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*Dear Donald,*

Burma/Pakistan/Bangladesh

Our telegrams Nos. 9 and 10 of today reported the announcement that Burma had recognised Bangladesh. For Burma, with its common border, recognition is a practical and administrative necessity and was only a matter of time. They have probably only been waiting for a few other governments to lead the way. I am a little surprised that they have moved quite so quickly. When I spoke to him last weekend, the Foreign Minister was obviously still hoping that Bhutto and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would come to some kind of understanding which would enable governments to recognise Bangladesh without offending Pakistan. He referred rather wistfully to the British practice in granting independence to their former possessions, by which we were the first to recognise the new state and sponsored its admission into the United Nations. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's subsequent pronouncements damped this hope, and the Burmese must have concluded that the need to get on terms with Bangladesh outweighed the risks of a hostile Pakistan reaction.

2. The whole business has caused the Burmese a good deal of anxiety in recent months, though they were careful to say nothing. We have reported previously from time to time about the refugees who crossed into Burma from East Bengal before the fighting started. The Indian invasion brought with it the possibility that Pakistan troops, of whom about one division were said to be cut off in the Chittagong area, might attempt to cross into Burma with their arms. This was one reason why General Ne Win hurried back from

/Britain

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Britain in December. The Burmese also sent army reinforcements to the border. Their main anxiety throughout has been to avoid getting involved or having to take sides. A subsidiary concern has been the fear that arms might find their way into the hands of insurgent groups in Burma.

3. Fortunately there was no appreciable influx of armed troops. In the last days of the war some fourteen light civil aircraft and helicopters landed in Akyab bringing some 174 passengers, mostly Pakistan officials and their families, including Major-General M. Rahim Khan who was wounded. A small Pakistan naval vessel also made its way to Akyab. The vessel and aircraft have been impounded by the Burmese until it is clear who has the rightful claim to them. Colonel Hla Han said that they had been claimed both by the administration in Bangladesh and by the Pakistan authorities. The Burmese were taking the line that it was up to the claimants to settle the question of ownership between themselves. The Burmese had no wish to retain them indefinitely, but if the claimants could not agree they would be told that the matter should be referred to the International Court. Colonel Hla Han also said that the number of refugees in Burma had now been reduced to about 2,000.

4. As elsewhere there have been defections of East Bengalis amongst Pakistan diplomatic and consular staff. The first to go (on 16 December) was the Vice-Consul in Akyab, on whom had fallen the burden of dealing with the influx of refugees there. Subsequently (on 27 December) the number 2 in the Pakistan Embassy, Kazi Anwarul Masud (a 2nd Secretary) and one of the Embassy's non-diplomatic staff applied to the Burmese for political asylum, which was granted. Masud's relations with his Ambassador remained civilised to the end according to the latter and he

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discussed his problem with him before taking the final step. He explained that he really had no alternative, now that it was clear that East Bengal's link with the rest of Pakistan had been severed and Bangladesh had emerged as a separate entity; if he failed to transfer his allegiance to the latter now he would have no future prospects and would be regarded as a collaborator. The Ambassador expressed understanding of his position and asked only that there should be no histrionics. The Burmese authorities made the same condition and these defections have received no publicity. Masud is still here and I suppose may now reemerge as Bangladesh Charge d'Affaires (though the Burmese announcement says nothing about diplomatic representation).

5. Colonel Hla Han thought that the Soviet Union was bound to have a powerful influence in the new state and agreed that this would not be very welcome to the Chinese. However he was inclined to pooh-pooh the ability of the Chinese to counter this or make difficulties for the new administration by supporting extremist groups, in view of the communications difficulties. I suspect he underestimates the ability of the Chinese to exert their influence in a country with which they have no common frontier, or perhaps he is unwilling to admit the possibility that one route by which they might do this could lie through Burma.

6. I have been told that the Bangladesh administration has already let it be known that they will be in the market for substantial quantities of Burmese rice; a figure of 300,000 tons was mentioned. If true, this would be a useful sale from the Burmese point of view.

*Yours ever*  
*Edward*

(E.G. Willan)

cc: Delhi  
Islamabad  
Dacca