

From Dr. R.S. Dewan,  
C/o Dr. H.D. Locksley, Dept. of Chemistry,  
Salford University, Salford M5 4WT, England.

Date: 1 Oct. 1984

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

Dear Sir,

May I present to you the following evidence concerning the crisis  
of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT):

1. a copy of the article, "Chittagong's hill men struggle to put  
their case", from the Guardian of 6 March 1984.

It shows clearly that the Bangladeshi regime is fully responsible  
for the prevailing extraordinary state of affairs in the CHT. As a result  
of the Bangladesh Government's extreme hostility, the indigenous people of  
the CHT who are ethnically, religiously and culturally distinct from the  
Muslim Bengalis, have been deprived of all human rights including their  
social, political and economic rights which they enjoyed even under the  
colonial rule. The fundamentally hostile government cannibalized the CHT  
Regulation of 1900, disbanded the tribal police force, seized the tribal  
farm lands for the hundreds of thousands of outsider Muslim Bengalis, killed  
tens of thousands of innocent tribal people, destroyed Buddhist temples  
and murdered many Buddhist monks. Thousands of tribal women have been  
kidnapped, raped and converted to Islam by the Bangladesh army as a part  
of the government's programme to assimilate the indigenous people.

The government has built a hydroelectric project at Kaptai and set  
up many industries in the CHT with the help of foreign aid. But the benefits  
of these industries and also of other development projects are not allowed  
to go to the local population. On the other hand the outsider Muslim  
Bengalis have been provided with free transport, food, land, jobs and money.  
These settlers have committed many massacres of tribal people with the help  
of the Bangladesh army and police. Under the extreme hostile rule of the  
Bangladeshi regime the indigenous people of the CHT are facing extinction.  
This extraordinary situation has prompted them to demand autonomy for the  
CHT, recognition of the tribal peoples' right to self-determination, the  
removal of non-tribal settlers, the reestablishment of the CHT police force  
to replace the oppressive Bangladesh army and police, release of all tribal  
detainees, and investigation by impartial international bodies into the  
human rights violations in the CHT committed by the Bangladeshi regime.

The people of the CHT need your help.

To Rudy Ryser Esq.,  
Centre for World Indigenous Studies,  
P.O. Box 911, Snoqualmie.

Yours sincerely

*Ramendu Dewan*

# Chittagong's hill men struggle to put their case

By a Correspondent

Tribal guerrilla fighters in the Chittagong hill areas of Bangladesh are demanding a £200,000 ransom for the release of three Shell employees kidnapped six weeks ago while managing oil drilling operations.

The incident has provoked a Government ban on reporting in the hill tracts, a jungle area bordering Burma and India in the extreme south-east of the country, and forced Shell to stop work, laying off 600 casual labourers. Shell is reported to be ready to pay the ransom for the three—a New Zealander, a Dutchman, and an American—but the Government is unwilling to allow such a sum to go to the guerrillas.

Known as the Shanti Bahini or Peace Force, the guerrillas have been fighting government forces for over a decade, fearing the extinction of their race as the Government seeks to open up the area. Although dubbed "miscreants" by the Government, their demands are essentially political, a minimum object being to maintain their social and economic status as a Buddhist minority in a Muslim-dominated country.

The Shanti Bahini developed against the background of dispossession and increasing exploitation by Muslim Bengalis who now control the markets, the courts, and the police in the hill areas.

Under the British, the Chittagong hill tracts were protected and non-tribals were only allowed to buy land or to trade there under strict supervision. With independence, this measure of security began to be eroded. The most important single factor which contributed to tribal disaffection was the construction of the hydroelectric dam at Kaptai in 1963.

The dam, financed by the United States, flooded nearly half the tribal people's settled and cultivated land, forcing them back into the hills and on to poor land. Few of the 100,000 affected, a sixth of the entire tribal population, received any compensation.

Since then there have been a number of large-scale aid projects to develop the region's resources. The tribal people argue that they are the victims of these projects and not the beneficiaries as road building

schemes merely assist the movement of the 30,000 government troops in the area, and Bengali-dominated businesses which exploit tribal people.

Under former President Zia Ur, a huge programme of settlement began, landless Bengalis from other districts were brought in by lorries, given land and encouraged to settle. This policy, which by 1982 had settled between 300,000 and 400,000 Bengalis, culminated in a series of massacres of tribal people by settlers.

The Shanti Bahini claim that the settlers had the tacit support of the police and army. They have also accused the army of razing villages, torture, and the desecration of Buddhist temples.

The tribal people see the settlement programme as an attempt to make them a minority in their own land and so break their claim to any particular rights.

In November, 1983, General Ershad, Bangladesh's chief martial law administrator and President, announced an amnesty for members of the Shanti Bahini who gave themselves up. The last date for surrender was recently extended to April 26 this year. So far fewer than 100, out of 3,000 active members, have surrendered.

While Shell interest in the region is purely commercial, the Shanti Bahini want assurances that some of the benefits, should oil be found, will go to the tribal population, as almost all administrative posts and commercial operations are in the hands of Bengalis.

More generally, the Shanti Bahini demand the restoration of tribal control over tribal land, and the return to the "special status" granted the area under the British.

They want the abolition of the identity cards which only tribal people have to carry, the reservation of the majority of local government posts for tribals, the restoration of land taken by Bengalis (often with false papers) since 1952, and the removal of recent settlers.

● Opposition attempts to disrupt rural elections called by the Bangladesh Government gathered momentum yesterday when election authorities announced the withdrawal of 499 candidates.

