

r 500 tribals killed
in Bangla action

a By ANIL BHATTACHARJEE
The Times of India News Service

AGARTALA, November 1: Some 500 tribals were reportedly killed in the Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh on August 8 and 9 in the renewed operation against tribals by the Bangladesh army.

According to a Shanti Bahini guerilla leader, the army has stepped up its operations against the tribals in the hill tracts.

The Bangladesh government, which has moved about 50,000 army men to the hills for the operation against the tribals has barricaded the border along Tripura to prevent tribals' exit to India.

The humanist protection forum, an organisation to protect tribals, has narrated the oppression of tribals in the area in a memorandum to the Amnesty International.

Last January, representatives of the Amnesty International had visited the Chittagong hills and appealed to Bangladesh to stop oppression of the tribals.

Falkland war: 3

Beleaguered tribals *

Salamat Ali's coverage on the Chakma issue in his article *Talking with the tribals* [REVIEW, 1 Sept.], though fairly informative and largely accurate, fails to focus on some issues which are crucial for understanding the political-economic-ethnic problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh. Given that visits to CHT by foreigners are restricted, Ali's lack of details is understandable.

The Shanti Bahini was not a creation of the Pakistan Government, but was started by hillmen, ex-members of the Bangladesh Freedom Fighters, who were disgusted at their Bengali colleagues' massacre of tribals at Panchari in December 1971 and the developments thereafter. The Shanti Bahini was organised as a guerilla force in 1975.

The settler issue in CHT is not just a matter of the Bangladesh Government opening up the hills to Bengali Muslim plainmen. In fact, under the late president Ziaur Rahman's orders, 250-300,000 Bengali Muslims were settled in the hills from 1979 onwards under a project initiated, financed and implemented by the government. The hill people believe this was a measure to make them a minority in their own land.

Ali's articles failed to explain the influx of hill people to Mizoram and Tripura in India which was set in motion by plundering and killing perpetrated by armed Muslim settlers, often aided by the Bangladesh army. On the pretext of providing security to the Muslim settlers, the Bangladesh Government has given them modern weapons and the necessary training to use them.

In the most recent atrocity, which took place on 8-11 August, hundreds were killed and thousands rendered homeless. News of this slaughter has not yet found its way to the state-controlled press and media.

The present situation in CHT is tense and most tribals fear attacks by the armed settlers in the guise of a village defence party.

In such a situation, it is difficult to

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believe that the tribal refugees in India would feel secure enough to return to Bangladesh. The declaration of Islam as state religion has served only to increase the sense of foreboding in the hills.

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