

REPORT ON THE SECOND GROUP MEETING  
HELD BETWEEN THE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT COMMISSION  
AND THE JANA SAMHATI SAMITI AT DHUDUKCHARA UNDER THE PANCHARI POLICE  
STATION WITHIN KHAGRACHARI DISTRICT ON JULY 10, 1994, (based on a letter  
written to me by the Jana Samhati Samiti on July 12, 1994).

A. BACKGROUND

At the First Group Meeting, which took place on June 4, 1994, both the Sub-Committee of the Bangladesh Government Commission (BGC) and the Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS) had decided that the Second Group Meeting would be held on any day between 25 and 30 June, 1994, and that the Sub-Committee would fix the date. The Leader of the Sub-Committee, Mr. Rashed Khan Menon had assured the JSS Delegation that the date and time schedule for the Meeting would be made known to the JSS before 15 June, 1994. At the outset of the Meeting, he also made it clear that the Sub-Committee was liaising between the BGC and the JSS.

B. THE LIST OF DELEGATES

a. The List of the Delegates of the Sub-Committee of the BGC

1) Mr. Rashed Khan Menon, MP (Workers Party), the Leader of the Sub-Committee & Chairman of the Group Meeting, 2) Mr. Kalpa Ranjan Chakma, MP (Awami League), 3) Mr. Mohammad Shahjahan, MP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), and 4) Mr. Mohammad Shahjahan Chowdhury, MP (Jammat-I-Islami).

b. The List of the JSS Delegates

1) Mr. Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, the President of the JSS and Leader of the JSS Delegation, 2) Mr. Rupayan Dewan, a Member of the JSS Central Committee, 3) Mr. Goutam Kumar Chakma, a Member of the JSS Central Committee, and 4) Mr. Sudhasindhu Khisa, a Member of the JSS Central Committee.

c. The List of the Liaison or Coordination Committee Delegates

1) Mr. Hangsadhvaj Chakma, the Convenor of the Liaison Committee, and 2) Mr. Mohammad Safi, a Member of the Liaison Committee.

d. The List of the Delegates of the Bangladesh Government Administration

1) Mr. Nasirul Islam, the Director (Planning) of the Special Affairs Division under the Prime Minister's Secretariat, and 2) Mr. Yar Muhammad Khan, the Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachari District, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

C. THE SECOND GROUP MEETING

The Meeting could not commence on time as the Delegates of the Sub-Committee could not arrive at the venue in time. So, the First Session had to begin at 11.15 a.m. It stopped at 1.45 p.m. for the midday meal. After the lunch-break, the Delegates met in the Second Session for only 15 minutes from 2.30 p.m. to 2.45 p.m.

a. The First Session

As the Chairman of the Group Meeting, Mr. Rashed Khan Menon opened the First Session and said that the following four topics were discussed in detail in the First Group Meeting on June 4, 1994: 1) Constitutional Recognition of the Ethnic Entity of the Jumma People, 2) Formation of an Apex Body in the CHT maintaining the three Hill District Councils, 3) Land Rights, and 4) Withdrawal of the Settlers (Bangladeshi Infiltrators). The Sub-Committee, he continued, had reported the matter to and discussed with the Government. As a result, Mr. Menon felt that the attitude of the Government towards the Rights of the CHT was positive. For example, the Reserve Forest areas would be put on the concurrent list and the other areas would be brought under the control of the Council. The Government also agreed on the Settlers' voluntary return. However, it would keep the existing Hill District Councils and create an Apex Body on top of them. Mr. Menon also mentioned that he met with the BGC Chairman, Col. Oli Ahmed in the....page/2-

in the presence of Mr. Kalpa Ranjan Chakma and Mr. Hangsadhvaj Chakma to know the views of the Government. He was asked by Col. Ahmed to submit the set of concrete proposals which were made at the First Group Meeting to solve the afore-said four issues. Mr. Menon reiterated that the Sub-Committee was authorised to liaise between the Government and the JSS and not to make final decision on any proposals. However, he had put a set of proposals before Col. Ahmed in order to enable the latter to prepare the Government proposals on the said issues in consultation with the Attorney-General of Bangladesh. Then, Mr. Menon requested the JSS to submit its proposals to the Sub-Committee and frankly admitted that he & his colleagues had come to the Second Group Meeting just to collect the JSS proposals.

Participating in the discussion, Mr. Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma wanted to know as to why the Second Group Meeting was not arranged during the period between 25 and 30 June, 1994, and also as to why the Sub-Committee had not apprised the JSS of the Meeting schedule before June 15, 1994, as promised. He also pointed out that even the Meeting had begun much later than the scheduled time. Having received no reply to his questions from Mr. Menon, Mr. Larma reminded that in the First Group Meeting of June 4, 1994, only views on the said four topics had been exchanged between the two sides but no decision had been adopted. He also recalled that the Sub-Committee was assigned to place the outcome of the First Group Meeting before the Government and then to let the JSS know about the views of the Government at the Second Group Meeting. Moreover, Mr. Larma said, the Sub-Committee was requested to bring the written statement of the Government on the Modified Demands of the JSS. Again he reminded that the JSS had submitted all its proposals in the Modified Five-Point Charter of Demands to the BGC long before and that every point had been explained in detail in the Charter. In spite of having been in possession of all necessary documents and information about the demands of the JSS, Mr. Larma continued, Col. Ahmed asked the JSS through a letter of Mr. Hangsadhvaj Chakma in the third week of June, 1994, to submit a new but brief Charter of Demands to him through the Liaison Committee. He was astonished to hear from the Sub-Committee again that Col. Ahmed had asked for the JSS proposals. Mr. Larma once again pointed out that at the request of the BGC, the JSS had modified its original Charter of Demands by dropping the demand for Provincial Autonomy, which was outside the framework of the Unitary Bangladesh Constitution, and by demanding a Regional Council with Separate Administrative Status for the CHT which was in line with the provisions of the Bangladesh Constitution. He also pointed out that during the First Group Meeting he had clearly explained the stand of the JSS. For instance, he emphasized that the Hill District Council system was not acceptable and that the modification of the existing Hill District Council system would not fulfil the JSS demands set out in its Five-Point Charter of Demands. Mr. Larma made it absolutely clear by declaring that the JSS had no alternative proposal other than the Five-Point Charter of Demands which were the minimum requirements for the survival of the Jumma People in the Islamic State of Bangladesh.

Then, Mr. Menon argued that the Sub-Committee was trying to find out a solution acceptable to both the BGC and the JSS by liaising between them. The Government, he said, had already consented to provide Constitutional Recognition to the Ethnic Entity of the Jumma People and this achievement had certainly proved that the Peace-Talks were making good progress and so the JSS should make further efforts to explore all the avenues in order to arrive at an agreement. There were, according to him, three options - 1) To revive the CHT Regulation of 1900, which was still in force although it was repealed in 1989 but not yet been published in the Gezette; 2) To implement the Hill District Council system; and 3) To form an Apex Body over the three Hill District Councils - before the JSS. Hence, Mr. Menon suggested, if none of these options were acceptable, then, the JSS could place its alternative proposal to the BGC through the Sub-Committee. On that....page /3-

that point, Mr. Kalpa Ranjan Chakma joined in the talks and disclosed that he and Mr. Menon had a meeting with Col. Ahmed. In the meeting, he went on, Col. Ahmed wanted the JSS proposal about the Administrative Structure of the CHT in writing and requested both the Sub-Committee and the JSS to consider whether the existing three Hill Districts could be brought under one Administrative Unit and also to consider how much power to be delegated to the three Hill Districts.

In reply, Mr. Larma contended that if the Government could give Administrative Powers to the Hill Districts as one Unit, then why the Government was unable to give Administrative Powers to the Regional Council as proposed by the JSS.

Then, Mr. Menon argued that basically there was no big difference between the existing Hill District Council system and the JSS-proposed Regional Council. But Mr. Larma pointed out to Mr. Menon the big difference by explaining that the Hill District Councils had no authority over the General Administration, maintenance of Law & Order, and so on whereas the Regional Council had all such powers. Despite repeated rejection of the Hill District Council system by the JSS, he continued, the Government was still harping on the subject. Replying to the charges of Mr. Larma, Mr. Menon admitted that the Government was not saying anything about the Regional Council because it was a sort of Union Territory in India and so it would certainly create problems for the Government of Bangladesh like those being created by the Tripura Autonomous District Council, the Darjeeling (Gurkha) Hill Council, the District Councils in Mizoram and the Jharkhand Council (which is under process) for the Indian Government. To counter the arguments of Mr. Menon, Mr. Larma argued that being a Unitary State like Bangladesh, Britain had accorded Autonomy to Scotland. Then why the Bangladesh Government was unable to provide Autonomy to the CHT in accordance with the Modified Five-Point Charter of Demands, he asked. Again, Mr. Menon suggested a Council similar to the Tripura Autonomous District Council which had no powers to form a separate Police Force and to conduct the General Administration. Rejecting Mr. Menon's suggestion, Mr. Larma emphatically said that the JSS had no other new proposal except the Modified Five-Point Charter of Demands without which the existence of the Jumma People could not be protected. Then, Mr. Menon wanted to know whether the JSS would like to consider the proposal about the creation of an Apex Body on top of the present three Hill District Councils as discussed in the First Group Meeting of June 4, 1994. Mr. Larma reminded him that the JSS had not accepted that proposal at the said Meeting. At that point, Mr. Mohammad Shahjahan of the BNP commented that the proposals made by Mr. Menon were proper. Then, he urged the JSS to accept the proposed rights at this stage and assured it that the remaining rights would be granted later without specifying the time-frame. Mr. Larma refused to accept his suggestion and remarked that the Sub-Committee was now talking like the Government. Coming to support Mr. Shahjahan's suggestion, Mr. Menon pointed out that the Government had already agreed to provide Constitutional recognition to the Hill District Councils. It was, he went on, a significant advancement towards the solution of the CHT problem and the Government might do further on the basis of this beginning. Then, Mr. Menon warned that the rejection of his proposals by the JSS might create problems for the Government although he did not explain what the problems were.

Thereafter, Mr. Mohammad Shahjahan Chowdhury of the Jamat-I-Islami suggested that both the Hill District Council system and the Regional Council proposal should be set aside and that the Hill Council for the CHT should be formed to solve the CHT issue.

Then, Mr. Larma raised the question of the Separate Administrative Status for the CHT. Mr. Menon replied that the Government would provide Separate Administrative Status to the CHT through any of the following four Administrative Set-ups: 1) In accordance with the CHT Regulation of 1900....page /4-

1900, 2) By forming an Apex Body over the existing 3 Hill District Councils with improved powers, 3) By forming one District Council for the CHT with the powers of the present 3 Hill District Councils, and 4) By forming the CHT a District with a Council, in any name, which would have greater powers than those of the present 3 Hill District Councils. He also wanted to know if the JSS had any alternative to either these four options or the Separate Administrative Status for the CHT. In response, Mr. Larma reiterated the JSS's inability to accept any of the options and stressed that the JSS had no new proposal except the Modified Five-Point Charter of Demands which provided not only the Regional Council but also the Separate Administrative Status for the CHT to which the JSS had no alternative proposal either. So, he said, the JSS had nothing to submit anew. To help Mr. Menon, Mr. Mohammad Shahjahan argued that the four options could provide a model on which the desired Council would be formed and empowered and that he would like to see the future Council retained the powers of the existing Hill District Councils.

After that, Mr. Menon urged Mr. Larma to draft proposals in consultation with Mr. K.R. Chakma and Mr. Hangsadhwa] Chakma. But Mr. H. Chakma declined to participate in framing the Draft Proposals on the grounds that his Liaison Committee was not the right body to do so. Mr. Larma also refused to submit new proposals as the JSS had already presented its Modified Five-Point Charter of Demands to the BGC much earlier. Then the Sub-Committee decided that Mr. K.R. Chakma & Mr. M. Shahjahan would prepare the Draft Proposals in consultation with the Bangladesh Attorney-General, Mr. Aminul Haque, and that the Draft Proposals would be sent to both the BGC and the JSS well ahead of the Third Group Meeting.

b. The Second Session

Both sides agreed on the extension of the ceasefire till the end of September, 1994. They also felt that there was no need to hold the Eight Round of the Dialogue as both Mr. Larma & Mr. M. Shahjahan Chowdhury did not notice any significant progress in the peace-talks so far. Then both the parties decided to hold the Third Group Meeting in the third or fourth week of August, 1994. They also decided that the BGC would fix the date for the Meeting and inform the JSS about it at least 15 days before the Meeting. Thereafter, Mr. Larma focussed the attention of the Sub-Committee on the continuing Military combing operations and atrocities against the innocent Jumma People and also on the construction of new Military camps in the CHT in violation of all cease-fire agreements. He also pointed out that the Bangladesh Military Forces violated the terms & conditions of the truce by attacking the Shanti Bahini (SB) camps and arresting 2 SB Members namely, Mr. Mathura Lal Tripura & Mr. Hari Chandra Chakma. Mr. Menon was astonished by hearing of such deliberate ceasefire violations and promised to take the matter up with the proper Authorities. Finally, both sides took the following decisions: 1) The Sub-Committee would send the Draft Proposals to the JSS before the next Meeting, 2) The Third Group Meeting would take place in the third or fourth week of August, 1994, and the BGC would fix the date for the Meeting and inform the JSS of the date at least 15 days before the Meeting, 3) The ceasefire would be observed till 30 Sept., 1994, and 4) Mr. Menon would urge the Government to stop ceasefire violations by the Military Forces & to release the SB Members. Mr. Larma assured Mr. K.R. Chakma of the JSS cooperation in the repatriation of the Second Batch of Jumma Refugees due to begin from July 21, 1994. The Sub-Committee directed Mr. N. Islam & Mr. Y.M. Khan to provide conveyance and funds to the Liaison Committee Members.

-THE END-

(This report has been written by Ramendu Shekhar Dewan, a Spokesman of the Jana Samhati Samiti in Europe, on 26 September, 1994).