

PUBLIC SEMINAR ON THE ETHNOCIDE IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS, BANGLADESH

Venue: Ethnological Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.

Organizers: The Workgroup for the Hill Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, which consists of representatives from the Minority Interest Group (MIG) in Uppsala, the Fourth World Association in Stockholm, and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs - Sweden (IWGIA-Sweden) in Gothenburg.

Date: 20th May, 1989

Mr. Chairman and friends,

First of all may I introduce myself to you - I am Ramendu Shekhar Dewan from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh and I am a Spokesman of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (Chittagong Hill Tracts United Peoples' Party (PCJSS or briefly JSS), the only political party in the CHT. The Organizers of this Seminar has invited me to speak on - the Claims of the Jumma people (the people of the CHT) and the present Negotiations with the Bengali Government.

The Bangladeshi regime is systematically exterminating the Jumma people in order to seize their villages and farmlands for its co-religionists although the vast majority of the Jumma people sided with the Bangladesh Liberation Army during the 1971 Bangladesh independence war. The Bangladesh Liberation Army started to kill the innocent Jumma people even before Bangladesh became independent. For example, on 14 December, 1971, the Pakistani Army withdrew from Panchari area. Immediately the Bangladesh Liberation Army entered into Kukichara village, shot dead at least 22 Jummas who came out to welcome the victorious Bangladesh Liberation Army, and burned about 200 houses in the village. The Pakistan Army surrendered to the Indian Army on 16 December, 1971. Even on that day the Bangladesh Liberation Army killed another 16 people who took shelter in a trench near Kukichara village for fear of their lives. After gaining independence, all successive Governments of Bangladesh have carried out massacre after massacre of the unarmed Jumma men, women and children. Kaokhali (also known as Kalampati) massacres of 25 March, 1980, Banraibari-Beltali-Belchari massacres of 26 June, 1981, Telafang-Ashalong-Gurangapara-Tabalchari-Barnala massacres of 19 September, 1981, Bhusanchara massacres of May, 1984, Matiranga-Lakhmichari-Panchari-Khagrachari-Dighinala massacres of May and June, 1986, and Baghaichari massacres of 8-9 August, 1988, are just a few of many massacres committed by the Bangla Desh security forces in league with the Bengali settlers.

To depopulate the Jumma villages, the Bangladesh security forces and the Bengali settlers jointly attack the Jumma villages, loot all valuable things, rape Jumma women and girls, torture villagers, burn houses, abduct Jumma girls and convert them to Islam against their will, desecrate and destroy non-Muslim places of worship, and kill Jumma men, women, children and even monks. After clearing the area of the Jumma people, the Bengali settlers are resettled there.

As part of the Government's programme to systematically annihilate the Jumma people, the Bangladeshi regime is depriving the Jumma people of job opportunities and economic benefits of all sorts of development works. For instance, the construction of the Kaptai Hydro-electric Dam inundated about 40 per cent of the best agricultural land in the CHT and displaced some 100,000 plough-land farmers and about 50,000 Jhum cultivators (hill-slope farmers). They were nominally compensated and no tangible steps were taken to rehabilitate them. No Jumma people were appointed in the project either during the construction of the Dam or after the construction of the Dam. The benefit of the generated electricity was not given to the Jumma people and almost all the other benefits such as fishing, fish industries and fish farming went to the Bengali settlers. Very few Jummas are employed either in the Government offices or in industries. The compassionate Swedish Government wound up the Forest Development Project

in the CHT on the grounds that the Bangladesh Government refused to employ the Jummas in the said project. Similarly the benign Australian Government withdrew its aid for the Chengi Valley Road Building Project because the Bangladeshi regime was using the road to launch military campaigns against the Jumma civilians and also to open up the interior to the Bengali immigrants.

On 26 May, 1979, Brigadier Hannan and Lt. Col. Salam declared at a public meeting at Panchari: "We want the land only and not the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts". Their statement revealed the actual motive of the Bangladesh Government. In keeping with this policy of the Government, the Bangladesh armed forces are Bangladeshizing and Islamizing the Jummaland (CHT) by getting rid of the 10 ethnic groups of the Jumma people - Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Chak, Khyang, Khumi, Murung, Lushai, Pankho and Bawm - who are Buddhist, Hindu and Christian by religion, Tibeto-Burman by race and also by culture, on the one hand and by resettling the members of the majority community of Bangladesh in their place on the other. The State terrorism is forcing the Jumma people to flee the country. As a result of Matiranga-Lakhmichari-Panchari-Khagrachari-Dighinala massacres of May and June, 1986, alone some 50,000 Jumma refugees had to seek refuge in the Tripura State of India. Perhaps, it is important to note that the regime of Bangladesh is extremely reluctant to repatriate them.

The Bangladesh Government is committing these genocidal crimes against the people of the CHT in gross violation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900. This law recognized the CHT as the homeland of the Jumma people and protected their political, economic, social and cultural rights. It did not allow the outsiders to settle or to buy land in the Jummaland. According to Rule 51, any outsiders found guilty of doing anything prejudicial to the interest of the Jumma people could be arrested, punished and expelled from the CHT. A British Deputy Commissioner assisted by a few other British Officers administered the Jummaland impartially and efficiently and strictly maintained the rule of law and justice. Almost all the officers of the administration were Jumma people. Even the CHT had an indigenous Police force known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Frontier Police. Except the British Superintendent of Police, almost all the remaining Police personnel were recruited locally. Although the highest power of the administration remained in the hands of the Deputy Commissioner, the Jummas virtually ruled themselves and they practically enjoyed a high degree of autonomy.

Although the Bangladesh Government is fully responsible for creating the crisis in the CHT, the peaceable people of the CHT appealed to the former to resolve the CHT crisis by a constitutional and political method. But all successive regimes of Bangladesh turned down the peaceful proposals of the Jumma people. For example, on 15 February, 1972, a Jumma delegation led by Mr. Manabendra Narayan Larma, urged the Bangladesh Leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to retain the CHT Regulation of 1900 and to grant Provincial Autonomy for the CHT. Sheikh Mujib rejected the delegation's legitimate demands and advised the delegation by saying - "Do away with your ethnic identity, go home and become Bengalis". Then he sent the Bangladesh armed forces to the CHT to crush the Jumma movement for self-determination and opened up the CHT to the Bengali immigration.

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, another Jumma delegation under the leadership of Mr. Manabendra Narayan Larma presented a memorandum to the then President of Bangladesh, Mr. A.S. Sayem on 19 November, 1975. As usual the President refused to accept the genuine demands of the delegation and intensified the reign of terror in the CHT. Again in 1976, on behalf of the Jumma people, Mr. Ashok Kumar Dewan submitted further proposals to Gen. Ziaur Rahman. He responded by launching a State-financed Bengali resettlement programme in the CHT and deployed more security men in the Jummaland in order to seize the Jumma villages and farmlands for the resettlement of over half-a-million persons belonging to the ruling community of Bangladesh in the CHT.

The present military dictator of Bangladesh, Gen. Hussain Muhammad

Ershad is persecuting the Jumma people more vigorously and with greater Islamic zealotry than any of his predecessors. He launched military campaigns again and again against the innocent Jumma villagers in order to make room for his co-religionists. Because of his regime's relentless attacks, some 50,000 Jumma refugees have sought shelter in the Tripura State of India. Although he is not interested in finding a political settlement of the crisis in the CHT, he pretends to be willing to resolve the CHT issue by political means just to mislead the donor countries. Under tremendous pressure from the international community, the Ershad-regime very reluctantly held the first round of talks with the JSS on 21 October, 1985. The JSS presented its charter of five demands to the Bangladesh official delegation. The JSS's demands were - i) the removal of non-Jumma settlers from the CHT, ii) the withdrawal of all Bangladesh armed forces including the non-Jumma police force from the CHT, iii) Provincial Autonomy for the CHT with a separate legislature, iv) adequate financial help for the rehabilitation of the Jumma refugees and the return of their ancestral villages and farmlands to them, v) the implementation of these measures under the auspices of the U.N.O. The Bangladesh Government delegation refused to accept formally the JSS's charter of demands on the pretext that the JSS's demand for Provincial Autonomy was outside the framework of the unitary system of the Bangladesh Constitution. However, it accepted one of the JSS's proposals for the first time that the CHT issue was a political and national problem which needed a political solution instead of a military solution. Both sides agreed to meet again on 25 December, 1985. But the Bangladeshi regime did not participate in the proposed meeting without showing any reasons.

Although the Government of Bangladesh was averse to further talks with the JSS, the compassionate international community pressurized the Bangladeshi regime to continue the dialogue. As a result, the Ershad-regime convened the second round of talks on 17 December, 1987. The peace-loving JSS always believes that the CHT issue is essentially a political problem and that it can be solved easily by meeting the just demands of the Jumma people. So the JSS enthusiastically joined in the talks with a hope that at last the Bangladesh Government might have given up its genocidal policy. But its hope was not well-founded. When the JSS delegation presented its charter of five demands, the Bangladesh delegation simply refused to accept the charter formally again on the same previous excuse that the demand for Provincial Autonomy was outside the framework of the Bangladesh Constitution. To justify its demands, the JSS delegation argued that "a constitution of a country is framed by the people for the welfare of the people and amended according to the need of the people". Since the present Bangladesh Constitution does not protect the entity and existence of the Jumma people, it "should be amended in order to ensure the rights of the Jumma people". But the Bangladesh Government did not come to listen to reasonings. In fact, it came to the meeting just to show to the donor countries that it was seeking a political solution to the crisis in the Jummaland. The meeting ended on 18 December, 1987, without any fruitful results. However, both parties agreed to hold the third dialogue on 24-25 January, 1988.

At the third round of talks, the Bangladesh team made two suggestions: i) it was willing to accept formally the JSS's charter of five demands provided the JSS was also prepared to accept the Bangladesh Government proposal as an alternative formula for the solution of the CHT issue, and ii) the JSS should prepare a charter of demands within the framework of the Bangladesh Constitution. The JSS delegation firmly and totally rejected both the suggestions of the Government team on the grounds that they were conditional and that the present Constitution of Bangladesh did not protect the entity and existence of the Jumma people. The third meeting ended without breaking the deadlock. However, both the delegations decided to continue the talks.

The fourth round of talks took place on 17-18 February, 1988. The Bangladesh delegation did not change its stand and frankly said - "It was

population. It described the JSS's demands as contradictory to the Bangla Desh Constitution and also as a threat to the sovereignty of Bangladesh. The JSS delegation dismissed the Government delegation's accusations as nothing but lame excuses and asserted that the creation of the CHT as a Province within Bangladesh could not be a threat to the sovereignty of Bangladesh. Similarly the amendment of the Bangladesh Constitution for providing the CHT with Provincial Autonomy could not be contradictory as the Constitution had already been amended many times. The Jumma people have the right to exist and to preserve their identity. They can exist and maintain their identity in the Islamic State of Bangladesh only if Provincial Autonomy is granted to the CHT. Therefore, the demand for Provincial Autonomy for the CHT is just and the Constitution should be amended to restore the Jumma peoples' right to self-determination. The Government delegation handed over an outline (Rupa Rekha) of its proposal to the JSS delegation and said - "If there was no solution within the framework of the Bangladesh Constitution, then the situation in the CHT was bound to be deteriorated" - to coerce the JSS and the Jumma people to accept the Government proposal. Needless to say that the JSS delegation totally rejected the so-called "Rupa Rekha" of the Government proposal because it did not safeguard the interest of the Jumma people at all.

Again the international community compelled the Bangladeshi regime to come to the negotiating table. The fifth round of talks began on 19 June, 1988, and as usual the Government team reiterated its lame excuses and stressed that it would never accept the JSS's third demand i.e. Provincial Autonomy for the Jummaland with a separate legislature. At the same time it threatened the JSS and the Jumma people with grave consequences of not accepting the Government proposal, so-called "Rupa Rekha". This threat was real. After the fifth dialogue was over, the Ershad-regime planned to coerce the Jumma people to accept the Government proposal. According to this secret plan, Maj. Gen. Abdus Salam, the General Officer Commanding of the Chittagong Division of the Bangladesh Army, ordered Lt. Col. Abdus Samad, Maj. Ishtiaq, Maj. Firdaus, Lt. Imran, Lt. Zaman and other military officers to carry out the Baghaichari massacres on 8-9 August, 1988, in which some 5 hundred men, women and children were killed. During these massacres, the Army officers threatened the Jumma people by saying that the fate of the Jumma people of all other areas would be the same as that of the Jummas of the Baghaichari area if they did not accept the so-called Rupa Rekha of the Government proposal.

With a view to making the acid test of the Bangladesh Government's sincerity in finding a political solution, the JSS delegation demanded Scottish type of Autonomy in stead of Provincial Autonomy at the sixth round of talks which took place on 14-15 December, 1988. The JSS's modified charter of demands was within the framework of the Bangladesh Constitution and fully satisfied the terms and conditions set by the Government delegation at the previous five meetings. Yet the Bangladesh team rejected the JSS's modified charter of demands. Thus the Bangladesh Government has proved that it has no intention to find a political solution to the crisis in the CHT. It has entered into the process of negotiation with the JSS just to mislead the donor countries. However, both parties agreed to hold the seventh round of talks on 22 February, 1989 as the Ershad regime needed more time to think about the JSS's modified charter of demands.

Without informing the JSS, the Bangladesh Government abruptly introduced four Bills based on the Rupa Rekha of its proposal to the National Parliament on 15 February, 1989. This unilateral action of the Bangladesh Government further confirmed its insincerity in seeking a political solution to the CHT problem. While the talks were in progress, the Government of Bangladesh forced some Jummas to sign the Draft of the District Council Law form on 5/10/88, against their will.

The names of the four Bills are - 1) The Hill Districts (Repeal and Application of Law and Special Regulation Bill, 1989, 2) The Rangamati Hill District Local Government Council Bill, 1989, 3) The Bandarban Hill District

Local Government Council Bill, 1989, 4) The Khagrachari Hill District Local Government Council Bill, 1989. The first Law was passed on 26 February, 1989, and the other three Laws were passed on 28 February, 1989. Now the Government has unleashed a reign of terror in the Jummland in order to coerce the Jumma people to participate in the District Council elections to be held in June, 1989.

The JSS has rejected the District Council Law in full because it has deprived the Jumma people of their political, economic, social and cultural rights and because it has been designed to Bangladeshize and to Islamize the traditional homeland of the Jumma people. In fact, the District Council Law has legitimized the systematic extermination of the people of the CHT. For example,

1. It has repealed the CHT Regulation of 1900 which protected the rights of the Jumma people in all spheres of life. Without such constitutional protection the Jumma people will not survive in the Islamic State of Bangladesh.
2. It has legitimized not only the Bengali settlement in the CHT but also the participation of the Bengali settlers in the District Council elections in violation of the CHT Regulation of 1900. According to the Rule 51 of the CHT Regulation of 1900, the Bengali settlers have no right to settle in the CHT nor have they right to take part in the District Council elections. They should be arrested, punished and expelled from the CHT as they are committing genocidal crimes against the people of the CHT.
3. It has given the District Council no control on "Protected and Reserved Forests, the Kaptai Lake and Hydroelectric Project area...the State Industrial areas, any land which has been transferred or settled in the interest of the State or the people, and any land or forest which will be required in the interest of the State". It means that the area under the control of three Councils will be about one-tenth of the total area of the CHT i.e. some 500 sq.miles only. Whereas the CHT Regulation of 1900 made the Jumma people masters of the entire CHT. As a result of the introduction of the District Council Law, the Jumma people have lost control over 90 per cent of their homeland and they will have no say even if the said area is used for the benefit of the majority community of Bangladesh such as for the resettlement of the Bengalis and so on. It also means that the Jumma people have been deprived of the economic benefits of the Kaptai Hydroelectric Project, the fishing and fishery-related industries of the Kaptai Lake, the State industries, the protected and reserved forests and so on.
4. It has restricted the settlement of the Jumma people from one Hill District to another Hill District within the CHT. According to the provision of the CHT Regulation of 1900, the entire CHT region is the homeland of all Jumma people and any Jumma has the right to settle or to buy land in any part of the CHT. The Bangladeshi regime violated the CHT Regulation of 1900 by creating three separate Councils and thus curtailed the fundamental right of the Jumma people by confining them within only one of the three Hill Districts. Obviously the Government of Bangladesh attempted to undermine the Jumma peoples' movement for self-determination by dividing them.
5. The District Council has no legislative power. It can frame by-laws and levy taxes only with the prior approval of the Government. Similarly the Council has no power to formulate a budget or to prepare a development programme without the consent of the Government. The Government will be able to discipline the Council and also to control the activities of the Council. In other words, the Jumma people have almost no right to control their own affairs.
6. The Council has almost no executive power. For example, it has been given the responsibility of various subjects such as primary education, primary health care, observance of the National Day and the

administrative matters in the CHT. The Council has no power to appoint high ranking civilian and police personnel and so the Jumma people have lost all kinds of official and police protection.

7. According to the recommendations of the National Committee for the CHT the Jumma people are entitled to have only 10 per cent quota of all Government contracts and of job opportunities in all local development works in the CHT. If this rule is applied on the Council, then 90 per cent of the Council jobs will go to the illegal Bengali settlers and the police force will consist of 90 per cent illegal Bengali infiltrators and mere 10 per cent Jumma people. In accordance with the CHT Regulation of 1900, all these contracts and job opportunities should be given to the Jumma people only. The District Council Law has deprived the Jumma people of all sorts of economic benefits.

The CHT Regulation of 1900 is as vital to the Jumma people as the Magna Carta to the English people. Without such effective constitutional protection, the people of the CHT will not survive the extreme hostility of the Bangladeshi regime. Therefore, the CHT Regulation of 1900 cannot be amended or repealed without the consent of the Jumma Parliament. The Bangladesh Government has imposed the District Council Law on the Jumma people against their will. So the JSS has totally rejected this bad law and has urged the international community to bring pressure to bear on the Bangladeshi regime to nullify the District Council Law. The people of the Jummaland need your help in their struggle for survival from the Bangladeshi invasion.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me an opportunity to address this distinguished audience. I am most grateful to the organizers of this great seminar for focussing the attention of the compassionate people of Sweden on the crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for taking keen interest in the CHT problem.

(R.S. Dewan)