

(Delhi & Calcutta)

Tribal atrocities in Bangla continue

From Sekhar Datta

Agartala, Feb. 22. The Bangladesh Army and paramilitary forces deployed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts shot dead five tribals and injured 13 in combat operations against Shanti Bahini insurgents over the past three weeks.

Reports from across the border said despite the ouster of President H.M. Ershad atrocities on the tribals by the Bangladesh Army and paramilitary forces were continuing.

On January 27 the Army raided several areas in the Bagicherri sub-district and shot dead a woman, Lakmipula Chakma (38), and injured five-year-old Dronachidya Chakma. Two days later another detachment of the Bangladesh Army went on a rampage in the temporary Barta market in Pegacherri and shot dead Sukanto Chakma (30) and Bijay Chakma (23). In the latest incident at Atar-

akcherra village in Longadu on February 10 Bangladesh Rifles jawans shot dead Rangachan Chakma (35) and 10-year-old Kalabi Chakma.

Sources from across the border said between February 11 and 13, twelve tribals, including women, were seriously injured in Mohacherri, Longadu and Dighinala subdistricts in combat operations.

The security forces are also continuing to force tribals at gunpoint to leave their homes and shift to regrouped "cluster" and "collective" villages. This is being done to clear areas for settlers from the plains. Army jawans deployed in Barkhal sub-district and Mahal valley have threatened the tribal villagers of Khupbang, Jambak, Characherri, Dhamkata and Jarulcherri and Shuknacherri with dire consequences unless they move to collective villages by February 22.

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CHT —

No Change

In spite of the overthrow of General Ershad and of what seem to be moves towards democracy in Bangladesh, it is disturbing that criminal law appears not to be in effect — at least in the case of the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Last October at 104 Jhagarabil Mauza, in Belacharipara, a few miles from Rangamati town, 14 tribal women and girls were raped by soldiers of the Bangladesh army. It is not known whether this was done on the "initiative" of the individual soldiers or whether they were merely following orders. Over the last decade or so rape has been used by the governing military authorities as a weapon of terror. It is also not known what disciplinary measures have been taken by the commanding officer. On the basis of the army's treatment of a Chakma leader attempting to gather information about the rapes, the answer is presumably none. Rupaak Khishna was threatened by members of the army intelligence corps simply for trying to establish the facts of the case.

Under Bangladeshi law members of the armed forces charged with rape are not to be tried by any form of military tribunal, but are to be prosecuted in a civil court. So far this has not happened. Even during the days of Ershad it was common knowledge that the real ruler of the tracts was the General Officer Commanding. So far, it would seem that nothing has changed.