same issue, numerous humanitarians penned letters to the *Forum*-editor, articulating their profound concerns for the civilians who have suffered due to the atrocities committed by the Pakistani soldiers. They implore the government to adhere to the people's verdicts and transfer power accordingly. An immigrant from Kashmir, Fazal H. Dar, wrote, 'The recent tragic events in East Pakistan have shocked the conscience of the entire civilized humanity. The Pakistani military dictatorship of Yahya Khan, in utter disregard of the democratic verdict of the Pakistani people, has let loose forces of barbarism and genocide on the unarmed Pakistani men, women and children in East Pakistan. This act of insanity on the part of the West Pakistani-based government has forever sealed the death warrant of Pakistan. As we knew it, Pakistan has ceased to exist' (Massacre of Bengalis 12). Identifying himself as a disenchanted West Pakistani, one Suleman Syed wrote, 'Listening to Pakistani news, I get sickened by their bragging about our culture, civilized manners and pious religious beliefs which I do not doubt as much as I doubt the sincerity and honesty of the responsible people in the government

who try to make us believe it. How can we criticize other countries while doing the same thing ourselves?' (Syed 12).

An enraged Ahmed Iqbal Bukhari from West Pakistan strongly criticized the Pakistani authorities for their cruel and irrational measures aimed at exterminating the East Pakistanis in order to maintain their grip on power. 'Let us weep for the soul of our nation which has been injured by our own insensitivity, incompetence, and stupidity. For twenty-three years, we have been blind to the factors of geography and language. We pushed aside social and political aspects. We wore the cloak of illusions and kept on parroting the cliches of unity and ideology. We made our national anthem in Urdu and asked East Pakistanis to learn it. Did we, from the West, ever try to learn our national language Bengali?

We used the jargon of unity to discourage the diversity of ideas…we never faced them as an alive nation. Now the problems are beyond solutions and beyond prayers… Are we blind not to see that no power can keep seventy million people in an arrangement if they want otherwise? … Many of us did not agree with the extreme demands of Mujib. But that does not justify the arbitrariness of the West Pakistani leaders. In the name of saving the country we are destroying ourselves and yet we fail to see it. We, a poor nation, a country of beggars, want to kill each other with borrowed weapons (Bukhari 12).

In the next issue, a letter from Mr. Shaukat Hassan of Eugene, Oregon, expressed outrage at the West Pakistani government's actions against the Bengali people. He accused the government of systematic violence and a propaganda campaign to hide these atrocities. 'With the systematic

decimation of the elites of our society and the indiscriminate killings of thousands of innocent lives, it is quite evident that the West Pakistani oligarchy is thoroughly committed to exterminating the entire Bengali race. The fascist government with its vast propaganda machinery has screened off the people of West Pakistan from the news about their crimes. But it is indeed sad that some of the West Pakistanis here have refused to see the reality and continue to harp on the theme on "national unity"--which never existed and will never come. Your stand on this matter is gratifying' (Hassan 10).

The June-July editorial condemns a series of political arrests and crackdowns in West Pakistan, part of an effort to suppress the people's movement and eliminate leftist elements from the political landscape. Mass arrests of political leaders, trade unionists, students, and intellectuals have been carried out across all provinces of West Pakistan. In Sind, the leader of the Sindhi cultural movement, G M Syed; Sind's best-known poet, Shaikh Ayaz; the Vice-chancellor of Sind University, Ghulam Mustafa Shah; and Afzal Bangash of the Kisan-Mazdoor Party have been arrested, along with hundreds of lesser-known individuals.

Mr. Bhutto, instead of protesting these arrests, joined hands with the army to eliminate leftists from the political scene. The imprisonment of journalist Abdullah Malik for insulting Yahya Khan and the closure of the newspaper 'Azad' and several other newspapers were part of the suppression of the press. The editorial also indicated that General Akbar, Omar, Pirzada, Irshad, Tikka Khan, etc., who constitute the hard core of the right-wing junta, are believed to be contemplating a permanent counter-revolution on the model of Spain.

The sub-editorial titled 'Second Indonesia?' draws a parallel between the political situation in Pakistan and the events in Indonesia, specifically the army's massacres of ‘communists’. It uses this historical context to highlight the potential for similar violence and political upheaval in Pakistan, emphasizing the threat and determ,ination posed by right-wing Islamist parties. The text references the suppression of political rebellion in Bangladesh. It indicates that Yahya Khan, while reassuring the rightists, was seemingly willing to inflict violence. He played a significant role in the events leading up to the suppression of the rebellion in East Bengal and in creating a situation similar to the one in Indonesia. It also suggests that the army's actions were not intended to be a quick, decisive military campaign but possibly a more prolonged effort to suppress political rebellion in Bangladesh. This implies a more complex and potentially more brutal operation than initially presented. The situation in Pakistan, where a junta rules, classifying 70 million people as ‘miscreants’ and imposing harsh penalties, shows that the issue is not about ‘separatism’, but rather about democracy and social justice. It implies that the arrests and political actions are a response to the question of Bangladesh and are suppressing democratic values. The article reports a quote from President Yahya, relayed by Javed Iqbal, stating that he would not mind slaughtering half the country's population to safeguard its integrity. It was published in the SUN newspaper in Karachi on November 18th 1970.

'Army Propaganda Backfires', featured in the June-July 1971 issue, reveals the misleading propaganda disseminated by the Pakistan military regarding the genocide in East Bengal. They tried to deceive the global audience by blaming the

Bengalis for perpetrating a brutal massacre against non-Bengalis. They invited 8 foreign correspondents to East Pakistan to witness the situation and publicize the military version.

Anthony Mascarenhas, a prominent Pakistani journalist and Assistant Editor of the *Morning News* based in Karachi, was among those who visited East Pakistan. Horrified by the atrocities he witnessed, Mascarenhas fled to the United Kingdom with his family, where he published his report, titled ‘GENOCIDE’, in *The Sunday Times* on June 13, 1971. 'What I saw and heard with unbelieving eyes during my 10 days in East Bengal during April made it terribly clear that the killings are not isolated acts of military commanders in their fields. They are the result of deliberate, vengeful orders from the top' (qtd. in Macarenhas 6). His report was critical in revealing the brutality of the Pakistani military action, turning world opinion against Pakistan. Mascarenhas was regarded as a traitor in his own country (Pakistan) after his report was published.

Similarly, Feroz Ahmed wrote a letter to *The Sunday Times* contesting the distorted reports regarding the Bihari Massacre attributed to the locals in East Pakistan. When the newspaper's management refused to print the letter, he opted to publish it in *Pakistan Forum*, where he expressed his disapproval of the falsehoods disseminated by the Pakistani power structure: ‘There is little doubt that frenzied mobs of Bengalis carried out massacre of some innocent non-Bengali civilians. But in a state of anarchy and total lack of record-keeping I do not know how your correspondent arrived at an incredible figure of 20,000 to 100,000 non-Bengalis killed. Moreover, this magnitude of non-Bengali massacre is not

borne out by the accounts of foreign eye-witnesses who have since left East Bengal. Your correspondent does not stop at this fantastic arithmetic but attributes it to the Awami League's so-called "rallying cry" of 'Clear Bangla Desh. Kill the Punjabis… A second set of figures used by your reporter really staggers my imagination, i.e. 176,000 strong Bengali-force poised against only 10,000 West Pakistani soldiers. Unless we believe in the West Pakistani myth of the timidity of the Bengali and super-manliness of the Punjabi, it is difficult to see how this 176,000 strong force, 'equipped with mortars, recoilless rifles, heavy and light machine guns, and road transport' was overwhelmed so easily by the heavily outnumbered West Pakistani army... the numbers, training, and equipment attributed to Bengalis by your correspondent is no more than an exercise in absurdity' (Army Propaganda… 6)

Protests organised by Bangladeshi immigrants, students, diplomats, and others for Bangladesh's liberation continued in various states in America, England, and Canada. Anna Taylor, an American citizen who stayed for some time in Bangladesh, ran a fasting protest for 15 days against the genocide in East Bengal.

In October 1971 issue, Eqbal Ahmed wrote in the editorial, 'Eight million citizens have been forced to flee to India; a quarter million have been murdered; and a millions languish in the interior terrorized and hungry, potential statistics in what threatens to become the worst holocaust in history. These horrors must stop now, and only we as citizens can put an end to it... Uncritical acceptance of the slogans, shibboleths, lies, and myths of those in power would compromise our national honour, render us guilty of

complicity in crimes against humanity, and condemn us in the judgment of history' (Ahmad 1).

During the liberation war, other political parties were discontented with the Awami League's single leadership, which had formed a provincial government popularly known as the 'Mujibnagar Government' and also as the 'Bangladesh government-in-exile'. When the five-party consultative committee was formed, including NAP (Bhashani), NAP (Muzaffar), CPB, BNC, along with the Awami League, a different kind of leadership race began.

The members of the consultative committee, except the Awami League, considered the committee the supreme body of the Bangladesh movement. Some called for dissolving the provincial government. 'In the event of the formation of an effective all-party supreme council, the provincial government should have either dissolved or been subordinated to the supreme body. The simultaneous existence of the all-Awami League Provincial Government casts doubts upon the powers of the new committee' (Abul H. Khan 13). It is obvious that the formation of the consultative committee created tension over the leadership of the Bangladesh movement. The communist bloc wanted to capture the leadership entirely, minimizing or eliminating the Awami League-led provincial government.

Feroz Ahmed conducted an interview with Professor Muzaffar Ahmad, which was published in the same issue, in which he also supported the subordinate role of the provincial government. Answering a question of Feroz Ahmed, he said, 'If we can make this committee function properly, then the provincial government might be

subordinated to it, or assigned to tasks other than directing the armed struggle' (Prof. Muzaffar… 8)

The Parties' inner conflicts were ongoing, and in such a crisis, they were engaged in vying for leadership of a bigger issue. Before the consultative committee, on 1 June, 1971, various leftist political groups formed the 'Bangladesh National Liberation Struggle Coordination Committee' (NLSCC), excluding the Awami League, and declared 15-point objectives. All these separate programmes bypassing the Provincial Government created confusion at home and abroad, and when the consultative committee was formed, only 3 groups of the NLSCC (Zafar-Menon, Nasim Ali and Serajul Hossain Khan) joined the liberation war.

Another example of the misleading activities of the left parties regarding the independence struggle of Bangladesh appears in a statement by Mohammad Toaha, leader of the East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), published in the Kolkata-based *Frontier* and reprinted as a document in the *Pakistan Forum* for April-May 1972 issue. Just as Muzaffar Ahmed sought to bring the government-in-exile under the Consultative Committee, Mohammad Toaha's party categorically denied the Awami League leadership of the war. He considered the departure of the Awami League leaders to India to organize and conduct the liberation war an escape and stated that the war was being waged in the country under the leadership of his party. 'Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as usual, went to jail and the rest of the Awami League leadership fled to India leaving the people to their fate. The barbarous attack of the Pak Army however, met with the resistance of the people. At places under the leadership of spontaneously organized sporadic

groups of patriotic fighters, the revolutionary people started resisting the onslaught of the Pak Army. Gradually this sporadic battles were being polarized and transformed into a national revolutionary war under the leadership of our party' (Toaha On B. D. …21).

During the Bangladesh Liberation War, Mohammad Toaha was a leading figure in a pro-Peking (Maoist) faction. Due to their ideological ties with China, which backed Pakistan during the conflict, and their mistrust of India, their role in 1971 was quite different from the mainstream Mukti Bahini. Toaha's group viewed the exile government led by the Awami League and India's involvement as 'Indian expansionism' or a 'bourgeois movement'. Though they opposed the Pakistani military occupation, they occasionally clashed with or remained hostile toward the mainstream nationalist fighters. Instead of joining the unified command under the Provisional Government of Bangladesh, Toaha established his own armed guerrilla units, sometimes called the Naxal Bahini.

American people also protested against the US role in the Liberation War when *The New York Times* published a report on US arms shipments to West Pakistan. Demonstrations and other forms of protests were taking place all over the US and Canada to denounce the support for the Pakistani Junta. The Americans exploded by exposing the US role in the genocide of the Bengalis. People tried to intercept loading arms in *Padma, Al-Ahmadi*, and other Pakistani ships at Port Covington, Baltimore, by throwing pickets. Even the 'International Longshoremen's Association' refused to load arms and ammunition in *Padma*, but later surrendered to the government pressure. In

Philadelphia, a flotilla of small boats blockaded the Pakistani ship *Al-Ahmadi* and forced it to divert its direction. Local Pakistani shipping agents faced picketing from outraged Philadelphians. Six Bengali crew members abandoned the ship to escape persecution from their West Pakistani counterparts.

In New York, a similar naval blockade forced the Pakistani ship *Sutlej*, which had arrived to load US military supplies, to retreat. A protest rally took place on August 14 in New York, featuring Bengali representative Dr. K M Alamgir alongside West Pakistani scholars Eqbal Ahmad and Feroz Ahmed, who called on the US Government to cease its support for the Pakistani Junta, which was responsible for the genocide. Protests against the US role in supporting the Pakistani Junta continued in cities such as Boston, Washington, Madison, Michigan City, East Lansing, Raleigh, Montreal, and Vancouver, with activists including Aijaz Ahmad, Feroz Ahmed, Eqbal Ahmad, Dr. Muzamil Haque, Dr. Hamza Alvi, Dr. Ralph Nicholas, and others leading the charge.

In April, US official sources previously rejected any shipment of arms and ammunition to West Pakistan. However, Benjamin Welles, a prominent diplomatic correspondent for *The New York Times*, along with Tad Szulc, a foreign correspondent for the same publication, reported on the covert geopolitical involvement of the US during the Bangladesh Liberation War. At least two vessels, *Padma* and *Sunderbans*, departed for Pakistan carrying military supplies. Following the release of this information, the US State Department attempted to clarify through a press

release that the weapons delivered had been procured prior to March 25.

On July 7, Senator Frank Church disclosed that military equipment valued at $35 million was still in transit. Additionally, Edward William Proxmire made public a confidential document indicating that the Nixon administration had requested $500,000 for military assistance to Pakistan for the fiscal year 1971, and $5,250,000 for 1972.

On August 3, the US House of Representatives approved a bill to suspend all aid to Pakistan until stability is restored. Nevertheless, Christopher Van Hollen, a spokesman for the State Department, acknowledged that military equipment worth $3,800,000 had already been dispatched to Pakistan since the official suspension, with another $2,300,000 worth still in transit.

On 14 October, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 9-2 to suspend all military and economic aid to Pakistan, except refugee relief, until the Government of Pakistan took the necessary measures to restore peace and tranquility in East Pakistan. After two weeks, on 29 August, the US Senate rejected the Nixon administration's foreign aid bill, which had passed on 3 August. It was decided that, before a new bill was passed, military supplies would continue without senate approval.

This step was taken solely to keep the supply chain running to Pakistan. This time, the US administration sent a Vietnam-tested counter-insurgency expert to assist the Pakistani military against the Bengali guerrillas, leased 6 aircraft for troop movements, and provided trainers to build

up a newly recruited non-Bengali police force to replace Bengali policemen who were then fighting against West Pakistani rulers. So, it was evident that American aid continued even after a bill restricting aid to Pakistan was passed.

Letters written by the West Pakistanis and published in this issue were full of indignation and shame. The writers also expressed their full support for the 'East-Pakistanis'. One Nisar Ahmad wrote, 'I only wish that everybody around here in Detroit realized what horrible things we have done in East Pakistan. As a Punjabi, I feel that, in good conscience, I no longer can stay silent. After March 25, 1971, I am sometimes ashamed to call myself a Pakistani… I appeal to all West Pakistanis in the United States and Canada to do whatever they can to support the just struggle for Bangla Desh' (Letters 7).

Zillur R. Athar expressed his ire through his July communication, 'I would like to thank you for your courageous and realistic coverage of the situation created in Bangla Desh by the fascist military junta of West Pakistan. People of Bangla Desh deserve the support and help from all nations and governments that are concerned with human suffering... This struggle is between the poor and the fascist Yahiya Regime. Is it not time for the West-Pakistan intellectuals to wake up, recognise the truth, and reassess their stand and take some positive action?' (Letters 26)

Aijaz Ahmad, in his article, 'Bangladesh: India's Dilemma', details the complex political and military situation in Bangladesh, focusing on the West Pakistani Army's control, the Mukti Bahini's role, and the economic strains impacting the region. It highlights the potential for conflict and the

precarious state of the economy amidst shifting alliances. He also draws attention to the dire food situation in East Bengal and the ongoing migration to India, highlighting the indifference to refugees' plight. The success of this movement hinges on overcoming internal divisions and engaging the Bengali middle classes. Delving into the complex geopolitical landscape surrounding the potential for Indian intervention in the Bangla Desh movement, he warns of the inherent risks and consequences.

He also critically examines the tumultuous partition of the sub-continent in 1947, detailing its immediate and lasting problems, including mass migrations and the precarious state of religious minorities. This text delves into the deep-rooted territorial disputes and historical animosities between the two nations, highlighting how colonial legacies continue to influence their present-day conflicts and the treatment of minorities. His analysis points to entrenched bureaucracies and a persistent exaggeration of external threats as key factors perpetuating this hostility. He outlines the 'Right Wing's' perspective on India's potential military action against Pakistan, suggesting a belief that Pakistan's demise is inevitable. It also touches upon the East Bengali insurrection and Pakistan's accusations of Indian involvement.

Aijaz Ahmad dismisses the conspiracy charge filed by the Pakistani Government against Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Since 1964, the Junta had accused Mujib of plotting with India to secede East Bengal from Pakistan and form a new independent state under Indian influence. He firmly stated that the charge was politically driven and lacked solid evidence. "Pakistan has since charged that the insurrection in East Bengal is an Indian plot. Specifically, it

is charged that Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the leader of the Bengali dissidents, has been conspiring with the Indian Government since 1964 to create in East Bengal, an integral part of Pakistan, a new and independent state that would be an Indian client. It is further alleged that the Pakistani Military Intelligence has known of this plot since at least 1966. All this seems to be fiction of a very low order. What is being resurrected today is the spectre of a conspiracy charge first levelled against Mujib during the Ayub regime and then dropped without court action when Yahya, the present dictator, took over in 1969. Since then, Mujib has led his party to electoral victory in elections supervised by the very regime that now claims to have known of the plot all along. Had there been substance to the conspiracy charge, the regime would not have allowed Mujib to contest the elections; nor, in that event, would Yahya have referred to Mujib, as late as January this year, as 'the future Prime Minister of Pakistan.'"(Ahmad 12)

In the November editorial, Feroz Ahmed points out that the war, which began in March 1971, escalated from a civil strife within Pakistan into a full-scale conflict between India and Pakistan. India's justification for its actions is presented as a response to the unbearable social and economic burdens created by ten million Bengali refugees fleeing to India. India argued that Pakistan's failure to resolve this issue through a political settlement necessitated a military solution. Furthermore, he mentions in an argument that the Pakistani army held illegitimate authority in East Bengal, implying that the Indian invasion was a measure to serve the interests of the Bangladeshi people and ensure the refugees' return. 'The recent tragic developments in the sub-continent once again underscore the point that the fascist military

junta, a puppet of American imperialism, which has usurped power in Pakistan and which continues a witch hunt against all progressive and democratic forces in the country, cannot be the defender of the people' (Ahmed 1)

The issue reports that Habib Jalib, a renowned Pakistani poet, was arrested for speaking out against the autocratic ruler. He was often celebrated as the 'poet of revolution' for his strong stance against authoritarianism and his powerful verses that inspired social and political change. His poetry frequently addressed the struggles of the common people, critiqued oppressive regimes, and advocated for justice and human rights. Jalib's fearless expression through his work made him a significant voice of dissent in Pakistan, particularly during periods of political turmoil. 'His poem *Hum Aise Dastoor Ko Naheen Mante* (We do not accept such a constitution) became the most popular chant against the farcical basic democracies system of Ayub Khan… Another Punjabi poet, Ahmed Salim, was sentenced to six months of hard labor and fined Rs. 2000 for publishing a poem entitled *Sada Jeeye Bangla Desh* (Long Live Bangladesh) in the weekly Awami Awaz' (Newsfront 19).

In a short editorial in the December 1971 issue, Eqbal Ahmad blamed the political leaders, army and bureaucrats for Pakistan's defeat and the creation of a terrible situation like war. He described the incident of the night of March 25 as a premeditated atrocity. He vehemently condemned the repeated disregard for the electoral mandate expressed by the populace of East Bengal, all under the guise of safeguarding Pakistan's integrity. Furthermore, he raised the question of why the majority of educated citizens in Pakistan refrained from voicing their dissent against these actions. He remarked

that they too bore a share of the responsibility for the injustices inflicted upon the people of East Pakistan.

He believed that the discrimination created between East and West Pakistan was extremely unjust. He perceived that the situation had deteriorated due to the government's lack of accountability in this regard. At that time, he felt the necessity of restructuring the army and bureaucracy. He called for dismantling their colonial mentality, authoritarian framework, and inefficient management. He urged the state to move toward more creativity and innovation rather than vindictiveness, despite defeat in war. “Historians will say that the destruction of the country, as conceived and constituted by its founding fathers, began on the night of March 25 when the Generals launched their murderous mission of suppressing the electoral verdict of the majority in order to save the ‘integrity’ of the nation. From that moment the movement toward disaster was inexorable, for the men who held our destiny were oblivious to reason of politics, diplomacy, morality, and military strategy… Power was concentrated in the bureaucracy and the army, both trained and tested by colonial Britain, aided and armed by imperial America. The poor were disfranchised; government unaccountable to the public. The callousness of our rulers was undiscriminating. Yet the more disadvantaged people of East Pakistan could only comprehend their condition as caused by regional discrimination. Their efforts to exercise their rights as a majority people were subverted in 1954, 1956, 1958 and 1969. In 1971 they were utterly brutalized… Diverse lands like ours do not respond to European models of integration. Nor can genuine regional grievances be suppressed by the repressive arms of government. Respect for regional cultures and traditions, and maximum local

autonomy within the framework of popular, national planning are the requisites of unity and strength” (Ahmad 2). But it did not happen. The prevalence of violence and a warlike mentality increased, and therefore peace did not come. Consequently, people continued to endure a dire and chaotic situation.

In an article titled ‘Pakistan and the Big Powers' in the January 1972 issue, Aijaz Ahmed criticized the roles of India, China, Russia, and America in the war. He also made serious complaints about the role of George W. Bush Sr., then the US permanent representative to the United Nations. He played a role in protecting the interests of West Pakistan but said nothing about East Pakistan. ‘In the U.N., the only guarantees Bush asked for were about West Pakistan; none about East Bengal. India's right to dictate a military solution was tacitly conceded’ (Ahmad 2).

In the same issue, Eqbal Ahmad, in an article titled 'Indian Invasion', criticized the roles of America, the Soviet Union, and India, while recognizing the legitimacy of the Bengali demand for independence and building public opinion in its favor. He categorically supported the Bengali struggle and criticized the Pakistani military junta's stubbornness, brutality, and military intervention. ‘I am among the few West Pakistanis to have publicly denounced the rigid policies and criminal conduct of our military government. The army intervened in East Bengal to offset the results of Pakistan's first freely held elections, transforming the demand for autonomy into a movement for independence. Judging that a problem which owes its existence to the militarization of our society cannot be solved by military means, and that the costs of continued conflict will be

intolerably high for all Pakistanis, I affirmed the Bengalis' right to self-determination, and have since worked toward the creation of a situation wherein the people of East Bengal may indeed be able to exercise this fundamental right' (Ahmad 4).

When Bhutto went to New York to attend the United Nations Security Council session on December 15, 1971, four prominent Pakistani emigrants—A I Bukhari, S. Arif Kazmi, M A Qadeer, and Sohail Rizvi—expressed their desire to meet him to condemn the military atrocities in East Pakistan. Bhutto initially agreed but canceled the meeting at the last minute. Meanwhile, Bangladesh became independent with the surrender of the Pakistan army in Dhaka on December 16. On the 17th, Bhutto met with about 75 Pakistanis in New York. At the meeting, he blamed President Yahya Khan's regime for Pakistan's defeat, saying, '... the regime of Yahya Khan was that of stupids, assholes, and fools… we had been beating the hell out of our own people, and now were being beaten the hell out of'(Bhutto's N.Y. Visit 6). He also criticized the colonial structure of the army and emphasized the need to change it. A section of the Pakistanis present supported giving the Awami League as much autonomy as possible to keep Pakistan united at any cost, but others kept muttering, 'It is too late.' They were right, because Dhaka had fallen a day earlier. When someone there criticized the PPP's threat to boycott the National Assembly session, Bhutto denied the accusation and also blamed Yahya Khan, '... we didn't threaten to boycott the N.A. … we would go to the N.A. meeting if the 120 day limit for framing the constitution was lifted. But Yahya Khan postponed the N.A. anyway' (Bhutto's N.Y. Visit 7). Even he said that he was against military violence though this did not suppress the

truth of the genocide. A middle-aged Punjabi woman at the meeting raised a strong complaint about the destruction of East Pakistan. In fact, a large section of the West Pakistanis present at this meeting blamed the power-hungry politics of the West Pakistan government for conducting these brutal mass killings in East Pakistan.

In the March 1972 issue, Aijaz Ahmad strongly criticized the book 'The Great Tragedy' by Bhutto, published by the Pakistan People's Party in September 1971. In his critique, titled 'The Great Farce', he first attacked the political leaders of West Pakistan who had shown the least protest against the military massacres in East Pakistan or had done anything to inform the people of West Pakistan about them. He refused to accept this silence as ignorance, and Bhutto, although he knew the matter better than anyone else, did not reveal the truth in his book, which he described as the book's fundamental horror. 'The hard, inescapable fact about the current political culture of Pakistan is that through the nine months of the genocide in East Bengal, March to December, there was no West Pakistani leader of any consequence who had either the decency or the sense of public accountability to denounce the military's actions and to inform the people of West Pakistan of what was actually going on. This silence was not a matter of ignorance either. The leaders knew, and Bhutto knew more than most. Nor were these leaders faced with what could be dismissed as mere excesses committed in the course of an ugly but necessary federal intervention. The brutalities were pre-meditated, purposeless, massive and Fascistic by any standards imaginable' (Ahmad 12).

Bhutto lamented the political polarization, recalled with regret the corruption of the Ayub regime, and regretted that

Yahya had not made a better system for the transfer of power, but he blamed the entire crisis on the inflexibility of Mujib and his associates. He took no responsibility for it in any way, nor did he directly mention the killings that he had indirectly approved. In this book, Aijaz Ahmed expressed his anger that Bhutto criticized the 6 points but did not present any reasonable alternative to them. He ridiculed his belief in the presence of a Hindu fifth force in the country, like the extremist mullahs. Bhutto considered the issue of teaching Muslim students under the supervision of Hindu teachers and professors a wrong decision. He believed that a generation had been lost in this manner. Aijaz Ahmed found this comment provocative because he said this at a time when the Pakistani army was busy exterminating Hindu teachers, professors, and the current younger generation of Bengalis.

Bhutto mentioned in the book the popular narrative that this war started as a result of a long-standing conspiracy with India. In this regard, Ahmed also clearly states, ‘we know that the movement as a whole was fed, financed, kept alive by the Indians after March 25th; we know nothing of a conspiracy existing before that date. It is characteristic that Bhutto, like the rest of the Pakistani rulers, should speak of the conspiracy as if it was self-evident and that he refuses to give any evidence whatever. We are required to take him at his word, on the pain of being called unpatriotic’ (Ahmad 12).

Bhutto has told many lies in this book. In addition to thanking the army, he thanks Yahya Khan, alleging that he made every effort to reach an agreement with the Awami League, which failed due to the stubbornness of the Awami League leaders. In this regard, Ahmad also strongly criticizes

Bhutto's lies, “The fact that Yahya did not call the Assembly on any of the dates suggested by the Awami League, did not concede the substance of the Six-points, did not lift the martial law as demanded by Mujib, did not accept any of the several formulas presented by the Awami League, and broke off negotiations without notice to either Mujib or Bhutto himself --none of it matters much for Bhutto; he is pleased with his rhetoric of ‘the edge of the abyss’ etc.”(Ahmad 13).

Aijaz Ahmad draws attention to an important comment by Bhutto in this book. In a meeting on March 21, before the March 25 crackdown in Dhaka, Sheikh Mujib urged Bhutto to cooperate to reduce the military's power. He also said that just as the army would not spare him, it would not spare Bhutto either. But Bhutto said that he would rather be destroyed by the military than by history. His words proved true. In 1979, military ruler General Ziaul Haq hanged him for allegedly plotting to assassinate his political rival, Nawab Mohammad Ahmad Khan Kasuri.

In an editorial in the April-May 1972 issue, Aijaz Ahmed criticized Tikka Khan's atrocities and also expressed his anger at Bhutto's role. Tikka Khan had led the same kind of violence in Bangladesh that he had led in Baluchistan. But Bhutto, instead of condemning his actions or punishing him, supported him. ‘Crimes of history must not be understood in terms of individuals alone. Nevertheless, Tikka Khan represents, and actually supervised, the machinery of murder that our Army has exercised against our own people, first in Baluchistan and then in Bangladesh. His recent elevation to the highest rank in the Army is an implicit and inexcusable recognition on Bhutto's part that what Tikka Khan did was good and legitimate’ (Ahmad 2).

Six months after independence, Eqbal Ahmad again criticized the role of the Pakistani army in the editorial of June-July 1972 issue. He strongly condemned the military's continued hold on power despite the election results that went in favour of the Awami League and their brutal atrocities against innocent Bengalis. 'We protested the army's intervention to suppress the electoral verdict of the Bengalis, and predicted the transformation of the demand for autonomy into a movement toward independence. With tragic accuracy we forecast the disastrous outcome of the policies of the Yahya regime, predicted the risks for Pakistan of the Soviet-Indian Friendship treaty, and analyzed the manipulation and betrayal that was fundamental to U.S. policy toward Pakistan. Moved by chauvinistic sentiments which they mistook for patriotism many Pakistanis condemned our dissenting views' (Ahmad 3).

He made the same accusation a year later in the editorial of the July-August issue of 1973. The inhumanity of the military was unquestionable and its consequences were horrific, but he considered the lack of strong protest from the educated class of Pakistan to be cowardice. The failure of the established people to protest seemed to him reprehensible. Those who are condemning the military today were silent at the time of the incident. 'The disaster occurred because we permitted it to develop. The excesses of the Awami League notwithstanding, the issues were relatively clear-cut, the inhumanity of the military intervention unquestionable and, from the start its consequences obvious to anyone who dared to think. Yet few educated citizens at home or abroad had the clairvoyance or the courage to disrupt their lives, jeopardize their ambitions, or take risks to challenge the junta they are so vociferously condemning today'(Ahmad 1).

However, some Pakistani intellectuals have been duplicitous. They have tried to equate the March 25 military atrocities to the violence that preceded the Non-Cooperation Movement for 3 weeks. They have tried to magnify the oppression of non-Bengalis at that time and to portray the army's actions as an attempt to control the situation. However, they have also admitted that such a situation would not have arisen if the election results had been accepted. Therefore, the military junta cannot in any way escape responsibility for it. 'The Awami League had won a majority in the national assembly, as a result of which the Pakistan leadership was about to be seized by those Bengalis who viewed West Pakistani presence with suspicion and who were not willing to compromise on some fundamental issues… The Bengalis, frustrated and hopeless, could no longer take the denial of their political rights, and when they found constitutional methods ineffective, as have most freedom fighters in the past, the naturally resorted to violence. And this is precisely the difference' (Mustafa 16)

When the war broke out, a large section of the Pakistani population expressed a hostile attitude, as Mohammad Qadeer, associate editor of the *Pakistan Forum* and also a Professor Emeritus at Queen's University, noted in an interview. He was surprised by this sudden change in the behavior of the Pakistani population, "You can't imagine how, once the Pakistan army started their crackdown in East Pakistan, other liberal Pakistanis all of a sudden became very jingoistic. They would say stuff like 'Bengalis are rabbles. They want to break up Pakistan. They must be tortured'". (Qadeer 4)

Conclusion

Indeed, *Pakistan Forum* was a journal that became a powerful voice for Bangladesh's independence abroad. It was published simultaneously in America and Canada and received support and cooperation from the people of the West. The most surprising thing is that it was initiated by some West Pakistanis who were not driven by radical nationalism but by humanism. They stood up against injustice with great courage to expose the truth. Even the anger of their own people abroad could not sway them from the path of revealing the truth. Their commitment to truth was not easily influenced by avarice. Global intellectuals like Feroz Ahmed, Eqbal Ahmad, Aijaz Ahmad, and Mohammad Qadeer did not fail to recognise the brutality perpetrated on the innocent Bengalis of East Bengal by the West Pakistani military junta as genocide. And so they did not stop at merely condemning their violence. Their pens were constantly flowing against it. They formed public opinion, took to the streets, and protested. Citizens of America and England also joined them in the protest. Numerous Pakistani poets and writers faced the wrath of the military junta and suffered repercussions, yet they remained unwavering in their pursuit of truth. Although the government and its allies misled the people through false statements, these people, driven by conscience, did not follow that path. They were always desperate to present the authentic news. Many were therefore dissatisfied with this newspaper. Wali Khan of the National Awami Party was very angry with the editor Feroz Ahmed. But some people do not compromise with the truth, not in exchange for anything. The three Ahmads of the *Pakistan Forum* were the kind of intellectuals whose integrity could not be purchased by any cost. Today, half a century after independence, when countless self-sold so-called educated people in Bangladesh are working hard to distort and debate the freedom struggle, the backdrop is being created for the end of an unfinished liberation war. That fight must also be won; otherwise, this Bangladesh will become a radical state where the people's fundamental rights to art, literature, culture, and knowledge will be destroyed. Even then, we will see some conscientious people standing by our side selflessly, because some people know that life is impermanent without a fight. The fight never ends.

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