

East Bengal atrocities

Sir.—We are not reporters with little time to spare looking for the best stories. We have each lived in West Bengal for most of 20 years and we have talked at random with hundreds of refugees in the course of our relief work among them. The total picture of what has been happening in East Bengal is clear to us without any shadow of doubt.

There are scores of survivors of firing-squad line-ups. Hundreds of witnesses to the machine-gunning of political leaders, professors, doctors, teachers, and students.

Villages have been surrounded, at any time of day or night, and the frightened villagers have fled where they could, or been slaughtered where they have been found, or enticed out to the fields and mown down in heaps. Women have been raped, girls carried off to barracks, unarmed peasants battered or bayoneted by the thousands.

The pattern, after seven weeks, is still the same. Even the least credible stories, of babies thrown up to be caught on bayonets, of women stripped and bayoneted vertically, or of children sliced up like meat, are credible not only because they are told by so many people, but because they are told by people without sufficient sophistication to make up such stories for political motives.

We saw the amputation of a mother's arm and a child's foot. These were too far from the border, and genuine distances from the border, to be made up. We saw their daughters raped, and the heads of their children smashed in. Some watched their husbands, sons, and grandsons tied up at the wrists and shot in more selective male elimination.

No sedative will calm a girl now in Borong Hospital. She is in a permanent state of being. "They will kill us all," she says. There is a girl still trembling from day-long raping and a vaginal bayonet wound.

About 400 were killed at Jhaudanga while on their way to India, surrounded and massacred. Why? Lest they take tales to India? Or because choosing a certain democratic system under Sheikh Mujib



the flight from Bangla Desh

means forfeiting the right to live in any country?

The insensate fury follows the contempt of years: exploitation has been chronic—rice had become double the price it sold for in the western province. Mujib's men were ready to re-establish justice democratically and peacefully, and gained an overwhelming mandate from the people in the December elections—167 out of 169 seats. But Yahya Khan's military junta and Mr Bhutto could not

stomach the humiliation implied.

India's problem? It should be no more hers than any other country's. What is the West doing? The big event is over, the heavy print of Pakistan recedes, the tragedy is stale, who will fund the relief operations? Who will campaign for this?

Are the political complexities so much a gag? Has no government or people the voice that can sound out with the authentic ring of passion in support of the victims? Is there no consensus out of which can be heard a creative answer?

(Rev.) John Hastings,
(Rev.) John Clapham
Sudder Street Methodist
Church,
Calcutta.

Source of dismay

Sir.—Lena Jeger (Guardian, May 20) is manufacturing stiff accounts for only 8 per cent of New Zealand's GNP. In fact, it accounts for over 30 per cent, compared with rather under 20 per cent from agriculture.

If Lena Jeger can be as wrong as this over a point of fact, could it be that she is equally wrong in some of her judgments about the question of British membership of the European Community?

Peter Stephenson.

London N 3.

Sir.—Lord Campbell of Eskan's experience of the meaning of "avoir à coeur" in the Dordogne (Letter May 20) can be supplemented from a more authoritative source, which Mr Rippon could well have consulted in Brussels, if he had had the time and the inclination. Littré's great "Dictionnaire Générale" (Vol. 1, p. 656, col. 2, line 32, for the benefit of Mr Rippon) defines it as "porter un vif intérêt," which offers nothing that can possibly be interpreted as a precise commitment, either in law or in honour.

Mr Rippon's suggestion of a possible British veto over whatever part of the amended draft of the Yaoundé Treaty may deal with sugar is no less inaccurate. According to the terms in which the draft is presented, he will have to choose between vetoing whole areas of it, and thus incurring the enmity of most of the Six and all their former overseas territories (with appropriate reprisals) and vetoing only the sugar portions, in which case he will throw the Commonwealth sugar producers back on the tender mercies of the existing Common Agricultural Policy (which deals with sugar), and thus kill them overnight. That is only one of the many cases in which a theoretical veto is in fact a boomerang.

Both Mr Rippon and Mr Heath could have argued, as you did in your leading article of May 14, that Britain must get into the Community at any cost to her former friends. In that case, one would have judged both their realism and their sense of honour with the same contempt with which one judges yours, but they would at least have been secure against accusations of either ignorance or dishonesty.—Yours respectfully,

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Mining and the environment