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Date: 19 Oct. 1984

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

Dear Friend,

May I present to you the following evidence about the massacre of the indigenous nationalities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) by the Bangladesh armed forces and the Bengali settlers.

1. A copy of the article, entitled "Buddhist tribe slaughtered in jungle genocide", from the Sunday Times of 14 October 1984.

Mr. Simon Winchester has brought the plight of the people of the CHT to light although "General Ershad's government prefers the region to remain unknown, since for the past 10 years a vicious little war has been raging out of control! Recently he journeyed into the CHT and met "Chakmas - both Buddhist monks, men of total peace, and members of the guerrilla army, the so-called Shanti Bahini - as well as government officials, police and soldiers." Mr. Charu Bikash Chakma, a tribal leader, told him - "Thousands of lives have been sacrificed in the violence that has come about as a result of the government importing thousands of new Bengali settlers....There is turmoil, chaos, confusion, a total collapse of law and order, widespread fear and terror. There have been the most awful massacres. Thousands of refugees have been forced to flee over the border into India, and the Indian authorities have pushed them back again."

The anti-tribal policy of the Bangladesh Government is fully responsible for the tragic situation in the CHT. For example, the government is employing every means to eliminate the indigenous people on the one hand and settling the outsider Bengalis on their farm lands on the other. The armed forces on the order of the government massacred the sedentary plough-land farmers, burnt down their villages, put thousands of them into concentration camps, and pushed tens of thousands of them into India and Burma. The people of the CHT appealed to the successive governments of Bangladesh for political solution of the CHT crisis. But the government turned a deaf ear to their ~~appeals and resorted to more violence.~~ Then the tribal people had no other alternative but to form the Shanti Bahini to protect their people and also their traditional homeland from the Bengalis invasion.

The people of the CHT need your help in their legitimate struggle for rights to live in their own homeland.

To

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Yours sincerely

*Ramendu*

# Buddhist tribe slaughtered in

THE SUNDAY TIMES, 14 OCTOBER 1984

## jungle genocide | Punjab

● When Princess Anne visits Bangladesh in nine days' time as president of the Save the Children Fund, she will be kept well away from the far south-east, along the border with Burma and India. General Ershad's government prefers the region to remain unknown, since for the past 10 years a vicious little war has been raging out of control. SIMON WINCHESTER reports.

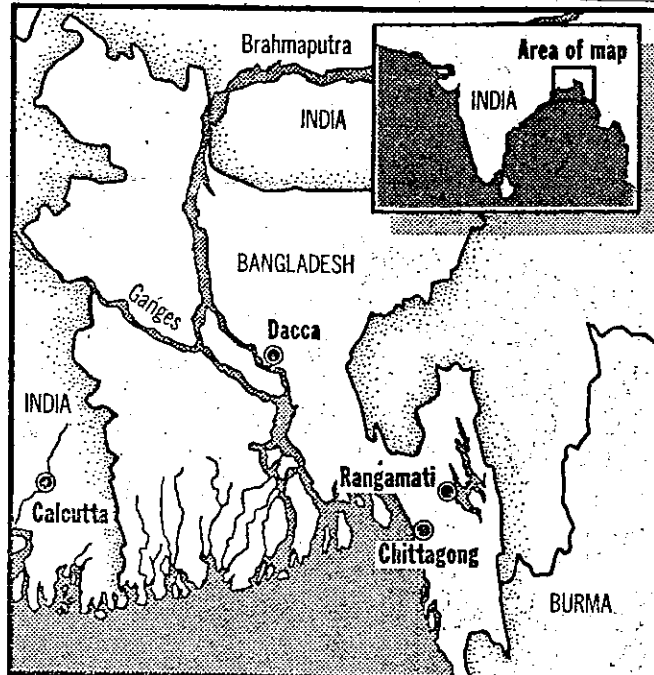
THE jungle hills seemed to spread for ever in folds of green, the peaks touched with mist, the valleys roaring with brown rivers in perpetual flood. Huge teak trees rose, dark and sentinel-like, out of the impenetrable cover of rain forest. A wisp of blue smoke told of a village hidden in the green depths.

Then, from behind, there came the soft thudding of rotor blades, and an elderly khaki helicopter, Russian-made, but bearing the insignia of the Bangladesh Air Force, lumbered overhead, flying low. It made a pass down a river valley, breasted the ridge ahead, and disappeared. Moments later there was a rattle of automatic gunfire, and flocks of birds rose, screaming into the sky.

There was another burst of fire, and perhaps the crack of a rifle; and then the helicopter climbed and headed over us, back to its base.

That evening there was probably a press release, which the local newspapers would have been obliged to publish. "Misguided elements and bandits in the Chittagong Hill Tracts," it would have said, "attacked members of the armed forces on routine patrol near Rangamati yesterday. But military commanders pledged that they would redouble their efforts to hunt down the miscreants."

The Bangladesh army has been promising to redouble its efforts for almost 10 years, but to no apparent avail. In the ugly



Buddhist monks have been among those held without trial, tortured and killed in the war between Shanti Bahini guerrillas and soldiers of the army's 24th infantry division, the "Bengal Tigers"

little war, fought over a hostile country of snakes and leeches, unbearable heat and monsoons, thousands have died. One soldier is now killed on average every week, two tribesmen every day, and scores are injured and maimed and have their homes and belongings destroyed. Survival International, the London-based charity that tries to bring such miseries to worldwide attention, reckons 185,000 have died in a war of which few outside Bangladesh know anything.

There are charges of genocide levelled against the Bangladesh government, charges, supported by Survival's research, that Bengali Muslims are bent on the destruction of the native peoples of the Hill Tracts - particularly members of the gentle Chakma tribe, whose Mongoloid appearance and Buddhist faith disturb the otherwise ethnic and religious purity of east Bengal.

The government denies this:

it is pursuing, it says, a perfectly reasonable policy of settling the Hill Tracts with people - yes, Bengalis and Muslims, it is true - who are currently confined to the crowded river plains of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. That certain misguided elements of the Chakma have decided to try to prevent what they, misguidedly, believe to be the wholesale destruction of their culture is, the government says, regrettable.

Last week, I journeyed into the Hill Tracts. I met Chakmas - both Buddhist monks, men of total peace, and members of the guerrilla army, the so-called Shanti Bahini - as well as government officials, police, and soldiers. All expressed their dejection at a conflict which, far from nearing an end, appears to be getting more vicious.

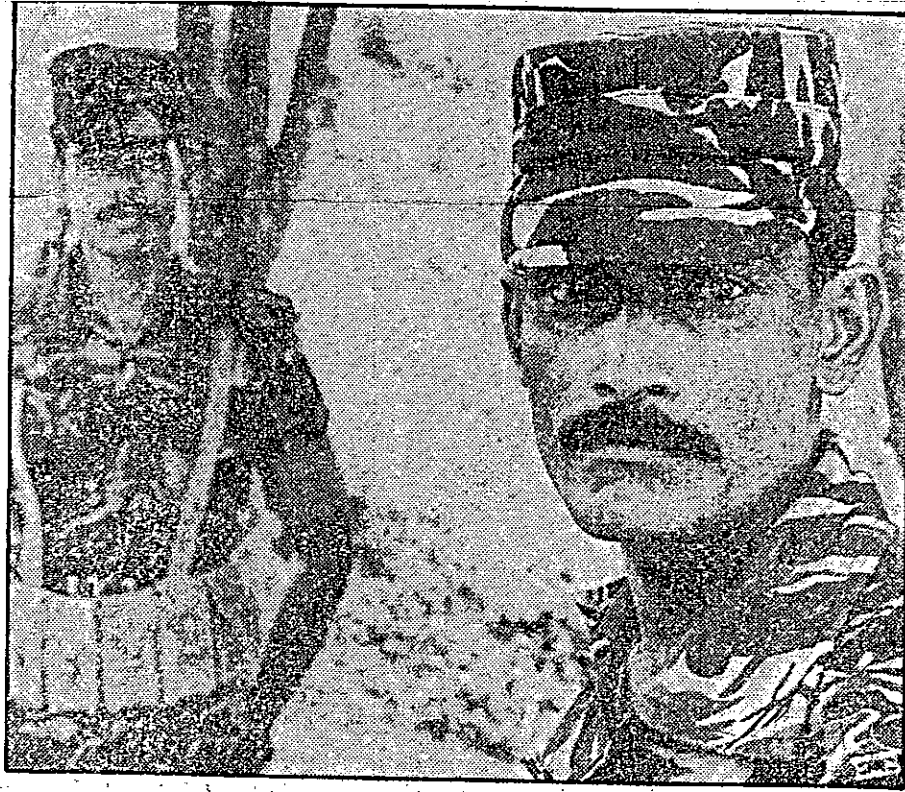
The Chittagong Hill Tracts have long been regarded as a special part of the Indian sub-continent. Difficult to reach, and home to tribal peoples who

were isolated from their more obviously "Indian" neighbours to the west, they have been singled out by successive rulers for special treatment.

The British are generally accepted to have ruled in the most benign and enlightened fashion: in 1900 they passed laws giving the Chakma people of the Hill Tracts considerable local autonomy. Forty years later, though, the British made a tragic error: in the dealing that accompanied the delineation of the border between the two new nations of India and Pakistan, the Buddhist Hill Tracts were handed over, not to the secular, democratic India, but to martial, theocratic Pakistan - a decision that contained all the seeds of today's conflict, and one from which the British simply walked away.

Until 1971 the problem truly was minor: small demonstrations, occasional riots in Chittagong, but very rarely a killing. The Chakma who are





# tried in secret

by Mary Anne Weaver  
Chandigarh

THREE special courts in the Indian state of Punjab have begun secret trials of Sikh extremists, whose identity is being kept secret from prisoners' relatives and lawyers. Hundreds of armed security men from the central police reserve guard the courts in Patiala, Ferozepur and Jalandhar where the trials are being heard. These courts come under the draconian "terrorist affected areas act" hastily passed by the New Delhi parliament in July.

Under the act, the identity of witnesses need not be revealed, and the rules of evidence have been amended, so that defendants are presumed guilty until proved innocent. The accused are permitted counsel but the lawyers do not know precisely who they are defending. Presiding judges fall under the control of central government rather than the high court. Bail is inadmissible. Definition of the word "terrorist" is wide.

Only 25 of 377 cases now pending before the Jalandhar court involve "anti-national activity". The rest are mostly petty offences under the Arms Act, or murders over land holdings.

Outside the fetid central jail in Nabha, 25 miles from Patiala's special court, 100 families wait with two dozen lawyers on Tuesdays and Thursdays, visiting days, for news of arrested relatives.

"We just don't know," said a leading Sikh advocate, Gurdarshan Singh Grewal. "Even now, parents are still coming to me, and they don't know where their children are. We have petitioned the central government, the state government and the army. We want charge sheets. But they just will not tell us. There has never been such an infringement of judicial and human liberties in India's history."

The trials are being conducted four months after the army's invasion of the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar to clear out Sikh extremists. Thousands were arrested. All are presumed to have been interrogated, yet no charge sheets have yet been filed. It is not clear how the trials can be conducted when defence lawyers, briefed by families cannot locate prisoners. Among those arrested when the temple was stormed were 29 children, aged from four to 12.

originally from northern Thailand, have no martial tradition, but since 1971 and the formation of the state of Bangladesh, the Chakma people themselves have come under concerted assault from the Bengalis.

"There is great bloodshed here in the Hill Tracts, and hardly anyone outside knows about it," said Charu Bikash Chakma, one of the tribal leaders, who lives in a tin house in Rangamati, the Tracts' capital. He, like most Chakmas, speaks perfect English (his children are called Dorothy and Benjamin; his brother is a doctor in Birmingham), and his family are devout Buddhists.

"Thousands of lives have been sacrificed in the violence that has come about as a result of the government importing thousands of new Bengali settlers", he said. "There is turmoil, chaos, confusion, a total collapse of law and order, widespread fear and terror. Here have been the most awful

massacres. Thousands of refugees have been forced to flee over the border into India, and the Indian authorities have pushed them back again."

There have been innumerable allegations that the settlement of 200,000 Bengalis in the Tracts has been accompanied by extraordinary violence: the UN was given documentation last August, and both Survival International and a London-based charity, the Anti-Slavery Society, have proffered their own allegations.

Says Survival in a new book, Genocide in Bangladesh, that "tens of thousands of innocent tribal men, women and children have been murdered; 12,000-15,000 tribal people have been detained without trial, tortured and some of them killed."

Whole villages have been created for Bengalis, who make up over 45% of the Tracts' population (whereas in 1951 there were 10 Buddhist tribals for every Bengali Muslim). The response to such settlements has been, perhaps inevitably, terrorism.

The Shanti Bahini, formed nearly a decade ago and armed by the Indians and, it appears, by the Soviet Union, has become a credible and ruthless fighting force. It raids banks and Bengali settlements, attacks the army, and blows up military supply routes.

Last January - in its most audacious act yet - it captured three Shell oil company seismic surveyors at a jungle outpost near Rangamati; Shell paid \$1m

to get them back - and then abandoned its exploration work in the Tracts.

The army's entire 24th infantry division, the "Bengal Tigers", under the command of Major-General Noor Uddin Khan, is deployed in the Tracts. With paramilitaries and police, there are, by Survival's reckoning, 120,000 government men under arms in the area. There are also vigilante groups of settlers armed by the government. Against these odds, the guerrillas continue the fight.

"One reason, naturally, is that they are accepted everywhere by the local tribals," a western diplomat explained in Dacca, the capital of Bangladesh. "The Chakma and the other 11 tribal groups believe, with some reason, that they are the victims of a terrible injustice."

"But the sinister thing now is the way the big powers are becoming involved. The Soviets, who have a huge and otherwise utterly useless consulate in Chittagong - 10 people, officially there to deal with shipping, and yet they only get one ship in port every month - help the Shanti Bahini. So do the Indians. The Chinese help the Indian dissident groups. So do the Americans. It is a mess out there, believe me. But what this really means is that the fighting will go on and on. No one will win or lose, but an awful lot of people will die. Soldiers and guerrillas, Bengalis and Chakmas. It really is a classic no-win situation."

