

cross the border and then added: "I won't trouble you with the exact statistics". And when he spoke of the floods that had swept through his state this summer, he referred to them biblically as "the visitation of the waters".

Leaving his room, one got a little glimpse for a moment of what went on behind the calmness: on one wall he had framed a cartoon from *Shankar's Weekly* of a fakir lying on a bed of nails and looking up at some officials who obviously constituted a search committee or civil service commissioners. The holy man was saying: "What makes you think I'd be any good as Governor of West Bengal?"

Running the state of West Bengal, trying to improve the lot of its 60 million people, is not the job for anyone who would turn pale at a bed of nails. Politically it has lurched back and forth in recent years from an elected coalition government with some Communist members who "President's rule", which means direct rule by a governor responsible to Delhi. Governor Dias is a recent arrival from the territory of Tripura, which has its own troubles because it is almost completely enclosed by East Pakistan and has had its population doubled since March by the nearly 1,500,000 refugees flooding into it. The good organization by which Tripura has managed to cope with this influx made Governor Dias the obvious candidate for the much vaster job of dealing with the problems of West Bengal.

The refugees who have straggled across the long border from East Pakistan are only the latest of these problems. Mr. Sengupta pointed out that some 3,000,000 refugees had crossed from East Bengal during the last 20 years before the present disturbances. These people had been given land and had been absorbed

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into the life of the state; they had become dominant in some electoral constituencies, and tended to support the most left-wing candidates.

What Governor Dias had called "the visitation of the waters" was a major problem, also. For two months the summer of '71 floods from the Ganges, the Hooghly and the Damodar rivers had turned 8,000,000 West Bengalis out of their homes; and the state and central governments had had to provide food for them, also. The rations for these Indian citizens in distress were, in fact, slightly smaller than the governments were supplying to the refugees from East Pakistan. There are an estimated 7,000,000 Pakistan refugees who have crossed into West Bengal between last March and mid-November, and the Indian authorities have been achieving the daily miracle of supplying each adult among them with 400 grams of grain and each child with 300 grams.

Little tension

It is a remarkable fact that there has been very little tension between the refugees and the local population of West Bengal. ("I shall keep my fingers crossed", said Governor Dias when we touched on this point.) The local population could so easily turn on the refugees and complain that they are gobbling up funds that should go for the development of West Bengal, that they threaten the state's job and wage structure by offering a huge source of very cheap labour.

So far they haven't done so. But the officials are wary. They are not keen that refugees should find jobs which would mean depriving a local person of employment. No more than a small proportion of the refugees were moved far from the border, because it would give them what was described as "a sense of permanency". In every policy statement, Indian politicians and officials are careful to refer to the refugees as "temporary" — and the motive is clearly to placate the local population.

How temporary is "temporary"? Coming from Canada, one could at once conclude that millions of the refugees are bound to be still in India for six months — maybe a year or longer — after a political settlement has been made that removes the fear which sent them fleeing. The Indian authorities, for reasons of domestic politics, do not feel able to talk in terms of planning over such a period. Each new requirement which is as predictable as the changing seasons since it is linked to them—blankets for the winter months, shelter materials for the monsoon next