

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

Date: 26 Sept. 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 a copy of the article, "Bangladesh Army brutalises hill tribes", from the Anti-Slavery Society's news sheet, issue no. 3, Spring 1984.

Dr. Julian Burger, the Indigenous Peoples Project Officer of the Anti-Slavery Society, has claimed in his report - The Chittagong Hill Tracts: militarization, oppression and the hill tribes - that "Bangladesh is systematically destroying the indigenous minorities of the southern hill areas" because they "differ in race and religion as well as culture from the dominant Muslim Bengalis." "The report states that the repression by the army is not a question of lack of control - the army is being directed in its policy of repression from the highest levels in the government." About 80,000 Bangladesh Army men, 25,000 Bangladesh Rifle men, 5,000 Ansars (Islamic guards), 10,000 Armed Police, one unit of the Bangladesh Navy and the entire Bangladesh Air Force have been operating in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). They are systematically exterminating the tribal people on the one hand and Islamising the CHT by moving tens of thousands of outsider Muslim Bengalis into tribal lands on the other. The armed forces have carried out massacre after massacre of the innocent tribal people, burnt hundreds of tribal villages, destroyed hundreds of Buddhist temples and killed many monks. For example,

a) In the early months of 1977, the Government sent troops to massacre the inhabitants of Matiranga, Guimara, Manikchari, Lakshmichari etc. (near Rangarh). 50 tribals were shot dead, 23 tribal women were tortured to death, 54 men died in pits, many women were raped, the villagers were robbed of their properties, and hundreds of houses including Buddhist temples were set on fire. 5,000 tribals sought refuge in the Tripura State, India.

b) In December, 1978, and January, 1979, the Bangladeshi troops invaded a big area comprising Dumdumya Mouza (No. 150 Mouza; "Mouza" is an administrative unit which includes a number of villages), Maidong Mouza (No. 138) and Panchari Mouza (No. 137). The total area is about 175 sq. miles. It includes 50 villages with a population of about 75,000. Almost all houses including the Buddhist temples were burnt to ashes, many tribal people were murdered, many women were raped and thousands of villagers fled to the nearby forests where many people particularly children died of starvation/-

starvation.

- c) In October, 1979, the Bangladesh Army attacked the Mubhachari area (near Mahalchari) and burnt down many villages including Buddhist temples. Several thousand men, women and children were killed. Hundreds of women were kidnapped and thousands of tribals were arrested. Their fate is still unknown.
- d) On 10 December 1980, the Bangladesh Army and the Bangladesh Rifles completely burnt down 7 villages - Shuknachari, Mahalchari, Nayadam, Chibarega, Toimidong, Tagalakchara, and Rangapanichara - in the Harina valley. On 10, 19, 21 and 22 December, 1980, similar military operations were carried out in the Bara Harina valley. The military campaigns in the two valleys resulted in the massacre of thousands of innocent tribal men, women and children.
- e) On 26 June 1981, the Bangladeshi soldiers and the Muslim Bengali settlers razed many villages such as Banraibari, Beltali and Belchari etc. (near Ramgarh) and killed 500 tribal men, women and children. Thousands of tribal people sought refuge in the Indian State of Tripura and many more fled to the forest where many died of starvation and also diseases. On 19 September 1981, similar military campaigns destroyed 35 villages including Telafang, Ashalong, Gurangapara, Tabalchari, Barnala etc. in the Feni valley of Ramgarh and Khagrachari Sub-divisions and killed thousands of innocent tribal people including women and children. About 10,000 unarmed tribal people died as a result of the massacres of 26 June and 19 September 1981. Some 18,000 tribal people fled to Tripura, India. It is, perhaps, worth noting that the Bangladeshi regime had denied that they were refugees from the CHT. However, the UNO and the international community forced the Bangladesh Government to repatriate them. The hostile Bangladesh officials gave them equivalent of \$ 8 and left them to their fate. They could not return to their native villages because their homes and farm lands had already been given to the Muslim Bengali settlers. Their fate is still unknown.
- f) On 26 June, 11, 26, 27 July, 9, 10 and 11 August 1983, the Bangladesh armed forces and the Muslim Bengali settlers massacred the tribal people of the villages within Panchari Police Station including Golakpatimachara, Machyachara, Tarabanchari, Logang, Tarabanya, Maramachyachara, Jedamachyachara etc. Hundreds of houses including Buddhist temples were looted and burnt and 800 innocent tribal men, women and children were murdered. The old people and the women were either shot or hacked to death. The young children were lifted up bodily by their limbs and smashed to the ground. Venerable Bodhipal Bhikkhu, Head Monk of the Banavihar Buddhist Temple of Jedamachyachara village was severely beaten on 11 August 1983 and he had no other alternative but to flee to India. These are a few typical examples of many massacres committed by the Bangladesh Army and the Muslim Bengali settlers against the defenceless indigenous people of the CHT.

Dr. Burger/-

Dr. Burger has also blamed the Bangladeshi regime for "mass dispossession of land, murder, rape, defilement of places of worship and the invasion of tribal lands by Bengali settlers." The Bangladesh Army forced tens of thousands of tribal plough-land farmers to leave their ancestral homes and farm lands and herded them into concentration camps. Then the Government allotted their villages and farm lands to the outsider Muslim Bengalis. In this way hundreds of thousands of outsider Muslim Bengalis have been settled in the CHT. Now almost entire valleys of the Feni, the Ichamati, the Karnafuli, the Sengu and the Matamuhuri rivers have been occupied by the Muslim Bengalis. Exactly same thing is happening to the valleys of the Chengi, the Kachalong and the Mayuni rivers. Already tens of thousands of Muslim Bengalis have settled there by displacing the tribal farmers.

"Deliberate defilement of non-Muslim places of worship by soldiers" is commonplace. For example, the Bangladeshi soldiers slaughtered a cow on the saffron robe of a monk of the Buddhist temple at Kattali in the Kachalong valley and then sprinkled blood on the image of the Buddha. On 21 February 1979, the Bangladesh Army burnt down the entire village of Pujgang, 20 miles north of Khagrachari, ransacked the Buddhist temple and shot at the Buddha's image. Then the soldiers broke the head of the holy image with rifle butts and played football with it in the courtyard of the temple. Rev. Aniruddha and Rev. Rebata Bhikkhu were mercilessly beaten ^{with} the result that ^{the} former's head was fractured ^{and} the latter's right hand was broken.

Thousands of tribal women have been kidnapped, raped and many of them forcibly converted to Islam. Gangs of soldiers go to the tribal villages and carry off the tribal girls. Every day hundreds of tribal girls are raped in the military camps as part of the government's programme to assimilate the indigenous people. The tribal people dare not speak out about the military atrocities because they have no official and police protection. They live under extreme terror and fear.

The government often seeks foreign aid to improve the economic condition of the tribal people. After receiving the aid the money is used either for the armed forces or the Muslim Bengali settlers. The benefits of economic and industrial developments in the CHT are exclusively reserved for the outsider Muslim Bengalis. The tribal people must always carry identity cards. They are not allowed to own business and they are required special permit to carry medicine. In short, the tribal people have been deprived of all political, economic and social rights.

"Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to external pressures." It will be compelled to restore all the rights of the tribal people if all foreign aids for Bangladesh are "made conditional on respect for human rights". I earnestly appeal to you to take all effective measures in order to protect the tribal people and also their homeland from the violent Muslim Bengalis invasion.

To

Rudy Ryser Esq.,
Centre for World Indigenous Studies,
P.O. Box 911, Snoqualmie,
Washington 98065, U.S.A.

Yours sincerely

Ramendu Dewan

ANTI-SLAVERY

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION

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Bangladesh Army brutalises hill tribes

Bangladesh is usually thought of as a country deserving of sympathy and aid. However, a report to be published shortly by the Anti-Slavery Society gives a very different view. The report **The Chittagong Hill Tracts: militarization, oppression and the hill tribes** documents that Bangladesh is systematically destroying the indigenous minorities of the southern hill areas.

The report details accounts of mass dispossession of land, murder, rape, defilement of places of worship and the invasion of tribal lands by bengali settlers.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are inhabited by 600,000 people in 13 tribal groups. They are of Tibetan-Burmese ethnic stock, are mostly Buddhist or Christian and thus differ in race and religion as well as culture from the dominant Muslim bengalis. Up to 1960, the tribal people constituted 90 per cent of the population of the hill tracts.

The first act of dispossession was carried out by Pakistan in 1962. The Kaptai dam, built with US aid, flooded 40 per cent of the good farming land in the hills. Hardly any provision was made for compensation or relocation. 100,000 tribespeople were displaced and 40,000 fled to India.

Since Bangladesh achieved independence conditions have deteriorated further. Approximately 300,000 bengali settlers have been moved into tribal lands, 100,000 of them in 1980 alone. Coupled with official favouritism for bengali Muslims has been an official policy of military repression of the tribes.

One third of the Bangladesh Army is stationed in the CHT. As tension between tribespeople and settlers

rose, the army tolerated violence, rioting and looting by the settlers and in a number of instances actually incited anti-tribal violence. Going further the A-S report documents that the Bangladesh Army is engaged in a policy of repression. Summary executions of village headmen have taken place, rape and brutality are reported as regular features of army sweeps and at least two massacres of villagers by soldiers are documented. One allegation made repeatedly is of deliberate defilement of non-Muslim places of worship by soldiers.

Two features are particularly disturbing. The report states that the repression by the army is not a question of lack of control - the army is being directed in its policy of repression from the highest levels in the government. The second disturbing feature is that the Bangladesh Army is being given military assistance by Britain and a small number of British soldiers are stationed in Dakha. There is, however, no evidence that British soldiers have taken part in army operations in the hill tracts.

Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to outside pressures. The record of violence and death in the hill tracts shows utter disregard for human rights and leads only to retaliation and further violence. Yet should economic aid for Bangladesh be made conditional on respect for human rights? Would it be ethical for the Anti-Slavery Society to press for such strings to be put on aid programmes, given that others might suffer? Your views are sought on whether the Society should seek to put pressure on in this way. Do please write and give us your opinion.

Reference:
Indigenous Peoples Officer/Julian Burger

UN mission visits Mauritania

A United Nations mission visited Mauritania in January to investigate the circumstances in which 100,000 people remain as slaves in the West African state four years after slavery was officially abolished. The visit of the team from the UN Commission on Human Rights had been urged by A-S for some time and it was a new departure for this section of the UN to carry out field investigations into human rights problems.

The Government of Mauritania made a request for the Anti-Slavery Society to be represented on the mission.

Since this was not possible under UN protocol, it was finally agreed that A-S Director Peter Davies would accompany the mission as an observer at the specific invitation of the Government of Mauritania.

Peter Davies commented, "it was excellent news that the Society had gained the confidence of Mauritians to the point that they regarded our attendance as important." Peter travelled extensively in Mauritania with the mission. Details will be given after the UN team has made its official report.

Reference: *Director/Peter Davies*