

## PRESENT SITUATION OF CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

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"What do you want? You have a choice. One is to convert and become Muslims, the other is to become completely Shanti Bahini. Otherwise I shall crush you." This is what the commanding officer of the Dighinala Canton said to the local leader of Hill Tracts on August 16, 1981. He asked the people to reply to his question by August 30.

The tribal people of Chittagong Hill Tract are living in fear and anxiety. What will be their future? Almost all fertile and the best land has been occupied by the new Bengali settlers. These settlers are brought in from the various districts of Bangladesh.

The Bengali new settlers are being trained by the Bangladesh Military government on how to root out the tribal people of Chittagong Hill Tract. The Bangladesh government is also supplying these settlers with modern weapons. As a result they can forcefully take away the property and land from the tribal people. Over and above the new settlers are given cash. The wheat supplied by the U.N. under the world Food Programme is given to the new settlers as expense for their family.

To harass the tribal people still more, the military are showing the Bengali how to occupy the land, and how to take all property, movable and immovable away from the people. So every day there is looting going on with the help of the military. If the Hill people dare to complain, the army comes and burns the villages and tortures the people. There have been massacres like in Matiranga and Kawkhali previously. The Bengali new settlers make up already 50% of the population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and still more Bengali settlers are coming in to permanently settle there.

The Bangladesh Government is not yet satisfied with the above. They want to suppress the tribal people even more in their livelihood. So during the rainy season which is the time to plant and cultivate the rice fields, the military do their training in the villages. If the people are around there is burning and torture. And the military make the tour of the different villages. So the tribal people are forced to flee into the jungle and seek shelter to save their lives. While the people are fleeing from the military, the Bangladesh government profits from this absence to settle Bengali people on the land. Upon their return the Chittagong Hill Tract people find their houses and land occupied. As a result many of them find death of starvation in the jungle. More than 30,000 people are living in the jungle without food or medicine. Nobody knows how they can survive. About 20,000 have crossed the Indian border. For humanitarian reasons the Indian Government is giving them temporary shelter.

The tribal people cannot move around freely either. Everywhere the military are putting up check-posts. There is harassment on the road and on public transportation. The military even prevent shipments of food, medicine, oil, paper, etc. to reach the people.

The villagers cannot purchase more than two kilograms of rice per person at one time. With this a family must do for the week. As a result many go without food.

Most of the tribal people are Buddhists. Some are Hindus or Christians, so they will not easily convert to become Moslems. These people are eager to go anywhere where they will be allowed to live peacefully, without being oppressed. No human person can continue to live under so much anxiety and inhumanity.

by a Bangladesh monk  
August 81

THE NEWEST SITUATION IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

To detribalise Chittagong Hill Tracts and to break the unity of the tribal people the Government of Bangladesh recently divided the district and created a new district (Bandarban) and intensified settlement of Bangalees from different districts into Chittagong Hill Tracts.

A reception camp has been opened at Haji camp at Chittagong Town to receive Bangalee families from the different parts of Bangladesh before their settlement in Chittagong Hill Tracts. On the 19th of Dec. 81 there was a news-paper report in the daily Ittefaq saying that there are at present 15,000 families in the Haji Camp waiting for settlement in the district of CHT. They have come from Jessore, Barishal, Khulna, Patuakhali, Dinajpur, Bogra, Rangpur, Faridpur and Noakhali, under the leadership of Mr. Golan Hossain Khandakar and Mr. Mir Mossaraf Hossain Dinajpur, respectively.

The new Bangalee Settlers are given every sort of Government facilities, transport, ration and clothing and also medicine. On the other hand the Government of Bangladesh seized all property ownership documents and licensed guns from the tribal people. The Government of Bangladesh formed a so called "Peace Committee" in every village with the new settlers of Bangalee Muslim and supplied arms to these committees, giving training to the young boys amongst the new settlers, have already completed their para-military training, using the arms and modern weapons.

The Bangalee new settlers with these arms very often create panic in the locality as a result of which tribal people are compelled to leave their huts and homes out of fear and go into the deep jungle.

It may be mentioned here that though the district of CHT. is the largest district in the country there is not sufficient cultivable land according to their needs. Since flat and cultivable lands are very scarce, the British Government included a clause in CHT. regulation 1900, which forbids any family from holding land in excess of 25 acres. In 1960 when the Karnafuly Hydro Electric Project was completed and one hundred thousand people were uprooted after submersion of vast tracts of land, this 25 acres limit was further reduced to 10 acres. Still now 20 thousand families affected by Karnafuly Project, could not be rehabilitated as there is no sufficient cultivable lands. Though CHT covers an area of a little over 5000 sq-miles most of this land is covered by mountains, hills, Government Reserve forest, the Man-Made-Lake and Rivers. Now without rehabilitation, the tribal people were affected by Karnafuly Project 20 years ago. The Government is settling the Bangalee people from other districts with an ulterior motive

to detribalize the district. The tribal population of the district is about 600.000. They are culturally and ethnically different from the Bangalees. Most of the tribal people profess Buddhism while the Bangalees are Muslims.

Whenever a Muslim is set up, a mosque is established at Government expense and Islamic religious education is introduced in the area. This is done with a motive to convert the tribal people to Islam. It should be mentioned that UNICEF grants are given only to the students of Islamic studies in CHT.

The new settlers are supplied monthly rations of wheat and rice. Needless to say, every year the Government of Bangladesh receives a huge quantity of food grain aid from the USA, WFP, FRG, Canada and other countries in the world. This aid is intended for Education and Food For Work Programmes.

But the Government is utilizing to rehabilitate the Bangladesee settlers in CHT and for military purposes. Every family is given 20 KG a week and TK, 200,- each month per head.

The Government of Bangladesh is also using a large portion of foreign aid to maintain army and para-military forces in the CHT and in construction of roads and bridges for military manouvres. A big chunk of foreign aid also goes for construction of Barracks for the troops. In particular the General Commanding Officer gets TK. 10.000.000,- (one crore) every year for his personal funds, money that he can spend as he likes. When the government selects a particular area for settlement of Bangalees it opens a police camp/military camp there and then new settlers are brought in. After a few days tribal people are compelled to leave the area, when a few of them are hauled up for their alleged link with Shanti Bahini, young girls are taken to the military camps and new settlers huts for rape and torture, their cattle are taken away for slaughter, and their crops are forcibly harvested. Thus when the area is deserted the settlers are occupying the land of the tribal people. As a result tribal people are being compelled to take refuge in the jungle and some of them are taking shelter in India as well. Now hundreds of families are living in the deep jungles without proper food, shelter, clothing and medicine. Many of them, especially children and the old ones, are dying.

18.000 tribal people who fled to the Tripura State of India were brought back to Bangladesh by the Government. They were given assurances that they would be rehabilitated in their own land, but they have not been rehabilitated at all. On crossing over into Bangladesh, each family was given TK 150,- (about \$ 8,-US) and they were abandoned to their fate. They were not even taken to their homes. Of course, they have no homes now. Their homes have already been burnt and looted by the Bangalees. Some of the tribal people have already died of starvation and cold. Yet they have not gotten their own land which has been occupied by the Bangalees.

It may be mentioned that essential commodities like, rice, cooking, oil and cloth can not be taken into the interior for sale beyond Rangamati by the traders without the clearance from the army commanders. Even medicine can not be purchased when prescribed by a physician without permission from the local army commanders. These steps have been taken so that essential foodstuffs and other articles can not reach the

hands of the Shanti Bahinies.

Though a civilian Government is running the administration in the country at vulnerable points of road communication in CHT, the military has opened up check points where they check and harass the tribal people. Sometimes identity cards are demanded, though there is no notification from the Government about requirement of identity cards by the tribal people. The military has also closed down all road side shops opened by the tribal people.

Frequently, the army and para-military forces go out, and catch hold of young boys and girls and wealthier people from the villages. They release the wealthy people only on payment of a considerable ransom but detain the young boys and girls in their camps. Very often the boys are compelled to dig out pits while they are detained. The girls are very often raped and tortured before being released. The boys are also sometimes released after being crippled with torture.

Today tribal people of every age are discriminated. Recently an advertisement was made for admission into the para-medical Institute of Rangamati for training of village doctors and it was published that preference will be given to the tribal people. But it was later learned that not a single tribal boy selected for admission.

Recent advertisement was made by Government of Memo No. 1221 dated 16.10.81 for admission of students into the Chittagong Engineering College and one seat was reserved for a tribal boy of the newly created Bandarban district. But it was also advertised that this selection will be made by G.O.C. 24 division in Chittagong.

by a Bangladesh monk  
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