

GENOCIDE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

by the Hindus and the Awami Leaguers and led astray. Now we thank God that the Punjabi soldiers have saved us. They are the best soldiers in the world and heroes of humanity. We love and respect them from the bottom of our hearts." And so on, interminably, in the same vein. After the "meeting" I asked the Major what he thought about the speech, "Serves the purposes," he said, "but I don't trust that bastard. I'll put him on my list."

The agony of East Bengal is not over. Perhaps the worst is yet to come. The army is determined to go on until the "clean-up" is completed. So far the job is only half done. Two divisions of the Pakistan army, the 9th and the 16th, were flown out from West Pakistan to "sort out" the Bengali rebels and the Hindus.

This was a considerable logistical feat for a country of Pakistan's resources. More than 25,000 men were moved from the west to the east. On March 28 the two divisions were given 48 hours' notice to move. They were brought by train to Karachi from Kharian and Multan. Carrying only light bed rolls and battle packs (their equipment was to follow by sea), the troops were flown out to Dacca by PIA, the national airline. Its fleet of seven Boeings was taken off international and domestic routes and flew the long haul (via Ceylon) continuously for 14 days. A few Air Force transport aircraft helped.

The troops went into action immediately with equipment borrowed from the 14th Division which till then constituted the Eastern Command. The 9th Division, operating from Comilla, was ordered to seal the border in the east against movement of rebels and their supplies.

The 16th Division, with headquarters at Jessore, had a similar task in the western sector of the province. They completed these assignments by the third week of May. With the rebels -- those who have not been able to escape to India -- boxed in a ring of steel and fire, the two army divisions are beginning to converge in a relentless comb-out operation. This will undoubtedly mean that the terror experienced in the border areas will now spread to the middle point. It could also be more painful. The human targets will have nowhere to run to.

On April 20 Lt. Col. Baig, the flower-loving G-1 of the 9th Division, thought that the comb-out would take two months, to the middle of June. But this planning seems to have misfired. The rebel forces, using guerilla tactics, have not been subdued as easily as the army expected. Isolated and apparently uncoordinated, the rebels have nonetheless bogged down the Pakistan army in many places by the systematic destruction of roads and railways, without which the army cannot move. The 9th Division for one was hopelessly behind schedule. Now the monsoon threatens to shut down the military operation with three months of cloudbursts.

For the rainy season, the Pakistan government obtained from China in the second week of May, nine shallow draught river gunboats. More are to come.

These 80-ton gunboats with massive firepower will take over some of the responsibilities hitherto allotted to the air force and artillery, which will not be as effective when it rains. They will be supported by several hundred country craft

which have been requisitioned and converted for military use by the addition of outboard motors. The army intends to take to the water in pursuit of the rebels.

There is also the clear prospect of famine, because of the breakdown of the distribution system. Seventeen of the 23 districts of East Pakistan are normally short of food and have to be supplied by massive imports of rice and wheat. This will not be possible this year because of the civil war. Six major bridges and thousands of smaller ones have been destroyed, making the roads impassable in many places. The railway system has been similarly disrupted though the government claims it is "almost normal."

The road and rail tracks between the port of Chittagong and the north have been completely disrupted by the rebels who held Feni, a key road and rail junction, until May 7. Food stocks cannot move because of this devastation. In normal times only 15% of food movements from Chittagong to upcountry areas were made by boat. The remaining 85% was moved by road and rail. Even a 100% increase in the effectiveness of river movement will leave



The Pakistani Army left such horrifying scenes during the crackdown.

70% of the food stocks in the warehouses of Chittagong.

Two other factors must be added. One is large-scale hoarding of grain by people who have begun to anticipate the famine. This makes a tight position infinitely more difficult. The other is the government of Pakistan's refusal to acknowledge the danger of famine publicity. Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan, the Military Governor of East Bengal, acknowledged in a radio broadcast on April 18 that he was gravely concerned about food supplies.

Since then the entire government machinery has been used to suppress the fact of the food shortage. The reason is that a famine, like the cyclone before it, could result in a massive outpouring of foreign aid -- and with it the prospect of external inspection of distribution methods. That would make it impossible to conceal from the world the scale of the pogrom. So the hungry will be left to die until the clean-up is complete.

Let Them Die of Starvation

Discussing the problem in his plush air-conditioned office in Karachi recently the

chairman of the Agricultural Development Bank, Mr. Qarni, said bluntly: "The famine is the result of their acts of sabotage. So let them die. Perhaps then the Bengalis will come to their senses."

The military government's East Bengal policy is so apparently contradictory and self-defeating that it would seem to justify the assumption that the people who rule Pakistan cannot make up their minds. Having committed the initial error of resorting to force, the government, on this view, is stubbornly and stupidly muddling through.

There is, superficially, logic in this reasoning.

On the one hand, it is true that there is no let up in the reign of terror. The policy of subjugation is certainly being pursued with vigour in East Bengal. This is making thousands of new enemies for the government every day and making only more definitive the separation of the two wings of Pakistan.

On the other hand, no government could be unaware that this policy must fail (there are just not enough West Pakistanis

colonised.

This is not an arbitrary opinion of mine. The facts speak for themselves. The first consideration of the army has been and still is the obliteration of every trace of separatism in East Bengal. This proposition is upheld by the continuing slaughter and by everything else that the government has done in both East and West Pakistan since March 25. The decision was coldly taken by the military leaders, and they are going through with it -- all too coldly.

Will The Killing Stop?

No meaningful or viable political solution is possible in East Bengal while the pogrom continues. The crucial question is: Will the killing stop?

I was given the army's answer by Major-General Shaukat Raza, Commanding Officer of the 9th Division, during our first meeting at Comilla on April 16. "You must be absolutely sure," he said, "that we have not undertaken such a drastic and expensive operation -- expensive both in men and money -- for nothing. We've undertaken a job. We are going to finish it, not hand it over half done to the politicians so that they can mess it up again. The army can't keep coming back like this every three or four years. It has a more important task. I assure you that when we have got through with what we are doing there will never be need again for such an operations."

Major-General Shaukat Raza is one of the three divisional commanders in the field. He is in a key position. He is not given to talking through his hat.

Significantly, General Shaukat Raza's ideas were echoed by every military officer I talked to during my 10 days in East Bengal. And President Yahya Khan knows that the men who lead the troops on the ground are the de facto arbiters of Pakistan's destiny.

The single-mindedness of the army is underscored by the military operation itself. By any standard, it is a major venture. It is not something that can be switched on and off without the most grave consequences.

The army has already taken a terrible toll in dead and injured. It was privately said in Dacca that more officers have been killed than men and that the casualty list in East Bengal already exceeds the losses in the India-Pakistan war of September, 1965. The army will certainly not write off these "sacrifices" for illusory political considerations that have proved to be so worthless in the past.

Militarily -- and it is soldiers who will be taking the decision -- to call a halt to the operation at this stage would be indefensible. It would only mean more trouble with the Bengali rebels. Implacable hatred has been displayed on both sides. There can be no truce or negotiated settlement; only total victory or total defeat. Time is on the side of the Pakistan army, not of the isolated, uncoordinated and ill-equipped rebel groups. Other circumstances, such as an expanded conflict which takes in other powers, could of course alter the picture. But as it stands today the Pakistan army has no reason to doubt that it will eventually achieve its objective. That is why the casualties are stolidly accepted.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11