

## **EAST PAKISTAN: The Avengers**

BY PETER GRANT

Calcutta: It has been a busy week -- for West Pakistani rulers and Bengali rebels alike. In an obvious move to improve its international image, the government announced the appointment of a civilian in place of General Tikka Khan, the cold blooded martial administrator of East Pakistan. But the civilian chosen for the job, A. M. Malik, is likely to further exacerbate Bengali feelings, for he has for long been considered by Bengalis as a tool of the government.

The Bengalis were busy diplomatically and militarily. Bangla Desh diplomats -- all defectors from the Pakistani foreign service -- opened up "missions" in New Delhi, London and Washington in addition to the one which has been functioning in Calcutta from the early days of the crisis. The Delhi mission was set up with the co-operation of the Indian government, an indication that Indian recognition of the rebel government is nearly as good as de jure.

Meanwhile, a genuine Bengali guerilla force may be emerging from the "secret" training centres in West Bengal's border districts -- filled only weeks ago with youngsters mustered together with few weapons and little supervision, resembling boy scouts more than guerillas. The brutality of the West Pakistan army in East Bengal has not crushed its people.

Many of those who have fled to India have seen their relatives killed and their villages destroyed -- and are set on revenge. The camps in West Bengal have provided the Mukti Fauj (liberation army) with large numbers of volunteers.

One recruiting officer near Petrapole claimed it is approached by far more young men than it can take. It is his job to select suitable volunteers and send them on to training camps near the border. Recruits must pass strict entrance tests before being accepted for training at the hidden camps: "The age limit ranges from 18 to 30 years, and recruits must pass a medical check before we can accept them.

"We do not have enough weapons to equip the new recruits but right now training is most important. In a few months we'll be ready to fight with enough men sufficiently trained to

face the Pakistan army on its own terms. We are getting ammunition and rifles . . . But of course we need more guns and ammunition. . ."

Near the small West Bengal town of Shikapur, about 125 miles north of Calcutta, a former captain of the East Bengal Rifles leads a force of some 250 guerillas. On the other side of the border Pakistan army troops occupy territory inhabited by only a fraction of its previous population; deserted villages testify mutely to the fear that has driven the peasant community away from their homes.

The guerilla leader, who refused to give his name, said his men had inflicted heavy casualties on the West Pakistanis. With a sympathetic population on both sides of the border, terrain similar to Vietnam's Mekong Delta and an enemy who feels out of place in the tropical jungles of Bengal, the guerillas have some advantages. But they are outnumbered and face vastly superior firepower, including aircraft which the Pakistanis have no hesitation in using. The guerillas' weapons are mainly of World War II vintage: Lee Enfield .303 rifles, Bren guns and Mark II Sten submachine guns. And, though they claimed to have ambushed and wiped out Pakistan army patrols in the area, none of them was equipped with the AK47 assault rifle used by many Pakistani troops.

In March, the offices of The People, one of Dacca's English-language dailies which support Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League, were destroyed by Pakistani troops. Some staff members escaped from Dacca and the newspaper -- "the only English-language newspaper from Bangla Desh" -- is published now from Calcutta. It pleads for foreign assistance: "We need solid, tangible, physical support . . . guns, bullets, food and training. We need some amount of professionalism for we cannot send a hungry batch of untrained men to their suicides, simply because an emotional situation demands it . . . Isn't it shameful that . . . the 'free world' with its commitment to 'democracy' and the 'socialist world' with its commitment to "struggling people" should both so conveniently forget their slogans? . . . Need a world with a charred body worry about a burnt finger?"

But such appeals are likely to fall on deaf ears. The issue of East Bengal already risks precipitating war between India and Pakistan -- and support from India, or any other nation, for the Bengali guerillas would be dangerous.