

From Dr. R.S. Dewan,
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Date: 21 July 1985

Sub: An appeal to save the Chakma and other tribes of the
Chittagong Hill Tracts from the total annihilation by
the Bangladesh Government.

Dear Friend,

May I present to you a copy of the report entitled, 'The crisis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts', presented by Mr. Mehervan Singh, the Secretary-General of the Asian Conference On Religion And Peace, to his organization's Annual Meeting held in Seoul, South Korea, in April/May, 1985.

The root of the crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is that the Bangladeshi regime wants only the land of the CHT for its co-religionists and not the indigenous people who are ethnically, religiously and culturally different from the majority community of Bangladesh. The government has deployed the entire Bangladesh Air Force, one unit of the Bangladesh Navy, and over 125,000 armed personnel of the Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Rifles, Police and Ansars in the CHT in order to seize the tribal farmlands and villages. Mass-murder, wholesale burning of tribal villages, relocation of tribal farmers into concentration camps, forcible eviction of tribal families from their ancestral homes and farmlands, detention and imprisonment of innocent tribal people without charge or trial, kidnapping and raping of tribal women, desecration and destruction of Buddhist temples, torture and murder of Buddhist priests, torture and harassment of tribal people, restriction on the movement of the local people, settlement of the outsider Bengalis on the lands of tribal farmers, restriction on the supply of essential commodities, extortion, looting, blackmail, chicanery, forcible conversion to Islam and all kinds of crimes have characterised the activities of the Bengali invaders in the traditional homeland of the tribal people for many years. In short, the fundamentally hostile Bangladeshi regime has been committing all sorts of genocidal crimes as enumerated in the United Nations Convention on Genocide of which Bangladesh is a signatory. It is also a signatory of the International Labour Organization's Convention 107 on Tribal and Indigenous Populations, the terms of which it is violating blatantly.

I appeal fervently to you to take appropriate actions against the brutal regime of Bangladesh. The people of the CHT need your help.

To

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Yours sincerely

Ramendu Dewan

The Crisis Of The Chittagong Hill Tracts

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A report to be presented to the Annual
Meeting of the Asian Conference On Religion
And Peace, Seoul, South Korea, April/May,
1985.

The Crisis Of The Chittagong Hill Tracts

On 26 May 1979, Brigadier Hannan and Lt-Col. Salam declared in a public meeting at Panchari: "We want only the land, and not the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts." Mr. Ali Haider Khan, the Deputy Commissioner of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), and Mr. Abdul Awal, the former Commissioner of Chittagong Division, threatened the tribal leaders on many occasions by saying that they would be extinct in the next five years 1,2). This frank admission by senior military and civilian officers reveals clearly the sinister motive of the Bangladeshi regime. The region has been sealed off and the government is exterminating the indigenous nationalities of the CHT systematically on the one hand and settling the outsider Bengalis in their place on the other. As a result of the government-directed violence tens of thousands of unarmed tribal men, women and children have been murdered. The crimes committed by the Bengali soldiers and settlers fall in the category which is beyond the capacity of condemnatory description. However, an attempt has been made to give a brief account of the prevailing extraordinary situation in the tribal homeland.

A. The Chittagong Hill Tracts And Its People

Situated in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, the CHT forms the largest district of the country. This hilly region has an area of 5095 square miles. It is bordered by Tripura State (India) on the north, by Mizoram State (India) on the east, by Arakan Province (Burma) on the east and south, and by the Chittagong district of Bangladesh on the west. Its principal rivers are the Feni, the Karnafuli, the Sengu, and the Matamuri. The Karnafuli river has many tributaries of which the Ichamati, the Reinkhong the Chengi, the Subalong, the Kachalong, the Bara Harina, and the Chota Harina are navigable. The Mayuni river is the most important tributary of the Kachalong river.

The CHT is the traditional home of some 600,000 indigenous people belonging to 13 tribes, namely, Chakma, Tongchongya, Chak, Marma, Khyang, Khumi, Tripura, Murung, Mro, Lushai, Bawm, Bonjugi, and Pankho. The Tongchongyas are a sub-group of the Chakmas. The tribal people profess Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Ethnically and culturally they bear resemblance to the Tibeto-Burman group 3,4). Because of their different religion, culture, and ethnic origin the hillmen suffered extreme hostility from the neighbouring Bengalis 5).

B. British Period

Britain created the CHT as an excluded area for the tribal people and promulgated the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 to safeguard their rights in all spheres of life. This Regulation provided for limited self-government by tribespeople. They virtually administered the district although the ultimate authority resided in a Deputy Commissioner who was traditionally British. Almost all government functionaries, apart from a few high officials were recruited locally. The indigenous police establishment, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Frontier Police, was mostly manned by the hill people except the Superintendent of Police who was also traditionally British. Non-tribal people were not allowed to settle in the district permanently, nor could they purchase land from hill farmers. Under Rule 51 they could be expelled from the district if they were thought undesirable or found doing anything prejudicial to the interest of the traditional people 1,2,3,4,5).

Schools, hospitals, sewing machines, survey, road-building, Post Office telegraph, courts, mechanised boats, water works, electricity, modern administration, rule of law and justice and so on were first introduced to the CHT during the British period 2). Weaving has been known to the tribal people since antiquity. The majority of them possessed flat farmlands in the valleys and practised plough cultivation. Those tribal people who did not possess flat farmlands cultivated hill slopes by the slash-and-burn cultivation/-

cultivation method (Jhum) 2,3,4).

C. Pakistani Period

In 1947, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the Chairman of the Boundary Commission, arbitrarily awarded the CHT to Pakistan in violation of the very principle of the partition, i.e. the Muslim majority districts to go to Pakistan and others to India. 98 per cent of the population of the CHT were non-Muslims at the time of independence. The hill people, under the leadership of Mr. Sneha Kumar Chakma, demanded that the CHT should be made part of the secular republic of India 1,2). The Pakistani Government abolished the special status of the CHT as an excluded area, brushed aside the CHT Regulation of 1900, disbanded the indigenous police force, transferred the tribal police and civilian officers to other districts of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), brought in Bengali police and civilian officers in their place, and allowed the Bengalis to settle in the tribal homeland 1,2,3,4).

The Bengalis even interfered with the social and religious life of the original people. For example, in 1953, the Chakma Chief, Raja Tridiv Roy, was attacked by the government-backed Bengalis while administering justice in his Royal Court. In spite of the personal intervention of the then Deputy Commissioner, Lt-Col. John Angus Hume, OBE, he was arrested and insulted by the Bengali police. The Chakma Chief fulfils the role similar to that of the British Constitutional Monarchy. He is the symbol of the nation, head and nucleus of the society, and defender of religion and culture. The Chakma Chief would have been killed without the intervention of Col. Hume. This highly admired officer protested against this injustice by resigning his post 2,6).

The construction of the Kaptai Hydroelectric Dam on the Karnafuli river inundated 350 square miles of low lands including 40 per cent of the best agricultural land of the CHT, and displaced 20,000 farmer families (over 100,000 people) and 8,000 Jhum cultivator families (more than 50,000 people). The government took no effective steps to rehabilitate them and paid them compensation at a ridiculously low rate. Many tribal people died during the removal and many fled to the Indian States of Tripura and Mizoram 1,2,3,4,7).

Large-scale Bengali settlement on the farmlands of the tribal farmers resulted in the eviction of about 100,000 tribesmen. The eviction of the largest single group of 60,000 took place in 1961 when the Bengali immigrants started a series of riots against the innocent tribal farmers. The riots were stopped only when the Governments of India, Sri Lanka and other countries lodged protest with the Pakistani regime. The evicted tribal people were pushed into India and Burma and none of them was repatriated 1, 2).

The Kaptai Hydroelectric Project neither employed any local people nor supplied them with electricity. The government set up a Paper Mill and a Rayon Mill at Chandraghona, and also many industries in the district. Only a few hill people have been employed there 1,2,3,4). During the 24 years of Pakistani rule the original people lost practically all political and economic rights including official and police protection.

D. Total Bengali Invasion, Oppression And Genocide

During the 1971 war for the independence of Bangladesh, thousands of hill people including Mr. Manabendra Narayan Larma fought with the Bengali forces against the Pakistan army in the hope that their condition would improve in independent Bangladesh. When the Pakistan army withdrew from Panchari, the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini (Bangladesh Liberation Force) came, killed 18 hillmen who came out to receive them, plundered the area, and murdered another 16 tribesmen in an adjacent place. On 14 December 1971, the Bengali soldiers killed 22 tribal people and burned 200 houses at Kukichara. During the civil war, 50,000 Bengalis settled on the farmlands of the tribal farmers with the help of the Pakistan army and following independence they refused to vacate. These illegal settlers attacked the tribal villages, killed many villagers, burnt their homes, looted their properties, raped their women, and destroyed Buddhist temples 1,2,5,7,8).

Soon after independence, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, unleashed a reign of terror in the CHT. In a military

campaign to search for 'Rajakars and Albadars' (supporters of Pakistan) several hundred innocent tribesmen were killed, hundreds of houses were looted and burned, a large number of women were raped, and thousands of innocent hillmen were indiscriminately arrested and tortured. Later more atrocities followed. For example, in 1972, the Bangladesh army massacred the people of the villages - Merung, Hazachara and Boalkhali. The Bangladesh Constitution, which was adopted in 1972, did not mention either the Special Status of the CHT or the CHT Regulation of 1900 to safeguard the interest of the indigenous people. The local Member of Parliament, Mr. M.N. Larma, in protest, refused to endorse the Constitution. Badly shaken by these attacks on their people, on their lands, and on their rights, the people of the CHT sent a delegation, led by Mr. Larma, to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on 15 February 1972, asking for autonomy and enforcement of the CHT Regulation of 1900. He rejected their demands, charged them of secessionism, and said "Do away with your ethnic identity, go home, and become Bengalis." After the rejection of the deputation's demands, the government stepped up persecution and the people of the CHT had no alternative but to organise the Shanti Bahini or 'Peace Force' with a view to resisting the government oppression. Sheikh Mujib's regime encouraged more Bengali immigration. Its policy was designed to outnumber the traditional people with the Bengalis, and to force them to lose their identity and merge with the Bengali nation. In pursuit of this policy the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board was set up in 1975 to create more jobs for the Bengalis and also to open up the interior to the Bengali immigrants 1,2,3,4,7).

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, a tribal delegation, under the leadership of Mr. Larma, submitted a memorandum to the then President of Bangladesh, Mr. A.S. Sayem on 19 November 1975. The result was more government-sponsored violence. Again in 1976, Mr. Ashok Kumar Dewan, on behalf of the people of the CHT, presented a further proposal to President Ziaur Rahman. In response, this soldier-President launched a full-scale invasion of the tribal homeland. He deployed some 125,000 military and paramilitary personnel, one unit of the Bangladesh Navy, and the entire Air Force of Bangladesh in the CHT to seize the tribal farmlands for over half a million Bengali settlers. This government-organised genocidal programme involved countless mass-killings, wholesale burning of tribal villages, forcible eviction, relocation of tribal farmers in concentration camps, torture, rape, forcible conversion to Islam, destruction of Buddhist temples, looting and chicanery 1,2,3,4,7,8). For example, the Bangladesh armed forces launched campaigns in the upper reaches of the Sengu river from November 1976 to January 1977, and destroyed many villages in the areas of Madhu and Thanchi. Over 1,000 hill people were killed, hundreds of women were raped, and their villages and farmlands were distributed to the Bengalis. About 15,000 tribal people took refuge in Burma and in the neighbouring forests 7).

On 15 October 1979, the Bangladesh army attacked the Mubhachari area (near Mahalchari), burned all villages within an area of 16 square miles, murdered several thousand men, women and children, and took away thousands of tribal men and women. Their fate is still unknown. It is feared that all men died during torture in military camps and that all women were raped and forcibly converted to Islam 1).

On 25 March 1980, a local commander of the Bangladesh army called a meeting at Kalampati Union to discuss the problems of the locality and also the restoration of Buddhist temples. A large number of tribal people assembled on the Kaukhali Bazar ground. The military commander arrived, addressed the assembled people, and then left. As soon as he had gone some hundred Bengali settlers armed with knives and spears attacked the tribal people. Behind them came the Bengali soldiers. More than 300 tribesmen were butchered on the spot. Then the Bengali rioters under the protection of the Bengali soldiers burned two dozen tribal villages, killed more tribal people, kidnapped many women, destroyed many Buddhist temples, murdered many Buddhist monks, and grabbed tribal villages and farmlands. Under pressure from Members of Parliament, the government reluctantly ordered a Committee of Inquiry but it never reported 9,10, 11,12).

Similar innumerable government-directed massacres had taken place in many areas during the rule of General Ziaur Rahman 1, 3,4, 7).

The army has forcibly moved the tribal farmers into Forced Resettle-
ment/-

ment Camps or Concentration Camps. The government describes them as Model Villages or Joint Co-operative Farming Projects in order to mislead the world. Such camps have been established at Moghban, Balukhali, Ijachari, Kangrachari, Bilaichari, Sakrachari, Taktanala, Dhupsil, Pharao, Kandyaduar, Basanta Hemanta, Tinkunia, Pengchari, Kacchaptali, Bagmara, Reisa, Murunghuk, Thanchi, Balipara, Alikadam etc. Murder, beating, rape, starvation, lack of medical care and so on are commonplace in the concentration camps. Life in these camps under the Bangladesh army is so horrifying that when the government decided to set up another camp at Ghagra, the tribal people deserted their ancestral homes and farmlands, and fled to other areas 3, 7, 8).

12-15 thousand tribal people have been imprisoned without charge or trial and subjected to routine torture. Inquiring family members elicit no response and no legal recourse is available to either the prisoners or their families 1,2,3,4). The government does not allow anybody to carry essential commodities such as rice, salt, kerosene, cloth and medicine beyond the district capital, Rangamati. The local people are not permitted to buy more than 2 kilograms of rice per family per week. A family has normally six members and this amount of food is totally inadequate for six people. There is serious shortage of these articles in the district and most of the hill people suffer from lack of food. A special permit is required to carry medicine. To get such a permit a tribal must go to government centres which are usually miles away from the villages. On the way there are military and police checkposts where the tribal people are often harassed, tortured and detained without food and water. Some of them die during torture. Raping of tribal women is a commonplace and so they dare not go out of their villages. In effect, the tribal people are being forcibly deprived of medicine and other daily necessities. As a consequence, large numbers of tribal people are dying of malaria and of other diseases. The Bangladeshi regime is adopting every inhuman method to get rid of the indigenous people of the CHT 13,14,15,16,17,18,19).

After the assassination of Gen. Ziaur Rahman, the government of President Abdus Sattar pursued the anti-tribal policy relentlessly and the present military regime of Lt-Gen. Hossain Mohammad Ershad is continuing the genocidal policy more vigorously than his predecessors. For example, on 26 June 1981, the Bengali settlers, under the protection of the Bangladesh army, invaded the tribal area in the vicinity of Banraibari, Beltali and Belchari, murdered 500 tribal men, women and children, and occupied their villages and farmlands. Thousands of tribal people fled to the nearby forests and 5,000 of them managed to seek refuge in the Tripura State of India 20,21,22,23,24,25).

On 19 September 1981, the Bangladesh army and the Bengali settlers made co-ordinated attacks on 35 tribal villages including Telafang, Ashalong, Gurangapara, Tabalchari, Barnala etc. in the Feni valley, plundered and burned the villages, and killed many thousand men, women and children. The surviving villagers fled to the Indian State of Tripura and to the adjacent forests. About 9,500 tribal people died as a result of these attacks 26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,38,39,40,41,42,43,44,45,46,16). Although the Bangladeshi regime had denied that these refugees were from the CHT, it was forced by the international community to repatriate them. 'These tribal people were met at the border by hostile Bangladeshi officials and were given the equivalent of £8 and were left to their fate. Return to their native villages, is of course, impossible for these refugees because their homes and possessions have been appropriated by Bengali settlers' 14,16). It is feared that many of them died of starvation and of diseases. Their fate is still not known.

On 26 June, 11,26,27 July and 9,10,11 August 1983, the Bangladesh armed forces and the Bengali immigrants massacred the tribal people of the villages within Panchari Police Station, including amongst others, Golakpatimachara, Machyachara, Tarabanchari, Logang, Tarabanya, Maramachyachara, Jedamachyachara etc. Hundreds of houses were looted and burned, and 800 people were murdered. Most of the victims were old men, women and children. After clearing the area of the tribespeople the government settled Bengali families there 47,48).

In May 1984, the Bengali settlers in complicity with the Bangladesh army carried out the massacre of the tribal people of Bhushanchara because they/-

they wanted to grab the tribal farmlands. Hundreds of unarmed people were murdered, 5,000 tribal people sought refuge in the Mizoram State of India, and 10,000 fled to the neighbouring forests 49). Again on 30 June 1984, the Bengali settlers with the help of the Bangladesh army attacked the tribal people of Chota Harina, Bara Harina, Chedoa, Garjantali, Soguripara, and Maudong. More than 300 innocent Chakmas were slaughtered. The captured hill people were divided into three groups - old and young men, elderly women, and young women. Men and old women were shot dead. The young women were raped freely, some of them were killed, and some were converted to Islam. 13,000 Chakmas sought refuge in the Indian State of Mizoram. The regime of Gen. Ershad is freely committing genocide against the defenceless people of the CHT 50,51). By 1984, over 185,000 tribal people died as a result of the Bengali invasion 52).

E. Bengali Colonisation

The process of systematic dispossession of tribal land rights began right from the beginning of the Pakistani rule. At first the Pakistani Government ignored the Special Status of the CHT and later abolished it in 1964 to pave the way for Bengali immigration. In the early fifties several hundred Muslim families were settled in Nanyachar of the Chengi valley, and in Longudu of the Kachalong valley. Then again in the sixties hundreds of Bengali families were allowed to settle in Ramgarh, Tabalchari and Belchari of the Feni valley, in Bandarban of the Sengu valley, and in Lama, Nakhyong chari, and Alikadam of the Matamuri valley 7). During the 1971 war, 50,000 Bengalis from the adjacent districts - Chittagong and Noakhali - took over tribal farmlands forcibly in the Feni, Sengu and Matamuri valleys with the help of the Pakistan army 1,8).

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman encouraged more Bengali settlement in the CHT. In August 1979, Gen. Ziaur Rahman embarked on a secret three-phased plan to shift Bengali settlers on a large scale through state-initiative. Although the government denies having settled any outsider Bengalis in the CHT, 25,000 families (25,000 X 6 members per family = 150,000) had been rehabilitated by the middle of 1980 (First Phase) 3,53). Gen. Ziaur Rahman was assassinated before he finished the Second Phase of the plan. The present ruler, Gen. Ershad, is carrying out this plan vigorously. Official secret documents smuggled out of Bangladesh show that another batch of 100,000 families (5,000 families from each district X 20 districts i.e. over half a million) had been settled by 1981 (Second Phase) 54,55,56,57). In 1947, the tribal population accounted for 98 per cent and the Bengali population formed 2 per cent of the total population of the CHT. The Muslim Bengali population had risen to 9 per cent in 1951, to 11.6 per cent in 1974, and to 39 per cent by the middle of 1981 3,4,58). The Third Phase of the Bengali settlement plan, which began in 1982, brought in another batch of 250,000 Bengalis 4, 59). It is estimated that the Muslim Bengali population now forms well over 50 per cent of the total population of the CHT. The government has provided the settlers with free transport and rations, plenty of cash and protection. Each family has been given five acres of hilly land, four acres of mixed land, and two and a half acres of paddy land 54,55,56,57).

The CHT is hilly and one third of the district is set aside as Reserved Forest. Level land suitable for plough cultivation is very scarce. The Kaptai Dam flooded 40 per cent of the district's agricultural land and the land shortage in the area became just as acute as in the plain districts of Bangladesh. It was for this reason that the Government of Pakistan could not rehabilitate even 16,000 of the total 100,000 people displaced by the dam. The CHT is not thinly populated. A study commissioned by Dhaka clearly stated 'as far as its developed resources are concerned, the Hill Tracts is as constrained as the most thickly populated districts of (Bangladesh)... the emptiness of the Hill Tracts, therefore, is a myth' 3).

Where then has the government been settling the Bengalis. Obviously, the Bangladesh armed forces are seizing tribal farmlands by killing the tribal farmers, by herding them into concentration camps, by sponsoring terrorism against them, by pushing them out of the country, and by cheating them for their co-religionists 60,61).

During the British period a tribal family could hold 25 acres of land. The Pakistani regime reduced this quota to 10 acres and the Bangladesh military/-

military junta has reduced it further to 5 acres. This law has never been applied to any parts of Bangladesh except the CHT. On the other hand, the Muslim Bengalis can hold unlimited land. Even the present Land Reforms Committee has recommended fixing of land holding ceiling for each Bengali family at 25-33 acres. Now the Bangladesh army is compelling the tribal farmers to surrender all their lands in order to accommodate the Bengali settlers 59,62).

the Feni,

Almost the entire valleys of the Ichamati, the Karnafuli, the Sengu, the Matamuri, the Chota Harina, and the Bara Harina rivers have already been occupied forcibly by the Bengali invaders. Now exactly similar situation is happening to the fertile valleys of the Chengi, the Kachalong, and the Mayuni rivers.

F. Religious Persecution

The Bangladeshi regime is persecuting the people of the CHT for their religious beliefs. Numerous Buddhist temples have been looted, desecrated, and destroyed. Many monks have been detained without charge or trial and tortured. They are often attacked, harassed, and murdered. For instance, on 22 February 1979, the Bangladesh army ransacked the Buddhist temple at Pujgang, some 20 miles north of Khagrachari. The Bengali soldiers shot at the Buddha's holy image, broke its head with rifle butts, and then played football with the head in the courtyard of the temple. Rev. Aniruddha Bhikkhu and Rev. Rebata Bhikkhu were severely beaten with the result that the former had suffered a serious head injury and the latter had the right hand broken. 7).

On 27 December 1979, Venerable Ajara Bhikkhu and Venerable Bannitananda Bhikkhu of the Buddhist temple at Thakujiyamakalak in the Kachalong valley were hacked to death by the Bengali soldiers 6).

During the massacre of 25 March 1980 in Kalampati Union, the Bangladesh army and the Bengali settlers plundered and destroyed many Buddhist temples, and murdered many monks. A parliamentary delegation consisting of Mr. Rashed Khan Menon, MP, Mr. Shajahan Siraj, MP, and the local Member of Parliament, Mr. Upendra Lal Chakma, MP, visited the area and confirmed that the Buddhist temples at Betchari, Tonghapara, Chotadulu, Baradulu, and Tripuradighi were completely destroyed, and those at Headmanpara, Poapara, Rangeipara, Kashkhalimukhpara, Kachukhali, Chelachara, Roazapara, Hatirpara etc. were heavily damaged 9,63). The Bengalis broke up the Buddha's statue of the Poapara Buddhist temple and then played football with the broken pieces 7). The Anti-Slavery Society has commented that the violence was directed particularly at priests and temples 4). A few Buddhist monks survived miraculously. They were left for dead. The priests of the Roazapara Buddhist temple, Rev. Pannasara Bhikkhu and Rev. Wannasara Bhikkhu survived but had their hands broken 7). Another survivor, Venerable U Chandra Griya Bhikkhu, 60, of the Chaityaraja Buddhist temple at Kashkhalimukhpara, had his head injured and both hands broken 64).

The Bengali soldiers stripped a Buddhist monk of the temple at Kattali, 70 miles north-east of Rangamati, slaughtered a cow on his saffron robes, and then sprinkled blood on the holy image of the Buddha 65).

On 11 August 1983, Venerable Bodhipal Bhikkhu, the Head monk of the Banavihar Buddhist temple at Jedamachyachara, near Panchari, was beaten mercilessly. He fled to Agartala in the Tripura State of India as he could not bear military oppression anymore 48).

International Fellowship Of Reconciliation has disclosed that the Bangladesh armed forces forcibly occupy the Buddhist places of worship. For example, the Buddhist temple at Maischhari, some 40 miles north of Rangamati, was forcibly occupied by the Bangladesh armed police for eight months on the ground that they had nowhere to live. These illegal intruders reviled the monks, slaughtered a cow on their saffron robes, and smeared the holy image of the Buddha with blood 5).

IFOR has also revealed that the Bangladesh army prevents the people of the CHT from practising their own religion. The Buddhist shrine at Chitmarong, 20 miles south of Rangamati, is the holiest of all places for the Buddhists of the CHT and the Buddhists from every corner of the district have gone there for pilgrimage. The Bangladesh army has set up a checkpoint on the way to the shrine. People going there are asked for identity cards (special

(special cards are required only of the tribal people) and thoroughly searched. Women are raped. Harassment has increased to such an extent that very few people dare visit the temple 5).

The military junta has made a secret plan to force the people of the CHT to become Muslims. With the financial help of Saudi Arabia, it has built an Islamic Preaching Centre, a huge Mosque, and an Islamic Cultural Centre at Rangamati for this purpose. The government is also building hundreds of Mosques throughout the CHT while it is destroying hundreds of Buddhist temples with equal measures of zealotry. It has secretly circulated a letter to all military officers, now stationed in the CHT, encouraging them to marry tribal girls with a view to assimilating the indigenous people. As a consequence, the Bengali soldiers kidnapped thousands of tribal women and forced them to embrace Islam. A number of forcible conversion of tribal men to Islam have already taken place 6,59).

G. Foreign Aids And Development Projects

The Bangladesh Government often seeks foreign aid for the economic and social development of the tribal people. After receiving the aid the military regime uses the money for the military and for the Bengali settlers and not for the local people 59,66). For example,

1. USAID(United States Agency for International Development)-financed Kaptai Hydro-electric Dam benefitted the outsider Bengalis only.
2. SIDA(Swedish International Development Agency)-funded Forest Development Project created job opportunities for the Bengalis only.
3. UNICEF(United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)-aided Drinking Water Supply Scheme benefitted only army camps, Bengali colonies, urban centres, and concentration camps.
4. WHO(World Health Organization)- organised Malaria Eradication Project has been used to protect the armed forces and the Bengali settlers.
5. ADAB(Australian Development Assistance Bureau)-sponsored Chengi Valley Road Building Project has been used to facilitate army movement in the hills and to open up the interior to the Bengali immigration.
6. ADB(Asian Development Bank)-assisted Livestock and Fisheries Programmes have benefitted the Bengali new comers only.
7. ADB(Asian Development Bank)-financed Joutha Khamar Projects or Joint Farming Projects are really concentration camps for the tribal farmers who have been forced to leave their ancestral homes and farmlands to accommodate the Bengali invaders.

The people of the CHT welcome foreign aid if it is used for their benefit. But at present foreign aids are helping the Bengalis only and these outsiders are annihilating the indigenous people. So the tribal people and various Human Rights Groups have appealed to donor countries to stop their aids to Bangladesh. Sweden responded to their appeal by stopping the Forest Development Project on the grounds that the Bangladesh Government refused to employ the hill people in the project 67,68). Australia, similarly, pulled out of the road building project because the road helped the military and also the Bengali settlers to move deep into the tribal homeland 69).

The indigenous people have no say in the affairs of the CHT. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, which has been operating since 1975, is not accountable to the tribal leaders 68). Its tribal members have never been involved in making decisions and they are simply asked to endorse the decisions taken by the senior military leaders or by other Bengali members. One of the tribal members, Mr. Niharbindu Chakma, protested against the Board's policy designed to deprive the tribal people of the benefit of all development projects. No action was taken by the authorities to redress his grievances. Instead he was arrested without warrant. His fate is still unknown. The Chairman of Balukhali Union, Mr. Shantimoy Dewan, was also arrested but he was released on condition that he would keep his mouth shut. In fact, the people of the CHT are never consulted by the government before any decisions are taken and they have no opportunity to appeal to the higher authorities.

The Anti-Slavery Society recommends to the international funding agencies and national governments providing development aid for projects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts that they withdraw support where such projects

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are against the wishes and interests of the indigenous population and that all future projects are carried out only after consultation with indigenous people's representatives' 4).

H. Demands

The Bangladeshi regime is fundamentally hostile to the indigenous nationalities of the CHT. It does not speak the language of justice, humanity and tolerance. Moreover Islamic fundamentalism is growing rapidly in Bangladesh. In these hostile circumstances the people of the CHT will not survive unless the international community protects them and also their homeland from the violent Bengali invasion. In view of the extreme hostility of the Bangladeshi regime the following measures are deemed absolutely necessary to ensure their survival:

1. Immediate release of all tribal people imprisoned in jails and detention centres in different parts of Bangladesh.
2. Immediate removal of all non-tribal settlers from the CHT.
3. Immediate withdrawal of all Bangladesh armed forces including the non-tribal police force from the CHT.
4. Retention of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 and constitutional provision restricting the amendment of the Regulation.
5. Autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts with its own legislature and recognition of the hill people's right to self-determination.
6. Deployment of the United Nations peace keeping force in the CHT and implementation of the said operations under the auspices of the UNO.

-The End-

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