

Thousand My Lais

by A Special Correspondent

[THOUSAND My Lais is a report based upon information gathered during a twelve-day visit to the then East Pakistan in early June, 1971 by a World Bank Mission for considering the World Bank assistance to Pakistan. The members of the Mission visited twelve of the nineteen districts. The then Martial Law Authorities very meticulously arranged these trips to selected places so that the atrocities committed by the brutal West Pakistani military personnel do not come afloat and even arranged Bengali officers to accompany the visiting team to various places to prove to the team that the Martial Law Authorities were allowing Bengali officers to divulge the truth in private also. Bengali officers were at a great disadvantage because if anything went wrong and if the report of the team is not managed to be a favourable one to the advantage of Pakistan Govt. the Martial Law Authorities would be able to throttle them. Yet the Bengali officers at the risk of their lives did not falter to apprise the team of the truth of the West Pakistan attitude and atrocities inflicted on the people of Bangladesh and of course suffered the sentence of such daring attitude later in the hands of the Army Intelligence.

The Bank Mission's report is a large one and covers several pages; it is not possible to reprint the entire report and as such a portion of the report is reproduced here for information of the people of Bangladesh that with all the precautions taken by the Military, the truth could not be suppressed even though some of the members of the team wanted to exclude certain portions which would go against the Military Govt. We are reproducing here verbatim a portion of the report which will prove that even to a visitor the atrocities were obvious and that every Bengali at the risk of life did his part to emancipate the country.]

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The human tragedy that occurred in a small hamlet known as My Lai in South Vietnam is now being repeated in a whole country and upon a whole nation. A thousand My Lai are being perpetrated in Bangladesh every day by the marauding trigger-happy gunmen from West Pakistan.

On the conclusion of an extensive study tour of Bangladesh, ten representatives of the World Bank submitted a joint report recommending an immediate suspension of aid to West Pakistan. Before dealing with the official report of the World Bank mission the reader may find great interest in the observations of Mr. Hendrik Van der Heijden, Economist, Pakistan Division, IBRD.

Insertion of individual reports of the other members of the World Bank team would have been of great value. Nonetheless this document helps to give a complete and faithful picture. We regret our inability to process the remaining individual reports.

These reports are so graphic and authoritative that they need no preface or comments. Would it be possible for example to surpass the following excerpts?

"When we moved around (Kushtia), everyone fled. It was like the morning after a nuclear attack. The people were terrified and still shocked and dazed".

"It is at the Thana (village community) level where the shock waves of the army action hit the hardest. It was at this

level where the hope for agricultural development was. It has been set back by at least five years."

The purpose of this preface is to request you to give this brief document your time and attention. After you have read it through, would you not do something to stop the genocide? A million people have already been bombed, bayoneted or machinegunned. Thousands of women have been raped to death and about eight million refugees have fled to India.

Would you do your little bit to persuade your Government to cut off all economic and military aid and credits to West Pakistan?

Would you awaken the United Nations from its indifference and apathy? Could we count on your help, material and moral?

1. The visit to the western area of East Pakistan which took place from June 3 to June 6, 1971 centered around three major cities there: Jessore, Khulna and Kushtia. In addition, I visited Chalna Anchorage and the adjoining service city of Mangla.

2. As I left in the early morning of June 3, 1971 for Jessore by regular PIA commercial flight it already became apparent at the Dacca airport that the Military Law Authorities (MLA) were still keeping in force elaborate security precautions: all luggage was carefully searched, none was allowed into the airplane, passengers were carefully searched and double checked by Army Security officers. Before entering the plane, another check took place: this time to ensure that cigarette lighter and matches were not carried into the plane. To top it all armed soldiers entered the cabin and flew as escorts, demanding that all passengers remained seated during the entire flight. The plane was fully loaded; government officials, army personnel and some civilians, including some women and children.

Jessore Area

3. Approaching Jessore, it became soon clear that this was the area where the Army Punitive action had been very severe: from the air tens of totally destroyed villages were clearly visible, a building was still in fire, and to the eastern side of the runway a good many houses had been destroyed. The airport was heavily guarded by Armed Forces who also controlled access to the airport. Upon landing, soldiers moved forward to the aircraft and took position around it. A heavy military presence around the passenger terminal was noted. The car from the Khulna District Commissioner was there to take me to Jessore first when I saw the Deputy Commissioner of Jessore, the ADC, the police commissioner and the Secretary of the Peace Committee.

4. Jessore has suffered badly from the disturbances. When the Army moved out of the Cantonment area on April 5 (from March 25 until April 5 Jessore was held by the "miscreants"); it reportedly met little in the way of strong resistance from the East Pakistan forces, and most of the very heavy damage in Jessore was the result—reportedly—of the Army punitive action. The authorities estimate that the population of Jessore itself is down from 80,000 to 15,20,000. Some 20,000 people were killed in Jessore town. The city's centre has been destroyed: commerce, obviously, has come to a standstill. More than 50 per cent of the shops have been destroyed, all of the city's bakeries have been burned (so that bread is unavailable

there as is coffee and butter), only three out of fifteen gasoline stations have survived, and only 5-10 per cent of the shops that are there have opened. Schools remain closed for all practical purposes: about half of the teachers report for duty but less than ten per cent of the children attended. Jessore is now a male city, with most women and children, having been sent to the country-side.

5. Damage to housing in Jessore District is so severe that the authorities estimate that some 450,000 people have been affected out of a total District population of 2.5 million. Half a million people have fled to India. Virtually all economic activity has come to a halt in Jessore city which in the afternoon looks like a ghost town. In the evening no one besides Army personnel ventures into the streets. The sugar and cotton mill remain closed, the cigarette factory operates at 5 per cent of its normal capacity, all public works programmes have come to halt, stocks of brick factories are very high (indicating the loss of one entire construction season) and while the Government administration is formally functioning (some 80 per cent of the employees have reported for work), in practical terms it does not operate; people have ceased to come to Government offices. Since the Army action no one has come to apply for licences and while there normally would be heavy activity at the Justice Department (settlement of land disputes etc.) no one is coming now. The collection of revenues had barely started. Some banks were open, but very few transactions took place. ADBP's office was opened but had not made any loans nor had it received any payments.

6. Transport has been badly affected by the disturbances: 50 per cent of the stock of trucks have gone out of commission (more than 100 out of 200) with more trucks having gone to India. Many buses have been requisitioned by the Army, are now in India or are being hidden to prevent requisitioning. Train service has been partially restored: the signalling system is out of commission, but the tracks are all right. On the whole, intercity traffic is at less than 5 per cent of normal. As a result of the dislocation of the transportation system, there are shortages of salt, tea, wash in soap and kerosene.

7. An important aspect of the situation in the Jessore area is that the area is by no means secure. Government officers cannot any more easily enter the villages as they run the risk of being shot by the "miscreants." A number of these incidents took place in the week before I arrived, and the Army is reacting to these incidents by burning down the villages from which these shorts are being fired. Generally, the Army terrorizes the population, particularly aiming at the Hindus and suspected members of the Awami League.

Khulna

8. On the way to Khulna just a handful of trucks, buses and cars were noticed. An Army patrol moved south and whenever people were in sight, they fled as fast as they could. Halfway to Khulna I visited the Jessore Jute Industry a firm that in normal times employed some 2,400 workers and operated on a three-shift basis. The firm has 300 hessian looms, 100 sacking looms and 50 broad looms for the production of carpet backing. The firm now operates (with 300 workers) one shift of the conventional (g. and no p. unquq.)

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looms and two shifts of the broadlooms, although only partially; it operates 40 narrow looms and 38 broadlooms. Consequently, production is at less than 10 percent of original capacity, for the most part occasioned by the skill-imbalance of the returning workers; there is an acute shortage of weavers who have fled to their native villages in the Noakhali, Barisal and Faridpur areas.

9. Khulna city has been substantially damaged in the centre town, the approaches to it. Very heavy destruction was observed in the areas alongside the road and along the river leading up to the Newsprint Factory and the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill. As a result of the disturbances the destruction of houses and the continuing uncertainty regarding life and property, a large segment of the population has fled from the city: in fact, the population of Greater Khulna is down from 400,000 to 150,000. It is, as Jessore, a male city. People do not venture after dark. The area is not hundred percent secure: all through my stay in Khulna 6 Police-men armed with rifles accompanied me. At night which I spent at the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill's guest house, the guards were strengthened to protect from possible hazards from the river which is generally unsafe. (The week before our arrival a passenger boat (the Rocket) had been seized by the insurgents, as were some barges carrying raw jute and manufactures.)

10. The Administration of Khulna District was back to 80 per cent of its original strength. There are serious police shortages, but the situation is improving. Some senior police officers have been recruited from West Pakistan. The road to Jessore and Kushtia is generally unsafe, particularly at night, and there have been frequent doubts about my proposed trip to Kushtia. Schools are open, but attendance is very poor. The Polytechnic Institute, as well as colleges however, have not yet started. The main problems affecting Khulna is communication; the telephone system works all right but mail service is very irregular. There is only marginal truck traffic on the roads; less than 5 per cent of normal. In fact, the road to Jessore is normally a heavily congested road. Now it carried only a handful of vehicles. The Army has requisitioned many vehicles and launches, including government vehicles, and many have been taken to India. As regards rail transportation, service is off by 50 percent. There are also very few buses on the road. Spare parts are a problem. In addition, most of the buses are being used by the Army. River traffic is negligible; less than 5 percent of what it used to be. As a result, there are pockets of scarcity: shortages of kerosene, edible oil and diesel oil exist in the villages.

supervisory staff. Forty-five percent of the staff has not yet returned to the job.

Chalna Anchorage

14. A two-hour trip by launch took me to Chalna Anchorage where ships started getting in since May 12. A total of 5 ships were anchored. Some having waited for two weeks to receive cargo traffic on the river is down to 5-10 percent of what it used to be. The project to construct a permanent port at Chalna have been indefinitely delayed; all of the workers have fled, as have the Yugoslav consultants.

15. The city of Mangla, the town where the labour for Chalna Anchorage lived has been virtually obliterated by naval shelling. The population there fore is down from 22,000 to 1,000 and the business routine there has been completely disrupted. Damage was extreme: houses, the market place, the telephone exchange power distribution lines etc. are all totally destroyed. All construction work, of course, has come to a standstill and there is no more an economic base for the population there. The 1,000 workers suffice to unload and load the ships' contents in barges. Some port officers have fled, one tug disappeared and two of the four pilots have disappeared. When I was there M.S. Mhams arrived carrying 1,500-2,000 soldiers from West Pakistan.

16. Works pretty close to normal. Eighty percent of the staff is on the job, probably forced. I noticed that one coaster had been requisitioned by the Navy and was being outfitted for naval duties. This was also the case with a fishing boat.

17. Perhaps the most impressive visit I made was the one to this Thana office. Fifty percent of the population of this Thana has fled (some 20,000 out of a total of 42,000), mostly Hindus, leaving behind unattended plots of land, houses, etc. Everything had been disrupted there: the livestock officer had been killed, the whole administration was in chaos. The people bewildered. The whole works programme had come to a stop: no labourer and no construction materials. Agriculture was in a shambles, the people demoralized. It is doubtful whether any government can effectively deal with these people in the near future. It is at the Thana level where the shock waves of the Army Action hit the hardest: it was at this level where the hope for agricultural development was. It has been set back by at least five years.

Kushtia

18. Five times the trip to Kushtia was off. Only in the late hours of Friday, June 4, was there a decision from the Governor that I could make the trip from Khulna to Kushtia. Most of the officials were extremely nervous and all the

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11. The area surrounding the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill has undergone very substantial damage. In fact, the destruction of Pucca houses and buildings reminds one of Arnhem in 1944. Also, many workers' houses were destroyed. The area is deserted now, less than 7 percent of the mill's permanent labour force had returned to the job, but local unskilled people were hired bringing attendance up to 30 per cent of the labour force which originally amounted to 4500. The firm now operates at about 25 percent of capacity. Of the 875 narrow looms originally in operation in 2 shifts, only 420 are working on a one-shift basis. The firm has started to employ women (very abnormal in East Pakistan) who have become widows in the past few months.

12. This factory which produces newsprint mainly for despatch to West Pakistan was restarted at the end of April and produces now 1,500 tons per month as compared to originally 4,200 tons per month. The firm has a shortage of skilled workers as only 20 percent of the labour force has come back to the mill; of an original labour force of 2,100 some 380 have returned with the remaining 600 having been recruited locally. The industry forms part of the EPIDC industrial complex, and obviously, is running at very heavy losses.

13. This thermal station was supposed to have been completed by mid 1971. However, there is now a six months' delay in commissioning the plant; the Czech consultants have left as have the Czech erection

Kushtia

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19. An hour's drive north of Jessore was Jen'dah a small town of some 20,000-30,000 inhabitants. The Army was omnipresent there, and all the approaches to the city were heavily guarded. The Army was dug in and on the alert. We were met by an Army officer who told us that there was only one way to travel to Kushtia: by road but with an Army protection party. On we went; in the front DC Jessore's Mercedes used by my counterpart and myself, a jeep with rifle, armed Policemen (8), and a truckload of heavily-armed soldiers. In convoy we drove to Kushtia.

20. It was only on April 15 (some 20 days after the Army moved into Da.ca) that the Army moved North from Jen'dah and into Kushtia. There must have been very strong resistance from the EP Rifles as some buildings clearly showed. When the insurgents withdrew the Army Punitive action started. It lasted 12 days and left Kushtia virtually deserted and destroyed. The population was down from 40,000 to 5,000. Ninety percent of the houses, shops, banks and other buildings were totally destroyed. The city looked like a WW II German town having undergone strategic bombing attacks. People were sitting around dazed. When we moved around everyone fled. It was like the morning after a nuclear attack. I was the first foreigner to come to Kushtia after the Army moved in. The people were terrified and still shocked.

21. I met the Administration officials who were still shocked and dazed. The DC at first did not answer any of my questions. Nor did anyone else who was there. After fifteen minutes I called the meeting to a halt and went on another trip through Kushtia. It lasted an hour and a half. I asked them to show me a shop where food was being sold; it was in that ninety minutes impossible to find one. Kushtia as someone told me, is the My Lai of the West Pakistan Army. There was only one reaction: to confirm that impression.

22. The DC had been killed as had so many other Government officials. The schools are open but nobody is attending. Even the hospital was practically deserted. The permanent staff was not there, and there was just a handful of new staff. The Army was requisitioning a part of the building. Everything but everything was displaced in Kushtia. ADBP, ADC and other activities, ADC had not recalled any of the pumps it had in the field.

The farmers are not coming to the cities, and nobody goes out. Thousands of farmers have fled. Everything is abnormal here and it was a shattering experience.

(Text of Field Report on trip to Jessore, Khulna, Chama and Kushtia submitted by Mr. Hendrik Van der Heijden, Economist, Pakistan Division, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, dated June 23, 1971. Received through the courtesy of Dr. Faizul Haq (BWAPDA))

McNamara offers IMF membership to Bangladesh

Mr. A. M. Hamidullah Governor, Bank of Bangladesh, disclosed in Dacca on Sunday that Mr. McNamara during his recent visit to Bangladesh requested the Bangladesh Bank on his own to accept the membership of IMF. Reports ENA.

The Governor said, country's economic position was sound and despite the destruction by Pakistan Army Bangladesh would be able to stand on her own under the planned economy as envisaged by Bangabandhu.

Mr. Hamidullah also disclosed on Sunday that the Bank of Bangladesh will formally open an account with the Bank of England within a day or two.

Talking to an ENA correspondent Mr. Hamidullah said, all talks regarding the matter have been finalised through the British High Commissioner in Dacca. He has already despatched a letter in this regard to the Bank of England. The Governor added.

After the account is opened Bangladesh will be a member of the Sterling Area.