

E. Pakistanis No Match for West Forces

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CALCUTTA, India — The past two weeks of bloody violence in East Pakistan may be the birth pangs of a new nation, but the 75 million people of the province have much to learn about the arts of war if they are to wrest independence from their rulers in the West.

The Bengalis, generally a docile race of clerks and peasant farmers, are pitted against the martial peoples of the Punjab, who make up the tough core of President Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan's Pakistani army.

If proud words were weapons the Bengalis would be a race of conquerors. But they are learning that flowery speeches do not win battles.

Wants Ties Cut

Everywhere along a circuitous 250-mile route traveled by this correspondent from the Indian frontier to the provincial capital of Dacca, off limits to newsmen since March 25, the people of Bangla Desh — the new name that means Bengali nation — clamored to cut the ties binding them to the Western wing of the predominantly Moslem country carved out of what was British India in 1947.

In Kushita, where more than 200 Pakistani troops were cut down after seizing the town's administrative buildings in a midnight swoop, all is confusion now, with thousands fleeing the town before the army advance. Equipment is being abandoned. Many Bangla Desh patriots are throwing away their guns. They are discarding their green, red and white Bangla Desh badges to avoid being shot.

At the Ganges ferry crossing at Goalondo Ghat last week, Bangla Desh defenders ran up the green and white Pakistani national flag on the strength of a rumor that gunboats were on their way and the army was preparing to cross the border river.

A husload of Bangla Desh troops arrived at the waterfront, then quickly departed. There was a wild scramble for the last train out of town.

No Organization

Arms were distributed to civilians and there was a fight to get a gun. Organized defense was completely lacking.

Local officials who had provided a guide to take this correspondent and photographer Michel Laurent across the river on the way to Dacca tried to call off the trip. They said the gunboats would intercept the little flat-bottom canoe and blow it out of the water.

Finally the craft set off in brilliant moonlight. Midway across, searchlights were spotted in the distance and there was the sound of approaching ship's engines.

The guide jumped overboard and scrambled to a nearby mudflat.

But it was a false alarm and the gunboats never put in an appearance.

On the eastern bank there were no more Bangla Desh flags and the Pakistani standard flew from every other village hut.

East of the river, support for Bangla Desh was strong, but villagers were fearful lest helping foreign newsmen might bring trouble to their community.

"We fly the Pakistan flag but Bangla Desh is in our hearts, one village elder said. "We have no guns to fight. What else can we do against an army with tanks and planes?"

We finally reached Dacca by way of a maze of muddy backway donkey cart rides, by bus and on foot.

Hundreds of people still are leaving that city for fear of trouble yet to come. They move out on bicycles, on foot and jammed into rickety buses. The roof of every bus is laden with refugees and their belongings.

In the provincial capital, which bore the savage brunt of the army's bid to crush the liberation movement, whole blocks of huts have been reduced to

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ashes and charred bamboo stumps.

People still grub among the ruins to salvage a few belongings.

Pakistani troops stand guard at every intersection and patrol the streets in commandeered trucks. Diplomats estimate up to 6,000 people died in Dacca, perhaps 700 of them students at Dacca University. In the wake of the bloodshed, Dacca is a city of fear.

Non-Bengali civilians from East Pakistan are taking advantage of the situation to loot and kill. The army stands by or openly condones the violence, neutral observers reported.

The head of a government department and his family trundled their belongings through the streets on a handcart. They said they live in a predominantly non-Bengali neighborhood and had been threatened with death.

Together with thousands of others, the family took refuge in Dacca's big residential school at Danmondi, a well-to-do district of the city. They report others were less fortunate.

'Hacked to Pieces'

"Many were hacked to pieces," the official said. "Some were buried alive."

Hindus are being singled out for persecution. Hundreds are said to have died in the March 25 fighting, and the killing continues.

The bodies of three office workers in the government electricity authority were found at the riverside last Friday. They had been shot.

A European resident of Dacca reported an entire family of six on his street was murdered.

"Shooting goes on every night," reported one diplomat. "There has been mass murder and now there is Gestapo rule."

The Intercontinental, Dacca's principal hotel, has been taken over by the military, and accommodation for clandestine visitor is difficult.

This correspondent and Laurent spent the night on the floor of a servants' room resting on a bundle of rags.

In Dacca the fear of informers is acute and betrayal a constant danger.

The shortest route from Dacca to the Indian frontier is due east across the Lachya River. A taxi driver was instructed to avoid the army and get this correspondent across by canoe.

He drove straight to a military picket guarding the regular ferry. Whether it was a genuine mistake caused by language difficulty is problematical.

It was a bad moment and one could only brazen it out. The sergeant in charge accepted a cigaret and offered to do his best to get the taxi across the river.

Another Route

He said his officers would soon be arriving and they would have to make the arrangements for our crossing. It was time to beat a retreat and try another route. West was best.

A bus to Dhaleshwari River and by launch to the Ganges ferryport of Lohiang. The captain of a cockleshell launch was bribed to sail to Madaripur. It was a 9-hour voyage.

A night in Madaripur, then by bus, rickshaw, pedicab and ancient horse-drawn carriage to Faridpur, Magura, Jhenida, Chuadanga and the border.

Waiting at one ferry was a jeepload of modern rifles, grenades and ammunition.

A Bengali accompanying the vehicle said it was part of a shipment of Indian weapons delivered by train to the Bangla Desh forces 12 days before.

He said at least one Indian army officer was instructing the Mukti Foj—liberation forces—in the use of the weapons. He said the materiel included heavy and light machine guns and 50,000 rifles.

A final jeep across plowed fields delivered this correspondent and photographer Laurent to an Indian border railroad station and a two-hour ride to Calcutta.

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