Interview With
Yahya Khan

"Indians are already at war with us … we are not hitting back. I hope to God it doesn't spread."

Arnaud de Borchgrave, Newsweek senior editor, interviewed President Yahya Khan of Pakistan last week in Islamabad. This is the text of the copyright interview, which appears in the issue of Newsweek out today.

QUESTION: How close are you and India to war today?

ANSWER: I have no reason to tell you war is not imminent because it is. Indians are already at war with us and the only reason there is no general confrontation is that we are not hitting back. I hope to God it doesn't spread. Can you imagine what the subcontinent at war would mean for the rest of the world? We are still exercising maximum restraint despite growing provocation. Indians are lobbing from 150 to 3,000 artillery and mortar shells across East Pakistan's borders every 24 hours. Earlier this week they fired almost 5,000 shells in one day—all from 25-pound field guns and three-inch mortars.

Q: India has mobilized many of its 600,000 reservists. Have you done so too?

A: They have been alerted and some reserve officers called back.

Q: What are the factors militating in favor of military confrontation?

A: First, the constant increase in shelling and infiltration of rebels. They are destroying bridges, electric pylons, even a food ship the other day. Second, the Indians may have set up 23 guerrilla training camps staffed by Indian officers and by officers of the Bengali regiment who deserted. We know there are brigadiers and colonels in the picture. When Delhi says they are retired officers you know what that means. Third, the massive concentration of Indian troops around East Pakistan's borders: Eight divisions, including two divisions withdrawn from the five they had facing the Chinese. Massive concentration on our western borders, too—12 to 13 divisions, including four in Kashmir—all deployed in battle positions. Civilian populations have been evacuated from their border areas. Their defense minister is threatening us every day.

Troops Advance

Q: Aren't you deployed in battle positions too?

A: Our troops have moved out of their cantonments and barracks and have moved forward. But they are not in battle positions.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I don't want to escalate.

Q: And what are the factors militating against war?

A: I'm doing my best to defuse the situation. I have repeatedly accepted U Thant's proposals for international observers to observe anything they wish, including how we are repatriating refugees who come back.

Q: How long can you put up with infiltration from India's privileged sanctuaries without retaliating?

A: I'm fed up with this affair. The army is thoroughly browned off. My people must be cursing me for not doing anything. But we must be patient.

Q: If war came, do you feel you could win it—or is it bound to be another stalemate as most foreign observers are suggesting?

A: I'll certainly not lose it. My people would fight it out. But how can an army fight and win against an army that is five times its size? It would be military lunacy for me to take them on. But if we're attacked, we'll fight back.

Q: You mean you won't attack regardless of what happens in the east?

A: Our army is dealing with the rebels very effectively. But if the Indians escalate with a view to capturing territory and installing a puppet Bangla Desh regime, that will be war and I can assure you it won't be confined to the east.

Q—How long could your armed forces fight before running into the kind of equipment and ammunition shortages that stymied the '65 war?

A—That's a real problem for us. Much less so for the Indians. They have a big war machine that is self-sufficient in many respects. Yet another proof of the madness it would be for us to initiate anything: If they can lob over 3,000

shells in a day, that means they have plenty of ammo on hand. It's a luxury our army cannot afford.

Ports Blockaded

Q— In the event of war, how long could you hold on to East Pakistan with overstretched supply lines surrounded on all sides by the Indian Army and with your ports blockaded by the Indian Navy?

A— It won't be easy, of course. Luckily the terrain in the east is in favor of defensive forces. It won't be a walkover, I assure you. But in case of a big war our strength is here in the west.

Q— If war broke out how do you assess the chances of Chinese or Soviet intervention?

A— I don't know about the Soviets. But that defense pact they have with India must mean something. Hopefully they'll use it to make the Indians see sense. As for the Chinese, they will not tolerate an attack on Pakistan. We will get all the weapons and ammunition we need, short of physical intervention. If the Russians and Chinese came in, we would be in a world war situation and no one can conceive of that.

Q— Have you been assured of Chinese military supplies in case of war?

A— Definitely.

Q— Do you have any problems obtaining spares from China for the 100 MiG-19s Peking gave you?

A— None at all. We get some things free and pay for others. But Chinese terms are so easy—25-year credit, interest-free.

Last year when I was in Peking I negotiated $400 million worth of economic aid for our five-year plan. No interest.

Q— Do you feel that China's presence on the United Nations Security Council will have an impact on the Indo-Pakistan crisis?

A— Certainly. It will restore some balance not only to our problem but to the world in general.

Q— Some prominent Indians say it would be possible to "liberate" East Bengal—and to hand over power to the elected representatives there—within a fortnight. If that were tried and achieved by India, what could you really do about it?

A— That would be a case of a foreign country forcibly occupying a country that doesn't belong to them. The world could not accept that. I know a fact East Pakistanis would not put up with it. The men India installed in power would be regarded as quislings. Muslims are not about to accept Hindu rule again.

Size of Louisiana

Q— Speaking privately, some important Pakistanis say that, long range, East Pakistan will become a terrible cross to bear. The size of Louisiana, your eastern wing will total America's entire population in 20 years. And these Pakistanis argue that you would be much better off if you allowed the eastern province to opt for independence. What do you think?

A— That is the advice of despair. Don't forget East Pakistan's spearheaded the movement for a single Pakistani state. They wanted to free themselves from Hindu domination. No one ever freed the Bengal from the British. We too have made many mistakes and we were to learn from East Pakistanis who have been our presidents and premiers since independence. East Pakistan was run down and we did not pay sufficient attention to their development. We are now trying to make up for lost time.

Q— How do you explain that 20,000 to 30,000 refugees from East Pakistan are still crossing into India daily?

A— They are not. That's an absolute lie. With all the shooting the Indians are doing, border villagers are naturally running for cover all the time. Our borders are not like the Great Wall of China. They are unmarked. So, the Indians take foreigners somewhere and say this is the border. For all they know, they might be 15 miles inside India. The only way to settle this is to let international observers come in on both sides and see what's going on. But India won't accept because of what she's doing.

Q— How can nine million people flee their country in a few months?

A— I cannot accept that figure. Two to three million is more likely. It may even be four million after impartial observers are brought in throughout the country. Whatever the figure, I will accept anyone who left voluntarily as a Pakistani national and take him back. This can only be controlled by the United Nations. India still has not resettled many of the refugees who were part of the mass exodus at the time of partition [1947]. Look at Calcutta. There are still about a million people sleeping in the streets every night.

Nationalism Cited

Q— What do you feel would happen if you released Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and allowed him to return to East Pakistan with a solemn pledge not to go beyond internal autonomy and ordered the army back to its barracks?

A— Many people might not believe me but I think he would be killed by his own people if he went back. They hold him responsible for all the suffering. In any case it's an academic question. Had been discussing internal autonomy with me for two years and went back on his word. He organized and led an armed rebellion against the state and subverted six battalions of the army as well as the police and the East Pakistan Rifles. About 60,000-armed men assisted by Indian agents. They tried to fight an all-out war of secession. There was no alternative but to suppress the rebellion. Any other government would have done the same thing. How can I now call that man back and negotiate with him. He is charged with waging war against the state and subverting the loyalty of the army. He is being defended by Mr. Brohi, who is the best and most respected lawyer in the country. He would not have taken on the case if he thought there was going to be any hanky-panky in the military court. I did not shoot him first and try him later as some governments are prone to do. What we do after sentence has been passed is the prerogative of the head of state. I cannot release him on a whim. It's only on a responsibility. But if the nation demands his release, I will do it.

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Nixon Is Seeking A Stopgap Plan For Foreign Aid

By Felix Belair Jr.

CEREMONY—South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu lights ceremonial flame at his inauguration in Saigon yesterday beginning his second four-year term.

Sees 'New Dawn of Sunshine'

Thieu Is Inaugurated for 2d Term

3 More Are Dead in Ulster; 2 of Wounds, One 'Executed'

By Decision on Alphabetical Order

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Declaration Signed

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