

Street Fighting In Dacca & Chittagong Bridges Blown Up: Rail Tracks Uprooted

NEW DELHI, March 26.—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman tonight proclaimed East Pakistan a "Sovereign Independent People's Republic of Bangla Desh". The declaration, broadcast over a clandestine radio station, was made shortly before President Yahya Khan went on the air in the west wing to announce that he had ordered the Army to reassert its authority in the Eastern wing, say UNI and PTI.

IN his clarion call in tune with the defiant mood of the people, who, aided by the East Pakistan Rifles and police, were fighting the west wing troops in different parts of Bangla Desh, said: "We shall not die like cats and dogs, but shall die as worthy children of Bangla Ma".

Reports from different areas said villagers, in their thousands, joined Awami League volunteers to give stiff resistance to West Pakistani troops in street fighting in Dacca, the port city of Chittagong, the Comilla Cantonment area and Rangpur.

The villagers were reportedly fighting with all available weapons including spears, lathis and ram daos".

Bangla Desh freedom-fighters were also blocking Pakistani military operations by blowing up bridges, uprooting railway lines and immobilizing the troops in various other ways.

The dramatic events leading up to the unilateral declaration of independence by Mr Rahman followed in quick succession with President Yahya Khan's unannounced departure from Dacca at midnight last night without conceding the demands made by Mr Rahman's Awami League.

Simultaneously the West Pakistani-dominated Army reinforced its presence with the arrival of thousands of troops and the start of an offensive to reassert its authority which had been extinguished when Mr Rahman launched a non-violent non-cooperation movement 25 days ago and followed it up with a directive that the civil administration should take orders from him, and not from the martial law authorities.

The eastern wing's Martial Law Administrator, Lt-Gen. Tikka Khan, promulgated a new set of martial law orders which banned all political activity, imposed indefinite curfew in Dacca and a host of other towns, authorized troops to shoot at sight, banned assembly of five or more for 72 hours, gagged all communications media, froze bank accounts and ordered civilians to surrender firearms and ammunition.

Mr Rahman, in a message to the world broadcast by an unidentified wireless station monitored in Calcutta this morning declared that the enemy had struck and that the people were fighting gallantly.

In a subsequent broadcast over a radio station, describing itself as "Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra" (free Bengal wireless station) monitored in Shillong, Mr Rahman proclaimed Bangla Desh an independent republic.

Gen. Yahya Khan's announcement banning political activity throughout Pakistan put the clock back by two years. Six days after he raised power on March 25,

1969 in the wake of a massive upsurge against President Ayub Khan's régime. Gen. Yahya Khan had similarly prohibited all political activity.

Shortly after the military operations began, Radio Pakistan said the situation had been brought "well under control", but Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (free Bengal wireless station) claimed that large areas, including the towns of Dacca, Chittagong, Khulna and Dinajpur, were in the hands of pro-Rahman forces.

While casualties were described as heavy in many places, details were available only from Ramgarh, close to the Tripura border, where at least eight people were

APPEAL TO U.N. AND AFRO-ASIAN NATIONS

Bangla Desh appealed to the U.N. and Afro-Asian countries on Friday to support its all-out struggle against colonial domination and to help in a late night broadcast the independent Bangla Betar Kendra said. "The liberation war now going on in Bangla Desh is part of the Afro-Asian countries' movement for liberation from colonial domination."

According to the radio, an emissary of Bangla Desh was sent abroad to seek help of "foreign Powers."

known to have been killed and more than 100 injured when troops fired on civilians.

Some 200 people, fleeing to safety from the Army's reign of terror, crossed into Tripura and gave themselves up to Indian authorities. They included some uniformed East Pakistani rifles personnel.

In another incident, four West Pakistani soldiers being pursued by freedom-fighters ran towards the Indian border and three of them were killed before they could cross the border. A fourth, who managed to cross, was arrested by the Tripura authorities.

There was heavy fighting near Comilla, also close to the Tripura border, and the boom of machine-guns could be heard from across the Feni river.

In Jessore and Khulna districts, rail and road communications remained paralysed. A railway bridge at Akhira,

three kilometres from the Tripura border, was blown up. A railway station in this area was destroyed in a series of explosions. At Parasuram, Naokhali district, a railway station was burned by demonstrators who clashed with troops.

One report said a Bengali regiment, aided by freedom-fighters, had surrounded and immobilized a West Punjabi regiment.

In many towns, women poured into the streets in their thousands in support of pro-Rahman demonstrators defying the martial law orders.

The freedom struggle seeped into the countryside too, with villagers in several places organizing themselves into self-defence groups with whatever weapons they could get hold of.

Troops shot their way into the Rajshahi Radio Station, killing or arresting employees who offered resistance, according to information reaching West Bengal border. The radio station had been silent since the Army's takeover of the station.

REPORT DENIED

NEW DELHI, March 26.—The Defence Ministry sources today denied a report that Pakistani Army contingents crossed into Tripura at Belonia today, says PTI. There is no truth in the report, they said.

President's Mysore Reco

BANGALORE, March 26.—The Mysore Governor, Mr. Dharmavira, has recommended imposition of President's Rule and suspension of the State Assembly for a short period in the States, reports UNI.

The Governor's recommendation follows the failure of the Congress (R) and the Congress (O)-backed SVD to form an alternative Government till this evening.

The Congress (O) Government led by Mr. Veerendra Patil fell on March 18 following the large-scale defection of MLAs to the Congress (R) after the party's total rout in the recent Lok Sabha election.

Mr Dharmavira earlier told newsmen that he had to recommend to the President to take over the administration, as he was anxious to get the vote-on-account