

Overseas

President Yahya was advised against force

From Peter Hazelhurst
Calcutta, March 30

Before embarking on the present military operation in East Pakistan, President Yahya Khan was advised by Vice-Admiral S. M. Ashan, one of his senior officers and a former governor of the province, that West Pakistan will never be able to retain the eastern wing by force.

Admiral Ashan tendered this advice to the President earlier this month shortly before he resigned as the Governor of East Pakistan.

According to the admiral's appraisal, the eastern province could never be retained by force. He hinted that it would be morally indefensible and militarily impossible to repress 75 million Bengalis.

It is understood the admiral warned the President that he could not expect to receive the cooperation of a single Bengali if the Army was called out to repress the province's demands for autonomy.

Free Bengal Radio came on the air again today and announced that the new sovereign state of Bangla Desh will pursue a foreign policy of non-alignment. The clandestine radio station continued to claim that the "Liberation Army", headed by a Major Zia Khan, had overrun the West Pakistan Army in most areas, including the port of Khulna, Jessore, and the Sylhet Comilla belt.

The radio station went on to claim that the "Liberation Army" has overrun Chittagong and is about to take Dacca. But according to impeccable Indian Government sources the picture is different: the West Pakistan Army holds Khulna and Jessore. It is now attempting to rush reinforcements to Chittagong where the Bengalis are making an all-out attempt to deny it landing facilities.

The Indian press reported today that Dacca radio station had been blown up by the Bengali volunteers but the station came on the air to deny the reports and other suggestions that major towns had fallen to the "Liberation Army".

Although Dacca radio has suppressed all news of the fighting in East Bengal the sudden announcement will tend to disprove some of the highly coloured reports of the Bengali peoples' victory which are circulating in India.

Contrary to reports that all ranks of the East Pakistan Rifles have revolted, when touring the border today I found East Bengali personnel still at their posts.

In the meantime, no hard facts are emerging from East Pakistan and the picture of the situation is being clouded by highly exaggerated accounts of the victories of the "Liberation Army" and a lot of wishful thinking in India.

There are some indications of Indian troop movements near the border posts but there is certainly no massive build up, at least on the Calcutta section of the border.

The following report was filed by Ram Suresh, a Reuter correspondent, who crossed from India into East Pakistan on foot.

Jainagar, March 30.—The 350 people of Jainagar have little to fight with but they have heard that Shaikh Mujibur Rahman, the Awami League leader, has declared their province a sovereign republic and say they are prepared to die for it.

They proudly show off their few firearms—aging 0.22 rifles—though few in the village know how to use them. "We were trained in the use of arms by men of the East Pakistan Rifles", said a factory clerk, while another man told me: "We are all now freedom fighters and sure of victory".

Taheruddin Khan, the village's Awami League leader, told me: "We know at the moment our services are not needed to fight, but we are prepared. We are watching out for possible Pakistan troop movements through this area."

The villagers said their main sources of information about the events deeper down in the eastern wing of Pakistan were Free Bengal Radio, All India Radio news, and Indian newspapers brought in by scores of Indian students.—
Reuter.