

Pakistanis

rally to sheik's call

From Australian Associated Press

NEW DELHI, March 28.—East Pakistan's rag-tag rebel army is fighting for its life, facing superior West Pakistan troops backed by tanks, artillery and jet bombers.

* An Indian news agency report said an estimated 10,000 East Pakistanis had been killed in less than two days of civil war.

Each side claimed to have the upper hand.

Supporters of the East Pakistani leader, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, today formed a provisional Government under the temporary leadership of Major Zia Khan.

A rebel radio, announcing the new Government, identified Major Zia as head of the liberation army of Sheik Mujib's Awami League. The radio did not explain why Sheik Mujib had not been appointed leader of the Government.

At the same time, the radio announced that a liberation force was marching from Chittagong to Dacca, a distance of 125 miles.

Radio Pakistan claimed that Sheik Mujib had been arrested at his home in Dacca on Friday.

But a speaker identifying himself as Sheik Mujib said on a rebel radio broadcast that he was free and in the "liberated" port of Chittagong.

The official Government radio said Government troops were in full control of the situation throughout East Pakistan and that "life is fast returning to normal" — but the rebel radio claimed most of the province was under their control.

Reports reaching Indian towns along the East Pakistani border said heavy fighting was continuing and that the para-military East Pakistan Rifles and police had joined the rebels.

Amid conflicting claims, Indian news agencies are the only independent source of news from East Pakistan, following the expulsion of 35 foreign correspondents from Dacca last night.

Rebel radio broadcasts said that Pakistani Air Force jets roared into action in support of hard-pressed West Pakistani ground troops who were encountering tough resistance from "liberation army" fighters.

The rebels wore sarongs and pyjamas, and many of them were armed only with sticks, knives and axes.

Hospital bombed

The Press Trust of India reported that West Pakistani troops were shelling and burning homes and factories as they retreated before "liberation army volunteers."

Air force bombers had destroyed a hospital in Dacca, killing most of the patients, the agency said. Air force jets had also bombed the town of Comilla, 55 miles east of Dacca, near the Indian border.

The agency said that more than 10,000 people had been killed in two days of fighting since Sheik Mujib proclaimed East Pakistan's independence of the central Government and President Yahya Khan outlawed East Pakistan's dominant Awami League and accused Sheik Mujib of treason.

Most of the deaths occurred yesterday when the Pakistan army used tanks and artillery against rebels in Dacca, Chittagong, Comilla, Maraingun, Rangpur, Khulna and Jessore.

One report told of Government machine-guns mowing down 1500 civilians who charged with daggers and spears.

In CANBERRA, the Department of Foreign Affairs has ordered the evacuation of the families of all Australian Government officials in East Pakistan.

There are 59 Australians, including about 20 Baptist missionaries in East Pakistan.

* War comes at last to a divided nation, P.6; Editorial comment, P.9.