

Army Men in Pakistan See Heresy In Western-Style Education There

The following dispatch is by one of six foreign correspondents allowed into East Pakistan for a tour with official escorts. Foreign newsmen were expelled from East Pakistan after the army moved on March 25 to crush an attempt by the Awami League to win autonomy.

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DACCA, Pakistan, May 11 — Military men in Pakistan have declared war on a Western-oriented form of education, which, in their view, is a precursor to religious and doctrinal heresy, rebellion against state authority and moral decay.

Ordinarily, military interest in education would be of no concern to Pakistani university students and faculty. But on the night of March 25, the army smashed student resistance at Dacca University. Between 100 and 500 students, depending on whose testimony is accepted, were killed.

Soldiers went on the hunt for certain professors and students who were believed to have incited student opposition to the Government. Homes were smashed open and entire families were shot to death.

Houses Torn Down

The number of teachers killed was reliably reported as 14. They included Dr. G. C. Dev, described by colleagues as a gentle old Hindu scholar whose work has been highly regarded in the United States.

In numbers, the killings were insignificant, compared with the other great events.

Thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of people have been killed. And some killing and destruction continue.

For instance, the army has ordered all houses cleared near rail tracks, starting in Dacca and continuing 90 miles north to Mymensingh. An estimated 30,000 families have been forced to tear down their houses, brick by brick, and have joined the tide of homeless.

The Army, mainly West Pakistanis, is a force besieged in an alien and hostile country, and faces sniping and sabotage. By clearing housing from the railway right of way, it believes, these problems will be reduced.

But intellectuals see an especially dangerous trend in military attitudes toward them.

'No Academic Future'

"There is no academic future for Pakistan for a long time to come," a professor said. "The army means to apply the rod to education so hard it will be beaten to death. For myself, it's better to leave Pakistan altogether, I'm afraid."

An army major said:

"We have to consider that an entire generation of students has been lost, because of the laxity and permissiveness of parents. You hear of alcohol drinking and raping going on at the university—things unheard of in a Moslem society.

"People like that become miscreants inevitably," he said. "They end by taking up arms and getting shot by us.

"The new generation must be brought up according to strict Islamic principles, with a return to the old ways. Too many people forget that the sole reason for the existence of Pakistan is as a home for Moslems. When we lose sight of that idea, we become corrupt."

Some Moslem officers even insist that all Pakistani women should be veiled and that banks should be forbidden to charge interest.

A Matter of Values

A conservative Dacca University student who took no part in the violent events of March felt that the army had a point.

"It's quite true that Pakistan is a doctrinal state that must put secular values second to spiritual ones," he said. "The tragedy is that too many of our officers from humble families become anti-intellectual zealots who will not stop before they have brought down an already humbled nation in glorious flames.

"Pakistan offers a fine setting for the epic poet, but for the engineers and practical people like myself, it is sheer hell."

The anti-intellectualism of the armed forces is said to extend to economics, where national pride and the concept of a united Islamic nation take priority over the fact that Pakistan is nearly bankrupt.

A businessman said:

"Our economic problems will multiply until at one point our generals discover that the people are starving and our money no longer buys things outside the country. At that point we shall declare war, probably on India, and our noble spiritual torch will no doubt outshine our backwardness and poverty.

"However, I do not intend to wait to watch," he said.