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QUESTION 3

Examine the causes and consequences of the 1971 separation of East Pakistan, highlighting the role of regional and international players. (20 marks) (CSS-2025)

1. Introduction

In 1947, Pakistan was created into two geographically separated wings, East Pakistan and West Pakistan. In the middle it was India that never wanted this partition of sub-continent. With growing political turbulence, economic disparity and cultural alienation between East and West Pakistan, it led to the tragic dismemberment of East Pakistan in 1971.

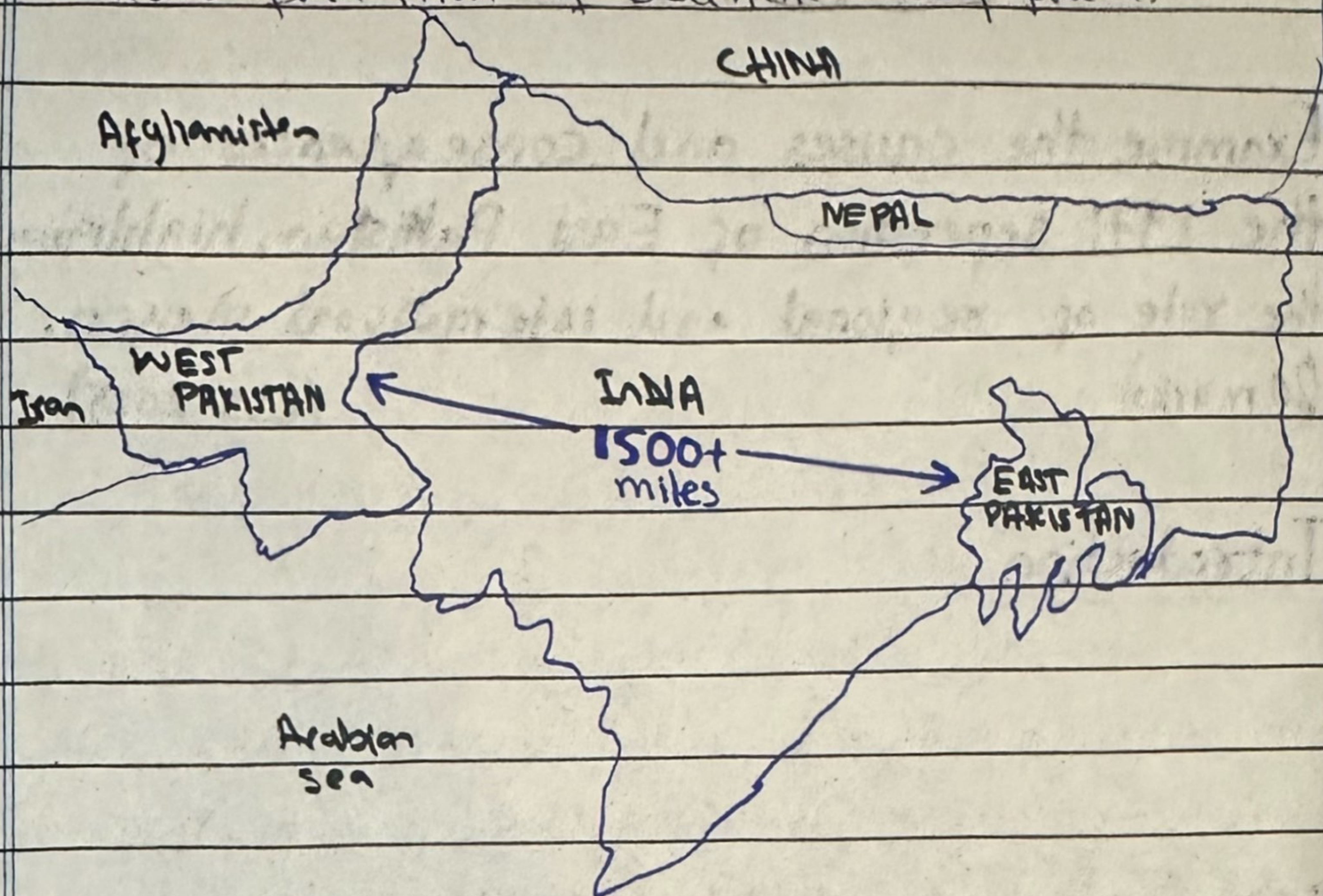
2. Causes of the 1971 Separation of East Pakistan

A. Long distance between the Two Wings Made Administration Difficult.

East Pakistan and West Pakistan were separated by over 1500 approximate miles of Indian Territory. It became complicate to create effective administration and communication between two wings. Since West Pakistan was larger in size, then decisions were made in Islamabad and East Pakistan was ignored and

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alienated from most of decision making power.



This diagram shows the Distance between East and West Pakistan that became a major cause of 1971 separation.

B. Political Inequality Despite Larger Population

West Pakistan possesses 46% of population whereas East Pakistan possesses 56% of Pakistan's total population. Despite East Pakistan being in majority, key posts in politics, bureaucracy and military were dominated by West Pakistan.

“ East Pakistan held only 10-15% of federal civil service posts and less than 5% of army commissions. ”
Hamid Khan, Constitution and Political History of Pakistan

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C. Denial of 1970 Elections Results and Six-Point Plan

In 1970 Elections were held, the Awami League won 160 out of 241 seats in parliament. Power was supposed to be transferred to East Pakistan. West Pakistani leaders, including Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, delayed the assembly session, and rejected Mujib's Six points. That mention about separate currencies, foreign policy and separate defense. Rejection of 6-points led to non-cooperation movement and start of civil war.

D. Economic Exploitation and Neglect of East Pakistan

East Pakistan generated over 70% of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings through jute exports, but most of funds were spent on the development of West Pakistan. Development was only focused on Lahore and Karachi not Dhaka, Chittagong or other areas of East Pakistan.

	East Pakistan	West Pakistan
Foreign Exchange Earnings	70%	30%
Development Spending	30%	70%

E. Language Controversy and Cultural Discrimination

In 1948, Urdu was declared the national language of both wings of Pakistan that sparked to Bengali Language movement in 1952. In this movement around 200 students

were killed. This also further deepened the divide between the two wings.

3. Consequences of the Separation of East Pakistan

A. Launch of Operation Searchlight

Pakistan started operation in March 1971 to suppress Bengali Nationalism. In this operation thousands were killed and human rights were violated at the large scale, this sacrifice later led to independence movement.

B. Deterioration of Relations with India

India started supporting Bengali Nationalist and Insurgents, borders were opened for Bengali to seek refugee. West Pakistan also had to fight against India as well. At the end, Pakistan surrendered on 16 December 1971 and Bangladesh came into existence.

C. Economic loss for Pakistan

West Pakistan not only lost human capital but also lost economic resources, especially the jute earning that contributed to 70% of exports. GDP of Pakistan fell drastically in the early 1970s.

D. Rise of Ethno-Nationalist Movement

After separation of East Pakistan, Pakistan soon began to face new challenges to national integration such as separation along ethnic bases led to rise of nationalist movements in Sindh and Balochistan. To have separate dominion state.

4. Role of Regional Players in the 1971 Separation

A. India's support for Mukti Bahini

India trained and armed the Mukti Bahini force of around 100,000 fighters. India also provided safe passage to 10 million Bengalis. Moreover, India's forces also intervened in Bengal in late December 1971. India was able to turn the political crisis in Pakistan into a strategic opportunity.

Indira Gandhi turned a political crisis in Pakistan into a strategic opportunity."

Stanley Wolpert

B. China's limited support to Pakistan

China was still growing economy at that time, However, China provided diplomatic support but avoided from direct involvement into conflict due to China-India tension on borders and China feared from Soviet reaction.

5. Role of International Players in the 1971 Separation

A. United States' cold Response

Despite Pakistan being a ally of CENTO and SEATO, the USA. avoided taking a stance in 1971 separation and civil conflict. However, later, USA sent the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal, but it arrived too late to influence the separation. and

B. Soviet Union's strategic support to India

USSR had already signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and friendship in August 1971. It showed that USSR India was backed by USSR through military and diplomatic. However, at later stage, Russian votes in the UN Security Council to block ceasefire resolution that favoured Pakistan.

C. Ineffective Role of the United Nations

UNO was unable to stop the conflict. As UNO was indulged at the peace efforts of cold war and veto politics between USA and USSR.

6. Conclusion

Political marginalization, economic disparity and denial of democratic rights were the

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main root cause of the 1971 separation. The separation was made possible by Indian involvement as well. Whereas, regional and international players were all aligning their strategic interests, with other countries. However, the separation of East Pakistan 1971 clearly shows that inequality and undemocratic action will lead to tragedy in any country. On this one writer once said:

← The breakup of Pakistan was not inevitable; it was the consequence of sustained injustice.⁴
Dr. Sayed Mahmood