

India:

'Without Mujib, We Are In Real Trouble'

NEW DELHI—"We hail the people of Bangladesh and their hour of triumph." Thirteen days and some 10,000 Indian casualties in dead, wounded and missing after she accepted the gamble of all-out war, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi stood before Parliament last Thursday to announce as complete a victory as she could have wished for.

India had said from the outset that her goal was limited—to overwhelm the Pakistani field army in East Pakistan, not to wage a relentless war aimed at the occupation of West Pakistan—and her Government's words and actions last week attested to the sincerity of her statements. With the Pakistani surrender in the East, said Mrs. Gandhi, it was "pointless" to continue fighting in the West. On Friday Pakistan agreed to her offer of a cease-fire. "The guns are silent," New Delhi announced.

The immediate problem for the Indians focuses on Sheik Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, whose election victory on a platform of autonomy for East Pakistan had led the military regime of President Mohammad Agha Yahya Khan to repudiate the election, arrest the victor and, last March, proceed to bloody repression of the autonomy movement.

The Awami League is, essentially, a bourgeois, moderate force whose main interest is in Bengali nationalism. If Pakistan releases Sheik Mujib, he can assume his role as President of the new nation of Bangladesh and, by the force of his personality, create a kind of order in what is now a vast political vacuum. "But without Mujib," an Indian official conceded last week, "we are in real trouble."

India has her own Bengali population in the Indian state of West Bengal and the city of Calcutta. (The Indian Bengalis are mostly Hindu and the East Bengalis are mostly Moslem, but

except for male circumcision the cultural differences are not very great.) All over the subcontinent, Bengalis are famous for being volatile and argumentative, for talented rioting, for turning over streetcars and smashing the windows of U.S.I.S. libraries. Miserably poor, they also have a propensity for left-wing politics, and in India there are several varieties of Bengali Communists, including Maoists and Trotskyites, and Bengali anarchists as well.

Without Sheik Mujib, said an Indian source, "there is no question that chaos and a power struggle in Bangladesh is now possible." The Bengali politicians who constitute the present Bangladesh government are not believed to have effective control over the guerrillas and may urge the Indian Army to linger until order is established. Yet India seems sincere in saying she wants to get her army out as soon as practicable. If the Indians wait too long they will inevitably become the "Hindu army of occupation."

In the peace negotiations that lie ahead, India's immediate goal, therefore, will be to obtain Sheik Mujib's release. There is little question that India will use her bargaining power—the Pakistani prisoners she holds and the more than 1,500 square miles of West Pakistani territory she occupies—to try to force Islamabad to release the Sheik.

India has other problems in the wake of the war. She must try to get almost 10 million Bengali refugees to return to Bangladesh, relieving her of a burden she is ill-equipped to sustain. But a large part of the refugees are Hindus who may be reluctant to return.

India is not much worried, at this point, that the emergence of Bangladesh will encourage secessionist and separatist movements among her own minority groups (India is really a federation of minorities). National power and prestige are at an all-time high, and the Indians in the past have been stubborn in resisting breakaway movements by such groups as the tribesmen of the Naga hills.

Pakistan has been reduced to less than half her former population. But her friend, China, has also suffered, and so has the United States.

The last-minute support of Pakistan by the United States seemed, from the perspective of New Delhi, to be a hopeless and inexplicable commitment to a lost cause. When it was fourth down and forty yards to go for Pakistan, President Nixon seemed still to be cheering weakly from the sidelines. He has deeply alienated 550 million Indians, and apparently accomplished nothing.

—CHARLES MOHR