

East Pakistan Town After Raid by Army: Fire and Destruction

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SHEKHARNAGAR, Pakistan, Nov. 6—A task force of Pakistani troops visited this East Pakistani town of 8,000 on Oct. 27 and destroyed it.

Apparently informed — mistakenly, according to residents — that a guerrilla group was here, the army attacked without warning in motor launches. Toward the end of the 20-mile trip from Dacca the launches' engines alerted Shekharnagar's population, most of which fled into nearby ponds, canals and paddy fields.

Shooting into houses and huts as they advanced, the troops set fire to nearly every building. Surviving residents pointed to the fresh graves where 19 villagers were buried.

The concrete schoolhouse was stripped of its furniture and doors, which the troops burned to cook their evening meal, and a rice mill was destroyed. The village's stock of freshly harvested rice was burned for the most part, and some 300 cows and sheep were slaughtered.

A large quantity of wheat that villagers said had been sent under a United States aid program was reportedly loaded into the boats by the troops.

A warehouse filled with bags of phosphate fertilizer was

Continued on Page 16, Column 3

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DESTROYED: Shekhnagar, East Pakistan, after it was visited by West Pakistani troops Oct. 27 in a search-and-destroy operation being used by the army in reprisal for the continued resistance of the Bengali guerrillas.

Army Raid on East Pakistan Town Leaves Death and Destruction

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

burned and most of the bags were destroyed.

Several buildings belonging to the mosque were burned down, and the Hindu temple—there are about 400 Hindus in the community—was burned and sacked, and its idols were smashed by gunfire.

Even the local post office was sacked, and the villagers say the troops took away its stock of stamps and money.

"Do you see this?" a villager said. "They even destroyed our fruit. Banana trees like these take a long time to grow, and the soldiers heaped up burning straw around them and destroyed them."

Another man, stifling tears, told this correspondent: "You Americans with your aid, you know who you helped with your wheat and oil and medicine? You help only Yaha's murderers."

A foreign official, hearing of the fate of Shekhnagar, commented: "It certainly seems that in cases like this the Pakistan army and outside nations trying to provide humanitarian relief are working at cross-purposes. We bring food and fertilizer in and the army seizes or burns them."

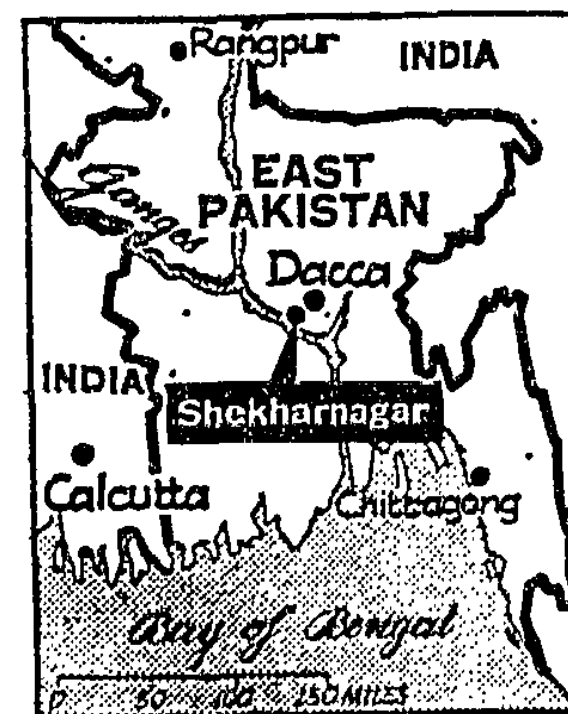
So far the United States has committed about \$100-million in relief assistance to East Pakistan, and more is expected.

Most American aid is channeled through the United Na-

tions, which is responsible for transporting food grains and other supplies to depots at key points throughout East Pakistan. But once the supplies reach the final depots, the responsibility of foreign relief organizations ends and distribution is handled by the army or its politically reliable "peace committees," subject only to occasional spot checks by United Nations officials.

It is widely charged that the army is using the aid more as a political lever than for genuinely humanitarian purposes, withholding it from rebel areas.

Meanwhile, as the war between West Pakistani troops and Bengali guerrillas becomes more intense, control areas have emerged in East



The New York Times/Nov. 17, 1971

Pakistan as they did in Vietnam.

The army, at least nominally, controls major towns, those areas served by roads, and the regions adjacent to rivers deep enough for military launches. According to officials, the guerrillas control only about a fourth of the land area of East Pakistan.

On the other hand, it appears to many people who regularly travel in the interior of the country that the guerrillas in fact control a much larger proportion of the land area and most of the Bengali population.

In any case, large parts of East Pakistan are inaccessible to Government relief teams, if only for reasons of safety.

The problem of helping feed the East Pakistanis was underscored for a foreign relief worker recently visiting the northern district of Rangpur, where pockets of near-

famine have been reported, due largely to lack of transportation.

"We had to stop at a bridge to wait for a column of trucks to pass from the other direction," he related. "Those trucks were headed south, away from Rangpur, and they were loaded with Basmati rice."

"Although East Pakistan always has a rice deficit, the province grows this very high-quality Basmati rice, which enjoys a good market abroad. Ordinarily Pakistan exports this rice and sells it for hard currency, importing cheap rice from China and elsewhere for its own consumption.

"But now it certainly doesn't look very good for donor nations to be struggling at great cost to bring rice into East Pakistan so that the Islamabad Government can go on making a profit on home-grown rice."

Bengalis argue, in fact, that continued food-grain and other assistance to the Government is nearly as much resented as the recently discontinued United States policy of providing Pakistan with the spare parts needed to maintain her military airlift from west to east.

"We know that you Americans are generous, kind people," a Bengali guerrilla told a visitor. "But you are also incredibly stupid, and I'm afraid your stupidity here is going to start costing you lives. No matter what you think you're doing, we can't tolerate your help to our enemies here much longer."