

## East Pakistan:

### The Grim Fight for 'Bangla Desh'

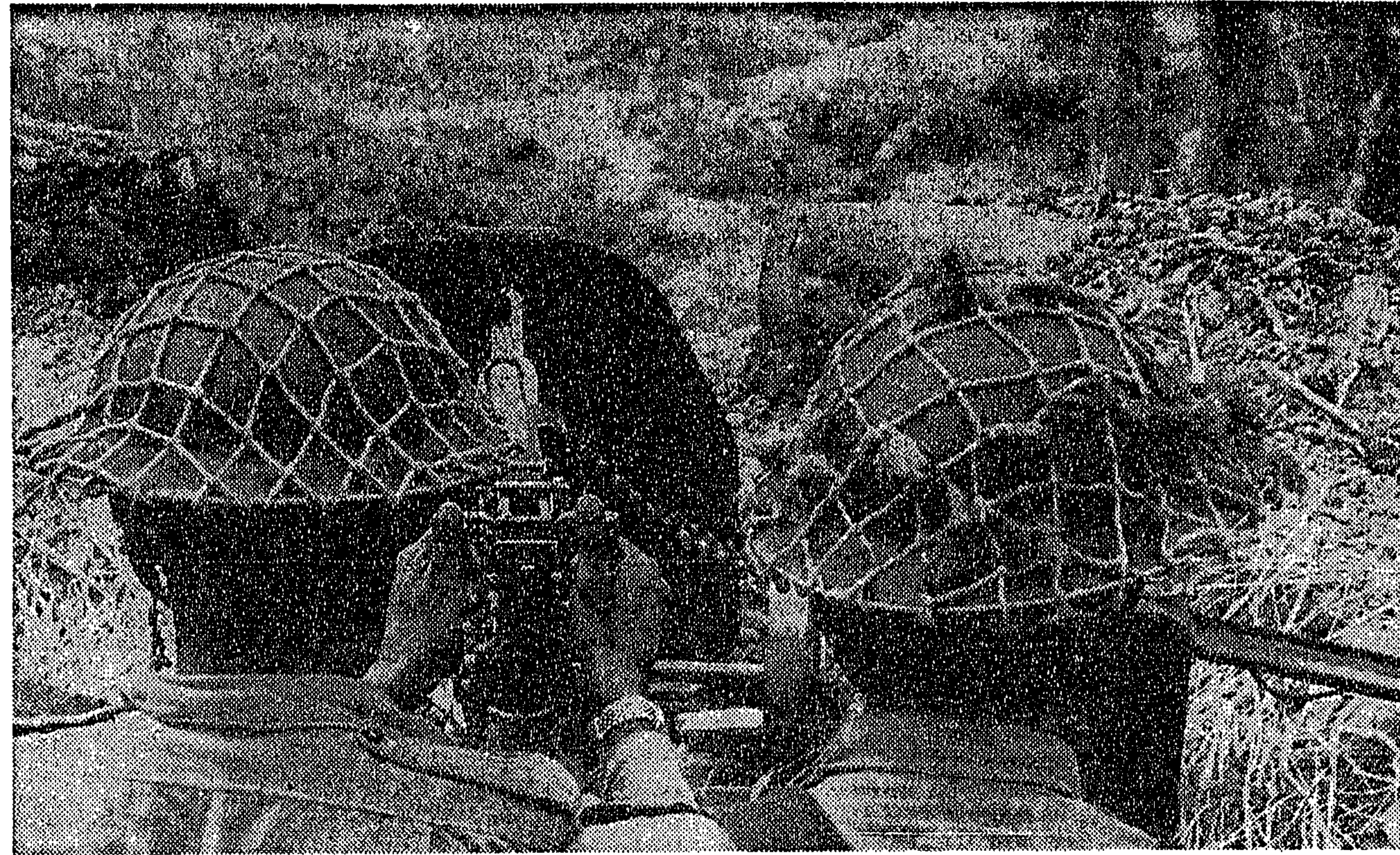
NEW DELHI—"If the Vietcong had been doing this well after six months, they would have considered it a remarkably good start." The foreign diplomat was talking about the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Forces), the Bengali insurgents who are fighting for the independence of East Pakistan, which they have named Bangla Desh (Bengal nation).

From a disorganized, confused band of freedom fighters that moved into action when the Pakistani Army struck in late March to try to crush the Bengali autonomy movement, the Mukti Bahini has become, if not a well-oiled fighting machine, at least a reasonably coordinated and more than reasonably effective guerrilla force.

India has helped with arms, training and sanctuary—and, clearly, without the Indian aid, the level of insurgent activity could never have reached its present pitch. But the men and the motivation are East Pakistani, and, even if they were on their own, it is doubtful whether the Bengali resistance could be totally crushed by the troops from West Pakistan.

An estimated 80,000 West Pakistani troops have been moved into East Pakistan, plus several thousand West Pakistani police. They have hastily trained about 10,000 non-Bengali home guards known as Razakars.

Estimates of the number of Mukti Bahini pitted against this force range from 50,000 to 100,000; foreign observers think the lower number is probably the more realistic. The hard core of professional soldiers, and some of these are not high-



Mohamed Amin/Nancy Palmer Agency  
Guerrilla fighters of the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Forces) of East Pakistan lie in ambush in their war against the Pakistan Army.

ly trained, consists of no more than 15,000—Bengalis who defected to the Bangla Desh movement from the East Pakistan Rifles, a paramilitary border patrol force, and the East Bengal Regiment, a better-trained regular army unit. In addition, an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 new recruits—mostly between the ages of 18 to 25 and mostly college students but including many village boys—have been trained.

Many Bangla Desh training camps and base areas are on the Indian side of the border, but a growing number of the Bengali troops have been operating from "liberated areas" just inside East Pakistan. These areas, though not large, have been expanding.

Some of the new recruits are being trained as regular troops and others as guerrillas. The latter adopt village dress and mix with the local population. There are many more volunteers, however, than the Mukti Bahini can absorb, primarily because of a shortage of weap-

ons, and a large number of boys simply mark time after getting their rudimentary basic training—which is hardly more than physical exercises and elementary driving.

The Mukti Bahini's weapons are a motley lot. There are some Sten guns, light machine guns and other automatic weapons, and many ancient single-shot rifles. The heaviest weapons in the arsenal are light and medium mortars—and not too many of them. These arms are of varying makes and age, some captured from the Pakistani troops and some—though far from enough, the Bengalis complain—provided by the Indians.

Yet with all these problems, the Mukti Bahini has effectively harassed the Pakistani Army, pinned it down in some areas and stretched its lines thin all over East Pakistan. Reliable reports indicate that Pakistani casualties are increasing. The guerrillas also continue to assassinate members of the local "peace committees," made up of non-Bengalis and

other collaborators assigned to carry out administration of areas under army occupation. No figures are available on guerrilla casualties, but they are believed to be low. However, with every guerrilla raid, the army burns hamlets and kills villagers in reprisal.

The guerrillas' greatest success has been their ability to reduce the army's mobility by keeping East Pakistan's communications system in chaos—blowing up bridges, roads and rail lines. Guerrilla frogmen have also damaged or sunk at least a dozen seagoing ships—including several foreign ones—at anchor in harbors. Seven British shipping lines have suspended all traffic to East Pakistan.

Although the Mukti Bahini is much better coordinated than it was six months ago, it is not a monolithic fighting force. Splinter groups have started operations on their own, including some pro-Peking Communists. One group, led by non-Communist militant students from Dacca, is said to

have established a base in the Indian border state of Tripura with a band of 1,500 men. Still, there is no sign at this point either of any serious division within the Bangla Desh movement or of the movement swinging to the left.

With the monsoon rains over and the ground firming up, it is expected that both the Mukti Bahini and the Pakistani troops will step up their activities in East Pakistan. Heavily guarded freight trains have been rolling into Calcutta, carrying military supplies reportedly destined for the Mukti Bahini. This seems to indicate that the Indian Government has agreed to increase its arms aid to the guerrillas.

But Mukti Bahini commanders, straining at the bit, continue to press for even more—Indian logistic support and air cover for a frontal offensive to seize a sizable piece of East Paki-

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