

End in sight to Chakma question

BOMBAY, MONDAY, JUNE 29, 1987, PAGE 6

DHAKA, June 28 (PTI) — The foreign minister of Bangladesh, Mr. Humayun Kabir, said today that the two national governments have agreed to settle the problems between India and Bangladesh. It is only on the implementation stage that they are bogged down.

He further said: "I had talks with your Prime Minister. He sounded as perplexed as I am. If this problem of Tibhiza is not solved there is danger of a lack of credibility creeping into our relations."

When asked whether India was presenting the Chakmas returning from Tripura, Mr. Chowdhury said: "How can I think an Indian hospital where he was being treated for cancer, a newspaper reported on Sunday, 'New Nation', said Mr. Sharma, believed to be in his mid-40s, was rumoured to have been suffering from cancer since 1982. The paper said the leadership of the insurgents has been taken over by a 'Major Simon', whose group operates from an Indian territory. The rebels have killed more than 3,000 people in their battle for autonomy in the southern Chittagong Hill Tracts, which border the Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram."

Asked what was the strength of the Shanti Bahini, he said he did not know. He, however, said they were not Urdu speaking people.

He also referred to the dispute about the sharing of the Ganga water and transfer of the Jhijhiza Island to Bangladesh on a perpetual lease.

The Bangladesh foreign minister said "I have seen tremendous amount of goodwill and willingness to settle the problems between India and Bangladesh. It is only on the implementation stage that they are bogged down."

Two governments were committed to end the trans-border insurgency, he said. Therefore, he is a total approach to tackle this problem, he added.

Speaking to a group of Indian journalists in Dhaka early this week, Mr. Chowdhury said if the Chakma problem was not solved immediately and quickly, it could sour our relations.

Replying to a question, he said the return of the "so-called Shanti Bahini" are obscuring the return of the Chakmas threatening them of dire consequences.

When asked why Bangladesh did not hold talks with the Chakma representatives, Mr. Chowdhury said, "We are prepared to talk with anyone. He, however, conceded that no such attempt had yet been made by his government."

He said that about 5,500 Chakmas had already returned to their homes. Most of these coming back, he said, were old men and women.

He claimed that the Shanti Bahini was not allowing the young Chakmas to return so as to "swell their fast-depleting ranks."

Mr. Chowdhury further said that there was no threat to the lives of the Chakma refugees coming back to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. "Bangladesh is a haven of communal and ethnic harmony. We do not distinguish between the Chakmas, Hindus and Christians," he added.

The newsmen he spoke to had travelled from Delhi to Dhaka on June 21. The bi-weekly non-stop service on Sundays and Thursday by the

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THE TIMES OF INDIA
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JULY 4, 1987, PAGE 9

Tripura bid to tackle Chakmas

AGARTALA, July 3 (UNI) — A NEW proposal was made to the Bangladesh authorities in the Chittagong hill tracts for sending an official team along with local Chakma leaders to convince the tribal refugees in south Tripura to return home.

The chief secretary, Mr. N. P. Nawani, said that the district magistrate of south Tripura, in a communication recently had informed that the Chakma refugee leaders were reluctant to visit their homeland to

study the situation there as proposed by the Bangladesh side at the Ramgarh meeting on May 29 and 30.

Mr Nawani said the Khagrachari deputy commissioner was informed this because Bangladesh had opposed the Indian proposal at a meeting that the Chakma group be accompanied by Indian officials, journalists and representatives from human rights organisations.

Meanwhile, Mr Safiul Rahman, head of the Bangladesh mission here, visited the refugees in camps to see for himself their condition and speak to them. He was not accompanied by any Indian official.

He is reported to have told the Chakmas that they should return to their native villages as the condition there was now very good and they would also get grants for their rehabilitation.

The refugees told him that they were more concerned about their safety and security than rehabilitation grants. They wanted to see the condition in the hill tracts for themselves before returning there, but the visit should be undertaken along with Indian representatives.

The chief secretary said Mr Rahman expressed satisfaction over the arrangements made for the Bangladeshi refugees in the camps. Ration, drinking water supply and medicare arrangements were all available in the camps.

NRIPENS CALL: The Tripura chief minister, Mr Nripen Chakrabarti, has urged the Centre to make its stand on Chakma refugees clear with Bangladesh.

Briefing newsmen after a cabinet meeting here on Thursday, Mr Chakrabarty said "We are not interested in keeping the refugees in Tripura but it was now for Bangladesh to create confidence in the Chakmas to facilitate their return to the Chittagong hill tracts."

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Rocking waves of Indo-Bangla ties

By S. DHARMARAJAN

The Times of India News Service

DHAKA, June 29.

MR Humayun Rasheed Chaudhury prefers to use an oceanic metaphor to describe India's relations with his country of which he has been foreign minister for nearly two years now.

He speaks of "wavy curves" over a "depth of relations rare among nations."

The 59-year-old career diplomat who learned diplomacy and law in Britain and the U.S. had become foreign minister after a spell as adviser to President Ershad.

As Mr Chaudhury proceeds to explain this "unique relationship", it is obvious that the depth with little risk of running ground have lapsed into history and that concern should be for the rocking waves. Perhaps for that reason too, the minister whose bio-data refers to him as a recipient of a Mahatma Gandhi peace prize of a U.S. university, claims to have sensed a shiver in my spine "as India air-dropped relief supplies." Incidentally, the air-dropping provoked loud protests by those who consistently or conveniently perceive India as an "over-bearing and irritable giant."

The controversy over the relief supplies has now been pushed behind and Mr Chaudhury himself claimed that SAARC had overcome the severe test (arising from the episode).

But an articulate section has used the occasion to point to the continuing danger of being situated at the "wrong tip of Indian sensitivities." There is an urge to look eastward and not to be obsessed with the South Asian inheritance.

In a widely read commentary Mr Sadiq Khan in the weekly "holiday" holds that "if India fails the SAARC spirit Bangladesh shall have no option but to reduce its multipolar external orientation and wheel around firmly towards the south-east and far east for stable alignment to prepare for the Asia-Pacific century in the offing."

More significantly he goes on to point out that Bangladesh grew up in the "geopolitical cradle of British India with memories of medieval rearing amidst West Asian and Central Asian relations."

It is high time that Bangladesh broke out of the inhibitions of those adolescent ties to be able to explore new horizons along the Indian Ocean and Pacific coast eastward.

Nonetheless, not even the most severe detractors of India would claim any under Indian interference in this country, where China supplies most of its arms, Japan has cut deep inroads into the economy and the U.S. has obvious political clout.

The "look eastward" perception based on don'ts of SAARC goals did not figure in the brief talk given by

Mr Chaudhury. This was before the latest attack on the Indian high commission in Dhaka by a group of hoodlums on the ground that some riflemen had been killed by Indian guards. The killing has been denied by Indian sources.

Mr Chaudhury could, however, list a few issues on which he was keen on hauling India over the coals. The prime question concerns ending what he calls cross-border insurgency. The reference is to the Shanti Bahini forces locked in operations with Bangladeshi forces in the struggle for autonomy for Chakmas in their tribal land in the Chittagong hill tract.

The problem dates back to the British times and possibly is akin to that India's north-eastern tribes like Mizos and Nagas. Bangladesh authorities had, however, no use for the Indian approach of negotiated settlement with these tribes. Asked about the prospect of a dialogue Mr Chaudhury was blunt: "There are often persons going about in Dhaka claiming something or the other. They can also do the same." The Chakmas after all are only one of the dozen tribes in the hill tract. Also he cares to remind the Indian visitors that the former leader of the Chakmas, Raja Tridib Roy, sided with Pakistan during the liberation and was now Islamabad's ambassador to Argentina.

In other words, the authorities want the Chakmas, who had fled their tribal land to Tripura camps or fighting, to surrender and return home where, according to reports a large number of non-tribals had been resettled giving rise to social tension, though of course the government wants everyone to accept that things are normal and that only the "so-called Shanti Bahini miscreants were creating trouble."

If that is so the unanswered question is why several thousand tribals have left their hearths and homes to live in relief camps in a foreign country?

Mr Chaudhury could only say that "Shanti Bahini forces are preventing the tribals to return and are trying to enroll them to swell their depleting ranks." He claims that still 4,500 of them have returned. Of the 50,000 odd India had listed, he maintained, the Bangladesh authorities had identified a little over 29,000 as belonging to tribal areas.

He had invited heads of missions in Dhaka to "see the conditions for themselves. The Indian envoy did not join the conducted tour. In any event, if things are so good, the dispersed Chakmas would have gone back home.

Asked if Tripura tribal insurgents were getting shelter in Bangladesh Mr Chaudhury snapped: "If anyone could tell us where they are we are prepared to catch them and hand them over to Indian authorities."

The accent was that while Bangladesh on its part was prepared to end cross-border insurgency, India should do the same for its part.

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From: Dr. Ramendu S. Dewan,
c/o Dr. H.D. Locksley, Department of Chemistry,
Salford University, Salford M5 4WT, England, U.K.

Date: 30 August, 1987

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

Dear Brother,

May I present to you the following information about the appalling situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area of Bangladesh:

1. A statement made by Rev. Bimal Tishya Bhikkhu (a Buddhist monk from the CHT) at the Conference of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations on 4th August, 1987.
2. An appeal letter sent by Mr. John Vanderveken, the General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), to Gen. Hossain Mohammad Ershad, the President of Bangladesh, on July 27, 1987.
3. A report, "50,000 flee secret war in Bangladesh", from the Toronto Star of May 24, 1987.
4. An article, "End in sight to Chakma question", from the Times of India of June 29, 1987.
5. A piece, "Rocking waves of Indo-Bangla ties", from the Times of India of June 30, 1987.
6. A report, "Tripura bid to tackle Chakmas", from the Times of India of July 4, 1987.
7. An article, "Chakmas step up war for existence", from the Times of India of July 27, 1987.
8. A news, "Doordarshan is 'biased': Dhaka", from the Times of India of July, 1987.
9. A piece, "Chakmas take heart from Lanka accord", from the Times of India of August 2, 1987.

A. AN APPEAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Rev. Bimal Tishya Bhikkhu was able to attend the Conference of the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations this year with the generous help of the Anti-Slavery Society, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Workgroup for Indigenous Peoples and a Belgian human rights group. He gave the Working Group a vivid description of horrible atrocities that he witnessed for many years. Speaking from his personal experience he told the Conference that "The Bangladesh Security forces and Bengali settlers attacked 35 villages in Dighinala Upazilla from 13 to 15 June, 1986. About 250 tribal people, mostly children, women and old people died during this attack. On 13 June, 1986, Bengali settlers, with the support of the Bangladesh armed forces, raided my orphanage at Boalkhali in Dighinala Upazilla. My orphanage housed some 300 orphans of 5 to 12 years old. More than 100 of them are missing since the raid. 154 orphans managed to escape to the Indian State of Tripura where they have been given shelter in the refugee camps". Rev. Bimal Tishya Bhikkhu earnestly appealed to the Working Group to persuade the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to send a rapporteur to the CHT to investigate the "genocide of the tribal people that is taking place in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and to persuade the Bangladesh Government to stop these atrocities".

B. REFUGEE SITUATION

refugees have taken refuge in the Tripura State of India. The benevolent Governments of India and Tripura have given them shelter on humanitarian grounds and they are spending crores of rupees to save the lives of these Jumma (the people of the CHT) refugees. Although they are causing a serious strain on the economy of India, the Government of India will not repatriate them against their will. Mr. I.P. Gupta, the Additional Secretary in the Union Home Ministry, has reiterated the humanitarian stand of India on the Jumma refugee issue in his recent statement which I quote, "We can't compel them to go back. They can't be pushed back. Unless they are willing to go, nothing can be done".

The Indian Government has also been trying for a political solution to the Jumma refugee problem. For example, the District Magistrate of South Tripura (India) suggested to his counterpart of the Khagrachari District in Bangladesh that the refugee leaders should be accompanied by Indian officials, journalists and representatives of human rights agencies during their visit to their ancestral villages to study the situation there, as the refugee leaders feared to go to Bangladesh on their own. The Chief Secretary of Tripura, Mr. N.P. Nawani, has confirmed that the Bangladesh Government is willing to allow only the refugee leaders to go to their homeland and to see the condition there for themselves. The Bangladesh Government's refusal to allow the observer groups to accompany the refugee leaders proves that the situation in the CHT is not safe for the return of the Jumma refugees to their homeland. It often accuses the Indian Government of preventing the return of the tribal refugees in order to cover up its failure to normalise the situation in the area. So the Tripura Chief Minister, Mr. Nripen Chakrabarty, had to take the trouble to explain the actual causes of the problem. He told the press, "We are not interested in keeping the refugees in Tripura but it was now for Bangladesh to create confidence in the Chakmas to facilitate their return to the Chittagong Hill Tracts".

The Bangladeshi regime has, in fact, done nothing to create a normal climate in the CHT for the return of the Jumma refugees to their own homes. It has no intention to remove the Bengali settlers from tribal villages nor has it will to withdraw its armed forces from the region. On the other hand the Government of Bangladesh is resettling more and more members of the majority community of Bangladesh in the tribal villages. The Jumma refugees will be in great danger if these two oppressive agencies of the Bangladesh Government are not removed from the CHT before their repatriation commences. Moreover their rehabilitation cannot be carried out unless their villages and farmlands are vacated by the Bengali settlers. The Bangladesh Government often says that it is willing to repatriate the Jumma refugees and that it will rehabilitate them in their native villages. These statements are nothing but misleading propaganda. The Government of Bangladesh is still reluctant to recognise all the Jumma refugees now camped in Tripura as genuine Bangladeshis. It is, perhaps, worth-noting that Jumma refugees were repatriated in 1979, 1981 and 1986 but they were never rehabilitated. On the other hand the refugees were tortured, raped and starved. So we believe that the Bangladeshi regime will never rehabilitate the present refugees at all. The safe return of the refugees and their proper rehabilitation can be ensured if the following effective measures are implemented:

1. Removal of non-tribal settlers from the CHT.
2. Withdrawal of all Bangladesh armed forces including the non-tribal police force from the CHT.
3. Re-establishment of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Police Force according to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900.
4. Implementation of the refugee rehabilitation programme under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of Red Cross.

5. Adequate financial help for the rehabilitation of Jumma refugees in their ancestral villages and on their farmlands.
6. Inquiry into Matiranga, Lakhmichari, Panchari, Khagrachari, Dighinala and Ranjan Moni Karbari Para massacres under the auspices of the UNO or a group of human rights organizations.

C. THE INTERVENTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

It is very inspiring to see that the compassionate international community is intervening in the crisis of the CHT. For instance, Mr. John Vanderveken, the General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), strongly protested to Gen. Hossain Mohammad Ershad, the military leader of Bangladesh, against the inhuman atrocities perpetrated by the Bangladesh security forces on the people of the CHT. He pointed out to the Bangladeshi ruler that his government failed to implement some essential provisions of the ILO Convention No. 107 on the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Tribal Populations which Bangladesh ratified in 1972. Mr. Vanderveken also took exception of the Bangladesh Government Representative's remark at the 1987 International Labour Conference that "there is no substance behind the allegations of massacres of the tribal population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts". Citing many examples of the Bangladesh Army violence against the innocent tribal people, he asked the General whether any military or civilian judicial authority had investigated those events or not and also what actions were taken against those army personnel who were responsible for the genocidal crimes. Mr. Vanderveken believed that the Bangladesh Government violated "universally-agreed international standards, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which) guarantees everyone the right to life, freedom and security of the person (Art. 3), protection against torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment (Art. 6), and the right to immunity from arbitrary arrest or detention (Art. 9)".

It is, perhaps, important to note that a Representative of the ILO went to the CHT to study the situation in the area for himself. But the Bangladeshi regime did not permit him to visit any place beyond Rangamati, the capital of the CHT, nor did it allow him to talk to any Jumma people privately. Clearly the Bangladesh Government fears that if its monstrous genocidal crimes in the CHT are exposed to the civilized world then the international community will take strong measures against Bangladesh.

D. CONCLUSION

The Jumma refugees now under the care of the Governments of India and Tripura need more relief supplies and educational facilities. They depend on the help of the international community for their survival. I shall be most grateful to you if you would kindly help the refugees until their safe return to their homeland is fully guaranteed.

The CHT is now just like a closed-door slaughter house. Neither human rights groups nor journalists are allowed to visit the areas where the Bangladesh armed forces and Bengali settlers are committing genocide of the Jumma people. I believe the international community has the power to open up the CHT to the press, human rights groups and humanitarian organizations. I fervently appeal to you to send an inquiry commission under the auspices of the UNO or a group of human rights organizations to the CHT to investigate the inhuman atrocities committed by the Bangladesh Government. I, on behalf of the CHT people, would like to thank you for your great kindness and extraordinary help. With my best regards.

To

Yours sincerely

Dr. Rudolph C. Ryser,
The Chairman of the Center for World Indigenous Studies,
P.O. Box 82038, Kenmore, Washington 98028,
U.S.A.

Ramendu

p.s. It was a surprise delight to meet you in Geneva.