



# bangla desh is for real

Jack Lakavitch, the author of the following article, has spent some time in the new state of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) and is the Secretary of Atlantic Region of Student Christian Movement. He will be speaking at UNB Tuesday, November 23 in Tiley Hall, Room 303 at 8 p.m. All are welcome.

**I** arrived in East Pakistan in January, but by the time I left on May 6 after witnessing some of the brutal suppression by the Pakistan Army, it was Bangla Desh. In fact Bangla Desh came into existence during midnight of March 25 when President Yahya Khan broke off the talks with the Awami League and ordered his Army under the ruthless direction of General Tilla Khan "to do their business." When I left Dacca on May 6 I went on to Japan until the beginning of August when I decided to return to Canada to work for the Student Christian Movement here.

While in Japan I tried my best to keep up to date on the Bangla Desh crisis. Japanese media gave a fairly good coverage. In the study session which had participants from partially all Asian countries we also had many discussions on Bangla Desh, and from time to time we would receive reports from various countries. The WSCF Executive meeting in July brought representatives from every region of the world, and again we were apprised of their reactions from these regions. The general impression was that all over the world there was tremendous sympathy for the suffering people of Bangla Desh, especially for the millions of refugees. But sympathy is not enough.

Before returning to Canada I felt strongly compelled to spend some time in Calcutta and area to get right up to date on the Bangla Desh situation, and then to make my findings available to whoever cared to have them.

This is now my 5th week in Calcutta where I have been involved in a constant

and fascinating process of information gathering. Actually this process began in Hong Kong and Bangkok. In Bangkok I visited UNICEF, East Asia Christian Council, FOA, and the WSCF Bangkok Office. In Calcutta I have now been in contact with many agencies; CASA, UNICEF, OXFAM, WAR ON WANT, CARITAS, SAVE THE CHILDREN, Red Cross, Calcutta Urban Service, Cathedral Relief Service, Student Christian Movement, etc. I have met scores of persons both from Bangla Desh and from India, and from other countries. The Bangla Desh High Commission has also been very helpful where one constantly meets refugee Professors, Journalists, Bankers, Politicians, Students, T.V. people, etc. Calcutta University is another meeting place of many of the intellectual refugees. The Calcutta University Bangladesh Sahayak Samati, a group of University Professors and Lecturers, has been doing a co-ordinating and publicity work and most helpful. There are always functions of many kinds such as Artists Exhibitions, Cultural Programs, Conferences, discussion groups, etc., all for Bangla Desh. I have also visited 12 Refugee Camps, the most dramatic example of the tremendous human suffering of millions. I constantly met people so eager to talk. In every visit to a camp I met new refugees. And of course there is no dearth now of written material such as articles, pamphlets, even books, the daily newspaper, etc.

After 4 weeks of this fascinating free-lancing I have managed to gather a sea of information and impressions, and I have been able to check out the validity of much of the information. Here are some of the glaring realities.

## GLARING REALITIES

### Refugees Without End -

There are now 8.6 million refugees. For a time in August and early September the influx dwindled down to only several thousand a day, but now within the past week or so refugees are pouring in again by the thousands many with bullet wounds. Word has reached here that many thousands more are on the move and are expected at the border crossing shortly. Many of them are coming to avoid starvation, as there is now a very acute food shortage in many areas. With renewed Pakistan Army action now that the monsoon is coming to an end, reliable sources are predicting that the total may rise to 12 million and over. The Pakistan Air Force is once again in action with strafing, bombing, napalming, etc!

Most of the refugees have fled to over-crowded West Bengal, approximately 6.5 million. Meghalaya has 500,000, Assam 250,000, Tripura 1.5 million. About 2 million refugees are living outside the camps with relatives and friends, and 6.5 million are spread over 1200 camps under Indian Government direction and care along with co-operation of many local and International Relief bodies. The Relief task is gigantic and how India has been able to cope so well in the most harrowing and unimaginable conditions possible is to her everlasting credit. Not only have the authorities had to cope with feeding and sheltering of millions who suddenly appeared from everywhere, but they have also had to cope within this last month with tremendous floods which have made millions homeless and destroyed about \$520 million worth of crops and property. Many of the Refugee

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