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(L) Refugees stream across the River Ganges Delta at Kushtia, fleeing the violence during the ongoing West Pakistani military campaign called Operation Searchlight. (M) Slain Bengalis in front of Jessore City College. Jessore, Bangladesh, December, 1971. (R) The field in front of Jessore Degree College was used as killing ground by Pakistani military during Liberation War. Jessore, Bangladesh, 1971.

A WITNESS TO BANGLADESH GENOCIDE 'It was like the morning after a nuclear attack'

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The following is the field report on trip to Jessore, Khulna, Chalna and Kushtia submitted by Hendrik Van der Heijden, Economist, Pakistan Division, the World Bank, dated June 23, 1971.

The visit to the western area of East Pakistan which took place from June 3 to June 6, 1971, centred around three major cities there: Jessore, Khulna, and Kushtia. In addition, I visited Chalna anchorage and the adjoining service city of Mangla. As I left in the early morning of June 3, 1971 for Jessore—by regular PIA commercial flight—it already became apparent at the Dacca airport that the Military Law Authorities (MLA) were still keeping in force elaborate security precautions: all luggage was carefully searched, none was allowed into the airplane, passengers were carefully searched and double checked by Army Security officers. Before entering the plane, another check took place: this time to ensure that cigarette lighter and matches were not carried into the plane. To top it all, armed soldiers entered the cabin and flew as escorts, demanding that all passengers remained seated during the entire flight. The plane was fully loaded: government officials, army personnel and some civilians, including some women and children.

Approaching Jessore, it became clear that this was the area where the Army punitive action had been very severe; from the air, totally destroyed villages were clearly visible, a building was still on fire, and to the eastern side of the runway a good many houses had been destroyed.

The airport was heavily guarded by Armed Forces who also controlled access to the airport. Upon landing, soldiers moved forward to the aircraft and took position around it. A heavy military presence around the passenger terminal was noted. The car from the Khulna District

and butter), only three out of fifteen gasoline stations have survived, and only 5-10 percent of the shops that are there have opened. Schools remain closed for all practical purposes: about half of the teachers report for duty, but less than ten percent of the children attend. Jessore is now a male city, with most women and children having been sent to the country-side.

Damage to housing in Jessore District is so severe that the authorities estimate that some 450,000 people have been affected out of a total District population of 2.5 million. Half a million people have fled to India. Virtually all economic activity has come to a halt in Jessore city which in the afternoon looks like a ghost town. In the evening, no one besides Army personnel ventures into the streets. The sugar and cotton mill remain closed, the cigarette factory operates at 5 percent of its normal capacity, all public works programs have come to halt, stocks of brick factories are very high (indicating the loss of one entire construction

trucks, buses and cars were noticed. An army patrol moved south and whenever they were in sight, people fled as fast as they could.

Halfway to Khulna I visited the Jessore Jute Industry, a firm that in normal times employed some 2,400 workers and operated on a three-shift basis. The firm has 300 hessian looms, 100 sacking looms and 50 broad looms for the production of carpet backing. The firm now operates (with 900 workers) one shift of the conventional looms and two shifts of the broadlooms, although only partially; it operates 40 narrow looms and 38 broadlooms. Consequently, production is at less than 10 percent of original capacity, for the most part occasioned by the skill-imbalance of the returning workers: there is an acute shortage of weavers who have fled to their native villages in the Noakhali, Barisal and Faridpur areas.

Khulna city has been substantially damaged in the center town, the approaches to it. Very heavy destruction was observed in the areas alongside the

buses on the road. Spare parts are a problem. In addition, most of the buses are being used by the Army. River traffic is negligible: less than 5 percent of what it used to be. As a result, there are pockets of scarcity: shortages of kerosene, edible oil and diesel oil exist in the villages.

VISIT TO PLATINUM JUBILEE JUTE MILL

The area surrounding the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill has undergone very substantial damage. In fact, the destruction of pucca houses and buildings reminds of Arnhem in 1944. Also, many workers' houses were destroyed. The area is deserted now. Less than 7 percent of the mill's permanent labor force had returned to the job, but local unskilled people were hired bringing attendance up to 30 percent of the labor force which originally amounted to 4,500. The firm now operates at about 25 percent of capacity. Of the 875 narrow looms originally in operation in 2 shifts, only 420 are working on a one-shift basis. The broadlooms (32) run on a two-shift basis. The firm has started to employ women (very abnormal in East Pakistan) who have become widows in the past few months.

VISIT TO KHULNA NEWSPRINT FACTORY

This factory which produces newsprint mainly for despatch to West Pakistan was restarted at the end of April and produces now 1,500 tons per month as compared to originally 4,200 tons per month. The firm has a shortage of skilled workers, as only 20 percent of the labor force has come back to the mill: of an original labor force of 2,100 some 380 have returned, with the remaining 600 having been recruited locally. The industry forms part of the EPIDC industrial complex, and, obviously, is running at very heavy losses.

VISIT TO EPWAPDA'S 60 MW KHULNA THERMAL POWER STATION

This thermal station was supposed to have been completed by mid-1971. However, there is now a 'six months' delay in commissioning the plant: the Czech consultants have left as have the Czech erection supervisory staff. Forty-five percent of the staff has not yet returned to the job.

VISIT TO CHALNA ANCHORAGE

A two-hour trip by launch took me to Chalna Anchorage where ships started getting in since May 12. A total of 5 ships was anchored, some having waited for two weeks to receive cargo. Traffic on the river is down to 5-10 percent of what it used to be. The project to construct a permanent port at Chalna has indefinitely delayed: all of the workers have fled, as have the Yugoslav consultants.

The city of Mangla, the town where the labor of Chalna Anchorage live, has been virtually obliterated by naval shelling. The population, therefore is down from 22,000 to 1,000 and the business routine there has been completely disrupted.

Damage was extreme: houses, the market place, the telephone exchange, power distribution lines, etc. are all totally destroyed. All construction work, of course, has come to a standstill, and there is no more an economic base for the population there. The 1,000 workers suffice to unload and load the ships' contents into barges. Some port officers have fled, one tug disappeared and two of the four pilots have disappeared. When I was there, M.S. Shams arrived carrying 1,500-2,000 soldiers from West Pakistan.

VISIT TO KHULNA SHIPYARD

Works pretty close to normal. Eighty percent of the staff is on the job, probably forced. I noticed that one coaster had been requisitioned by the Navy and was being outfitted for naval duties. This was also the case with a fishing boat.

VISIT TO THE PHULTALA THANA, KHULNA

Perhaps the most impressive visit I made was the one to this Thana office. Fifty

percent of the population of this Thana has fled (some 20,000 out of a total of 42,000), mostly Hindus, leaving behind unattended plots of land, houses, etc. Everything had been disrupted there: the livestock officer had been killed, the whole administration was in chaos. The people bewildered. The whole works program had come to a stop: no laborers and no construction materials. Agriculture was in a shamble, the people demoralized. It is doubtful whether any government can effectively deal with these people in the near future. It is the Thana level where the shock waves of the Army Action hit the hardest: it was at this level where the hope for agricultural development was. It has been set back by at least five years.

TRIP TO KUSHTIA

Five times the trip to Kushtia was off. Only in the late hours of Friday, June 4, was there a decision from the Governor that I could make the trip from Khulna to Kushtia. Most of the officials were extremely nervous and all the top officials (DC, Chief of Police, etc.) accompanied me to Jessore where there were final deliberations with the DC Jessore.

An hour's drive north of Jessore was Jhenaidah, a small town of some 20,000-30,000 inhabitants. The Army was omnipresent there, and all the approaches to the city were heavily guarded. The Army was dug in and on the alert. We were met by an Army officer who told us that there was only one way to travel to Kushtia: by road, but with an Army protection party. On we went: in the front the DC Jessore's Mercedes used by my counterpart and myself, a jeep with rifle armed Policemen (8), and a truckload of heavily armed soldiers. In convoy we drove to Kushtia.

It was only on April 15 (some 20 days after the Army moved into Dacca), that the Army moved North from Jenidah and into Kushtia.

There must have been very strong resistance from the EP Rifles as some buildings clearly showed. When the insurgents withdrew, the Army's punitive action started. It lasted 12 days and left Kushtia virtually deserted and destroyed. The population was down from 40,000 to 5,000. Ninety percent of the houses, shops, banks and other buildings were totally destroyed. The city looked like a WWII German town having undergone strategic bombing attacks. People were sitting around dazed. When we moved around, everyone fled. It was like the morning after a nuclear attack. I was the first foreigner to come to Kushtia after the Army moved in. The people were terrified and still shocked.

I met the Administration officials who were still shocked and dazed. The DC at first did not answer any of my questions. Nor did anyone else who was there. After fifteen minutes I called the meeting to a halt and went on another trip through Kushtia. It lasted an hour and a half. I asked them to show me a shop where food was being sold: it was in that ninety minutes impossible to find one. Kushtia, as someone told me, is the My Lai of the West Pakistan Army. There was only one reaction: to confirm that impression.

The DC had been killed, as had so many other Government officials. The schools are open but nobody is attending. Even the hospital was practically deserted. The permanent staff was not there, and there was just a handful of new staff. The Army was requisitioning a part of the building. Everything, but everything, was dislocated in Kushtia. ADBP, ADC and other activities, ADC had not recalled any of the pumps it had in the field.

The farmers are not coming to the cities, and nobody goes out. Thousands of farmers have fled. Everything is abnormal there, and it was a shattering experience.



Bangladesh Mukti Foj at Jessore. April 4, 1971

season), and while the Government administration is formally functioning (some 80 percent of the employees have reported for work), in practical terms it does not operate: people have ceased to come to Government offices. Since the Army action no one has come to apply for licenses, and while there normally would be heavy activity at the Justice Department (settlement of land disputes, etc.), no one is coming now. The collection of revenues had barely started. Some banks were open, but very few transactions took place.

ADBP's office was open but had not made any loans nor had it received any payments. Transport has been badly affected by the disturbances: 50 percent of the stock of trucks have gone out of commission (more than 100 out of 200) with more trucks having gone to India. Many buses have been requisitioned by the Army, are now in India or are being hidden to prevent requisitioning. Train service has been partially restored: the signalling system is out of commission, but the tracks are all right. On the whole, intercity traffic is at less than 5 percent of normal. As a result of the dislocation of the transportation system, there are shortages of salt, tea, washing soap and kerosene.

An important aspect of the situation in the Jessore area is that the area is by no means secure. Government officers cannot any more easily enter the villages as they run the risk of being shot by the "miscreants." A number of these incidents took place in the week before I arrived, and the Army is reacting to these incidents by burning down the villages from which these shots are being fired. Generally, the Army terrorizes the population, particularly aiming at the Hindus and suspected members of the Awami League.

TRIP TO KHULNA

On the way to Khulna just a handful of

road and along the river leading up to the Newsprint Factory and the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill. As a result of the disturbances, the destruction of houses and the continuing uncertainty regarding life and property, a large segment of the population has fled from the city: in fact, the population of Greater Khulna is down from 400,000 to 150,000. It is, as Jessore, a male city. People do not venture after dark. The area is not hundred percent secure: all through my stay in Khulna 6 police en armed with rifles accompanied me. At night which I spent at the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill's guest house, the guards were strengthened to protect from possible hazards from the river which generally unsafe (The week before our arrival a passenger boat, the Rocket, had been seized by the insurgents, as were some barges carrying raw jute and manufacturers).

The Administration of Khulna District was back to 80 percent of its original strength. There are serious police shortages, but the situation is improving. Some senior police officers have been recruited from West Pakistan. The road to Jessore and Kushtia is generally unsafe, particularly at night, and there have been frequent doubts about my proposed trip to Kushtia. Schools are open, but attendance is very poor. The Polytechnic Institute, as well as colleges, however, have not yet started. The main problems affecting Khulna is communications: the telephone system works all right, but mail service is very irregular. There is only marginal truck traffic on the roads: less than 5 percent of normal. In fact, the road to Jessore is normally a heavily congested road. Now it carried only a handful of vehicles. The Army has requisitioned many vehicles and launches, including government vehicles, and many have been taken to India. As regards rail transportation, service is off by 50 percent. There are also very few



Troops of the Bangladesh resistance force march off to fight against Pakistan army, near Jessore on April 2, 1971. PHOTO: AP

Commissioner was there to take me to Jessore first, when I saw the Deputy Commissioner of Jessore, the ADC, the police commissioner and the secretary of the Peace Committee.

Jessore has suffered badly from the disturbances. When the Army moved out of the Cantonment area on April 5 (from March 25 until April 5 Jessore was held by the "miscreants"); it reportedly met little in the way of strong resistance from the East Pakistan forces, and most of the very heavy damage in Jessore was the result, reportedly, of the Army punitive action. The authorities estimate that the population of Jessore itself is down from 80,000 to 15-20,000. Some 20,000 people were killed in Jessore town.

The city's center has been destroyed: commerce, obviously, has come to a standstill. More than 50 percent of the shops have been destroyed, all of the city's bakeries have been burned (so that bread is unavailable there, as is coffee