

Airfield victory claimed for Bangla Desh

The Guardian ; Apr 20, 1971;

cbgr1971: The Guardian and The Observerpg. 3



Refugees from East Pakistan passing through Chuadanga on their way to India

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New Delhi, April 19
Bangla Desh forces are reported here to have captured Shalutikor airfield near Sylhet in the north-east corner of East Pakistan. According to the Press Trust of India the town itself was already in Bengali hands and the entire area has now been virtually cleared of Government forces.

Witnesses quoted by the agency said the Pakistan Army suffered heavy casualties in the fighting. One wounded Bengali who reached Dawki on the

Indian frontier said 170 West Pakistanis had been killed around the airfield today.

The agency also reported fierce battles for Meherpur, only three miles from the Indian border in the Western sector of the province. Meherpur is just a few miles from Baidyana Thala, the village where a Bangla Desh independence ceremony was held at the weekend.

Clashes were also reported from Brahmanbari and Quassa in the Comilla area, south of Sylhet, and at Kaligacha and

Tangail in the area round Dacca, the East Pakistan capital. Pakistani troops were in control of the important Hardinge railway bridge, 30 miles north of Chuadanga, which was named two weeks ago as the provisional capital of the Bengali republic.

The reports of the continued fighting come in the wake of an apparent all-out offensive by the Pakistan Army to seal off all East Pakistan's borders. The army was reported last night to have gained control of almost the entire eastern border area.

Indian officials denied reports

that the Bangla Desh Cabinet was operating from Indian soil or that its headquarters were in Calcutta.

The West Bengal Information Minister, Mr B. S. Nahar, told reporters in Calcutta that a Government team had arrived from New Delhi for discussions on developments in East Pakistan.

Radio Pakistan said today that the Pakistan Government had lodged a strong protest over an alleged attack by Indian armed personnel on a border post in East Pakistan last Friday.