

Translation of statement distributed by Mr. Upendra Lal Chakma, member of Parliament, Bangladesh, at his Press Conference held at Assembly Hall, Dacca, on 1.4.1980.

KAOKHALI MASSACRE: BANGLADESH ARMY SLAUGHTERS CIVILIANS IN CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS.

In the morning of 25 March 1980, an estimated 300 tribal civilian men, women and children were massacred by regular Bangladesh Army troops (operating in conjunction with armed Bengali immigrants) at Kaokhali Bazar, Kalampati Union, Betbunia Thana, Chittagong Hill Tracts. Available evidence suggests that the massacre was planned, possibly linked in retaliation against the decimation of an army petrol by resistance tribal fighters (Shanti Bahini) in early March in Subolong area, Barkal Thana, Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, conflict within the Chittagong Hill Tracts has escalated. The root of the problem has been the imposition of Bangladesh immigrants, culture and laws into a tribal, resource-rich area, which under Pakistan (and formerly British) law had been treated as a special "excluded area" where local laws, autonomy, and restrictions against Bengali immigration from the over-populated plains districts (Noakhali, Comilla, and Chittagong) had been in force. Tensions increased to a point where local tribal armed resistance developed, through a resistance group called the Shanti Bahini - a guerilla force estimated at about 15000 tribal youths. Progressively, Bangladesh Government response has been military subjugation. Over the past four years, regular army troops - now numbering 6-8 brigades of 1 Division - has undertaken the following repressive measures in an effort to control the resistance: (1) arrest and incarceration of tribals without charges or recourse to legal protection; (2) search-and-destroy missions into unarmed villages, including physical abuse and burning of homes and fields; (3) establishment of "ideal villages" of resettled (forcibly) tribals in an effort to deny the resistance a civilian base of support; (4) massive Government sponsored migration (including financial incentives) of Bengalis from overpopulated plains districts into tribal areas; (5) introduction of supposedly development projects in order to exploit natural resources and to facilitate troop movement and combat effectiveness (new roads, cantonments, etc) and (6) formation of "tribal convention", supposed tribal leaders without broad-based support, who provides civilian legitimacy to army actions.

Armed conflict between army and resistance fighters has escalated recently, often with innocent civilians being used as pawns or scapegoats by the army. In early March, a 22-member army patrol led by Major Mosin Reza in the midst of a search-and-destroy mission in the Subolong Bazaar area, Barkal Thana, CHT, was ambushed by the Shanti Bahini. All soldiers were killed. Possibly in retaliation, a Captain Kamal of Kaokhali Bazaar Army Camp requested tribal leaders and villagers to attend a meeting at the Bazaar to discuss the law and order problem and to plant reconstruction work of several Buddhist temples, at 8 AM on 25 March 1980. At 9 AM of the same day suddenly rifle fire broke out. The events during the confusion can not be reconstructed definitely. However, by the end of shooting spree - exacerbated by armed Bengali civilians joining in the military attack - and estimated 200 tribal men, women and children had been brutally murdered. The Bazaar incident then spread with several Buddhist temples attacked, monks and nuns were mercilessly killed or wounded, and about two dozen villages in the union were attacked, some burned to ground. The exact human toll is unknown but certainly exceeds 200. Massive migration of the affected tribal communities has taken place. Lists of the villages affected, temples destroyed, known individuals killed or wounded are appended to this document.

Although no official army report has been made public to account for the massacre, one informal explanation offered has been

that resistance fighters initiated the firings. This explanation seems highly implausible, for several reasons: (1) the army itself called the preplanned meeting; (2) armed Bengali civilians who joined in the killing appeared prepared to participate; (3) no casualties were reported from either the army or the Bengali marauders; (4) the army has refused impartial investigation; (5) Government has attempted to suppress the massacre news; and (6) public demands by the member of Parliament representing the CHT for a full investigation reported in the Bengali newspapers have been totally ignored.

#### ACTIONS INDICATED

1. The massacre should be given wide scale publicity to ensure that Government and the military recognize the need for accountability and to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

2. Governments committed to human rights and non-Govt. groups committed to protecting the rights of minorities and civilians against armed military attacks should demand Bangladesh Govt. accountability, full investigation, preferably by an impartial commission - either impartial Bangladeshi or international in character.

3. Governments and agencies with active "development assistance programmes in the CHT - including Australia and the UNDP/Asian Development Bank - should immediately cease development projects in the CHT. These projects have excluded tribals from the employment generated, have created physical facilities and infrastructure that that have either assisted the army's counter-insurgency actions or facilitated in-migration of Bengalis into tribal lands. Sweden, which formerly supported a forestry project in the CHT has completely withdrawn its assistance activities in the CHT.

4. The Bangladesh Govt. and army should immediately desist from the anti-human rights tactics of imposing a military solution to a problem of ethnic, cultural and economic conflict.

5. Negotiation should be initiated to explore for a political solution to the CHT problem. A solution should recognize the legitimate concerns of the tribals against ethnic, cultural, economic and social annihilation by the Government's policies and massive in-migration.

#### ANNEXURE

##### Tribals killed at Kaokhali

Kumud Bikash Talukdar (Bazaar Chowdhury)  
Shashi Dev Chakma (Chairman, Paopara H.S.)  
Aswini Kumar Karbari  
Aswini Kumar Chakma  
Kalimohan Karbari (Postmaster)  
Udayan Kumar Chakma (Headmaster, Bara Dalu)  
Dinanath Chakma (Director, Co-op Society)  
Bijoy Kumar Chakma  
La Theai Marma (Ex-Member, Union Council)  
Kalanjoy Chakma (Ex-Freedom fighter)  
Krishna Hari Chakma (Ex-Malaria Supervisor)

##### Buddhist Temple Affected

Betchari \*  
Headmanpara  
Kashkhalimukhpara  
Tanghapara \*  
Rangeypara  
Puapara  
Chote Dalu \*  
Bara Dalu \*  
Tripuradighi \*  
\*Temple completely destroyed

##### Tribals Hospitalized

Parimal Kanti Chakma - Rangamati Sadar Hosp. 25-28 March (by Army per)  
Indus Kumar Chakma " " " 25 March (admitted by army per)  
Ittukya Chakma - Chittagong Medical Hosp.

##### Eye-Witness to Massacre

Sai Theai Karbari, ex-Chairman, Kalampati Mouza

Kaokhali Villages Affected: 24 villages - largest and most affected including: Kachukhalimukh (80 families); Betchari (80 fam); Rangeypara (70 fam); Chote Dalu (80 fam); Bara Dalu (80 fam).