

**FROM INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT TO REFUGEES:
THE TRAUMA OF CHAKMAS IN BANGLADESH**

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FROM INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT TO REFUGEES: THE TRAUMA OF CHAKMAS IN BANGLADESH

In the years after the Second World War, the world has witnessed a large number of political upheavals in many countries. The European and Third World countries are the most affected. Reasons for such disturbances range from simple political rivalry, regional conflicts of a country, ethnic issues and unequal distribution of natural resources and development projects to, simple persecution of people of minorities by one country to those of another, one region to another region due to racial discrimination.

All these caused to create refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) or internal refugees. Because of fear of international repercussions, most of the regimes in the Third World as well as in developed countries do not recognize IDPs. The IDPs, themselves become uprooted people with very little or no state protection and continue to face the hostility of the population wherever they are forced to stay, leading to gross human rights violation. Apart from these man-made disasters, natural disasters like earth-quakes, eruption of volcanoes, landslides, famines, floods, and epidemic diseases have contributed the creation of IDPs in relation to the local natives in many underdeveloped countries, especially in Africa and Asia. Thus in the contemporary world, the IDPs and Refugees have become a major concerns and the subject of not only one nation but also of overall international relations. The United Nations and international law have taken serious note of these forced migrants. There are an estimated 20 – 22 million people internally displaced by conflict throughout the world. Many live in appalling conditions with little security.

In general, the IDPs are forced migrants living without national boundaries, and government protection. Most of them want to flee as far as possible from conflict, but refugees are not welcomed, so they choose to remain in their own country and thus the number of internally displaced people has been steadily growing. They live without any formal documentation and identity cards, unlike refugees (who are at least formally recognized), and do not get any international coverage or publicity for their existence on

the earth. In this context one should take note of the definition of IDPs in general and the definition used by the United Nations in particular.

Definition of IDPs:

There is no unanimity among the scholars about the definition of IDPs. Every scholar or an institution has its own way of perception of the definition of IDPs, and accordingly, the concept of IDPs has been discussed along the following lines. According to Janie Hampton, Editor of Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey, (1997: xvi)

Unlike refugees who cross international borders, those who stay within their own country must rely upon their own governments to uphold their civil and human rights. If the state chooses not to invite external assistance, then the international community has limited options to protect these people. In many countries it is the government or its military forces that have caused the displacement or prevent access to their citizens.

The definition for internally displaced people (IDPs) used by the United Nations follows:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of, or in order to avoid, in particular, the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

Although it is a very vague definition, it attempts to include all aspects of internal displacement. It assumes that the international aid community will become concerned, particularly where violations of human rights occur. Ironically, in practice, as per IDP: Global Survey (1997), sometimes the governments concerned, exaggerates a problem in order to secure more international aid.

Thus it is very difficult to define who are IDPs, because people are forced to flee from their homes because of either civil or international war (Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Israel, Palestine, Iran, Iraq and Africa as well as in Eastern Europe); natural or man-made disasters, (China Japan, Korea, Australia and some of the South-East Asian Countries); development like construction of dams or urban clearances (India, Bangladesh) and changes in the economy due to either industrialization or famine (Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Fiji). Although there are certain cases of

economic migrations for example, the continuous flow of Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh to India and the flow of Asian people in the United Kingdom or the United States of America would be good examples of this kind. However one cannot go on arguing the various reasons for internal displacement within a one nation and from one nation to another for the sake of economic, cultural and social security.

In view of this background, the proposed paper makes an attempt to study the causes and consequences of trauma of internally displaced Chakmas in Bangladesh. Hence this paper one deals with the brief historical background of Chakmas during the Pre-Bangladesh period, illustrating how they are different in all respects particularly race, language, culture, religion, from other local inhabitants in Bangladesh. It would also critically evaluate the various policies adopted by the Islamic Republic Government of Bangladesh in the post-1972 period, which caused internal displacement of Chakmas within Bangladesh and subsequently forcing them to take refuge in third countries. The paper also discusses the response of local people, various political parties and Governments of Bangladesh, India and towards Chakmas.

This paper examines the forceful eviction of Chakmas from Bangladesh and human rights violation in the post 1980s. It discusses the formation of *Shantibahini* and the reason for adoption of violent methods and also looks at the effectiveness of the CHT Peace Accord of 1997. It also deals with the constraints and limitations in providing protection to them while evaluating the human right violations of internally displaced Chakmas.

II

The CHT predominantly a land of some ethnic minorities of Chakma, Marma, Tipperas, Chak, Murung, Khumi, Lushai, Bowm and Pankho and formerly a part of East Pakistan (during the era of Pakistan) has become a part of Bangladesh after its liberation in 1971.

It covers approximately an area of 5,138 sq miles and is bounded on the north by Indian state of Tripura; on the south by Arakan Hills of Burma; on the east by Lushai Hills of

Mizoram and Arakan Hills of Burma and on the west by Chittagong District. The dense jungle areas of the CHT in the southeast of Bangladesh consist of a succession of hill ranges running north to south, somewhat diagonally and form the highest elevation of Bangladesh (highest peak Keokradong: 4,034 feet). The tracts are directly adjacent to the Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram and the Arakan Yoma Hills of Myanmar that flank it on the eastern side. The CHT, which is the single largest forest-clad area of Bangladesh, owes much of its economic value in current times to the forest conservancy plans undertaken by the British for their province of Bengal. To its commercial value, British administrators noticed that the introduction of timber varieties for industrial use was not an easy task in the malarial, dense jungles of the country. Thus, for practical purposes the British chose to involve the native tribal inhabitants in their plantation schemes. The Chakmas constituted the dominant group among the native tribal inhabitants. Besides teak, bamboo grew wild and in plenty. This facilitated the production of paper pulp. Thus, after the British left, the government of the erstwhile United Pakistan established a paper plant at Chandraghona, 26 miles from Chittagong as it was a valuable economic unit of the country's agrarian economy. Besides being well known for its timber varieties, it also contributes a large tonnage of cotton, rice, oil seeds, legumes, fruits, tea, paper pulp and fish.

Although the Karnafuli dam project was conceived as a multipurpose scheme as early as 1906 with the possibilities of having hydel power generation, the project received priority for developmental schemes only after partition in 1947. Because the river Karnafuli had its tributaries in the hilly areas and the Kab and Tulianpuri are its major tributaries, the catchment area above Rangamati spreads to 3,382 square miles. In addition to this, the annual rainfall in this area is said to vary from 100 to 200 inches, which ensures a perennial supply of water. Hence, due to various political reasons the newly-established East Pakistan Government had to shift the original location of the project further downstream to low elevations and taken up to the village of Kaptaimukh where the Karnafuli was 220 yards wide, 10 feet above sea level and meandered widely. An earth dam 100 yards long by 136 feet wide encompassed an area of 254 sq miles (Hutchinson: 1978: 3) As such the project not only generated hydro-electric power but also tensions

and discontentment among the local inhabitants. Change in the original location of the dam resulted in a major population displacement of both native tribals and settlers. Among these tribals who were already engaged in settled (plough) cultivation, the Chakma alone constituted 25 per cent. (Hutchinson: 3) Moreover they were not looked after by the government and without significant compensation particularly to them who were jhum cultivators. The problem was further aggravated as the native Chakmas being Buddhists, and the authorities/settlers, Muslims. Thus, there were tensions and disaffection among the various tribals of the region against the government. By 1963, the 120,000-kilowatt Karnafuli multipurpose project was almost completed and had a total catchment area of 253 sq miles. In the beginning, 50,000 acres of settled arable land, accounting for 40 percent of the District's total arable area was submerged. This affected around 18,000 families or approximately 100,000 persons who were uprooted from the District's capital of Rangamati and 125 adjacent villages. (Debbarma and George: 1993: 40) However, the government made some efforts to provide enough flat arable land to the uprooted people in lieu of the flat arable-land submerged but it was an impossible task. So the government took up certain measures on a priority basis providing fresh occupational avenues and income generating schemes. Despite these facts, the Chakmas could not live a regular life in their traditional way.

III

During the United Pakistan regime there was unrest especially among the Chakmas against the Commissioning of the Kaptai dam and the resultant displacement of a large section of the tribals. But these protests did not take the phase or form of militancy. On the other hand, the Chakma leaders participated in the elections and won a legislative seat from Chittagong Constituency in 1970, which indicated their interest in political participation. But the independent and sovereign Bangladesh on 16 December 1971 could not bring any ray of hope for the Chakmas due to certain vested interests of Chakma leaders. For instance, Raja Tridib Roy, Chief as well as symbol of integrity and cohesion of the Chakma tribe, was pro-Pakistani in his political outlook. When Bangladesh came

into being in 1971, he remained in and subsequently opted for Pakistan, leaving the Chakma tribe without a chief until 1978. (Syed Nazmul Islam: 1981: 1219)

Initially the CHT became very important for military operations because of *Mukti Bahini*'s (Liberation Forces) active involvement in CHT during the process of struggle for independence and the actual war between India and Pakistan. Suddenly, after the emergence of Bangladesh on 15 January 1972, the Chakma leader Manabendra Narayan Larma who was a member of the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly in 1970 and a very prominent figure in the politics of the CHT met Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and set forth four basic demands of the tribal people. These were:

- (1) Autonomy for the Chittagong Hill tracts, including its own legislature;
- (2) retention of Regulation 1900 in the Constitution of Bangladesh;
- (3) continuation of the tribal chiefs' offices ; and
- (4) a constitutional provision restricting the amendment of Regulation 1900 and imposition of a ban on the influx of the non-tribal people into CHT.(Syed Aziz-Al Ahsan : 1989:967)

In addition to this, he also demanded payment of compensation to tribal families uprooted by Kaptai dam and the fixation of the water level of the dam at 90 feet. (Talukdar: 1994:72) 'Rejecting these demands, Mujib advised the disappointed tribal leaders to forget their ethnic identities and merge with greater "Bengali" nationalism'. The 1972 Constitution made no provision for a special status for the CHT' (Syed and Chakma: 1989:967) This led to formation of regional political party called as the PCJSS (*Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samghati Samiti*), meaning the United People's Party of Chittagong Hill Tracts by M.N. Larma.

According to Debbarma and George, there are numerous socio-economic problems that became politicized and ultimately led to the Chakma unrest in the CHT of Bangladesh.

To quote him:

According to the constitution of 1972, all land was placed under a common land law which recognized a citizen's fundamental right of free movement and settlement within all parts of the country's boundary. Internal migration among the landless peasantry has been a common or usual phenomenon in Bangladesh. Poverty and unemployment has compelled the landless peasantry in the country to move from place to place in search of seasonal harvesting and employment. Added to these natural calamities such as cyclones, floods and tidal waves have rendered millions homeless from time to time and forced them to move to safer and higher places. (Debbarma and George: 42)

By 1973 this factor compelled the Government of Bangladesh to take up the policy of settling the landless peasantry from such parts of Bangladesh to the sparsely-populated regions of the CHT and its adjacent areas where land was available. By 1974, the resettlement of the peasants from the plains became substantial and failed to organize and resist against the tribals. As a result, the tribals gradually became alienated, and decided to form an organization known as *The Shanti Bahini* (Peace Force) as the rebel wing of the *Jana Samhati Samiti* (JSS) to protect their interests.

The assassination of Sheikh Mujib on 15 August 1975 by the army ushered in a period of greater turmoil and uncertainty. Obviously, in the prevalent conditions the political climate in the CHT area could not improve, on the contrary it worsened. The constant suspicion between the settlers and the Chakma tribal population was also augmented.

In regard to the CHT, the settlement policy continued by President Zia-ur Rehman with the objective of exploiting the vast economic potential of the CHT and the Chittagong Division. Industrial Development schemes were planned and he set up the Export Processing Zone in Chittagong, which brought direct under the control of President's office. The moment Government realized that the situation in the CHT region had deteriorated, it adopted stern measures, not only military measures but also shifting of the Bengali Muslim population and settling them in the CHT region. The CHT was also swamped over by the country's military and parliamentary forces whose numbers are given hereunder.

	Combat Force	Unit
1.	Bangladesh Army	80,000 Men
2.	Bangladesh Rifles	25,000 "
3.	Armed Police	10,000 "
4.	Ansara (Islamic Guards)	5,000 "
5.	Combatant Force at Guerrilla Training Centre	1,800 "
	Total	121,800 Men

(Source: cited in Debbarma and George: 44)

As the Chakmas realized the support from Indian media highlighting the plight of Chakma refugee families facing the ‘atrocities’ of the Bangladesh army because of the former’s resistance against ‘settler’s, they decided to resist the alleged atrocities perpetrated by the Bangladesh Government to disseminate the Chakma tribal population and to demand complete autonomy with separate legislature for the CHT region. Around the same time the simmering hostility between India and the Bangladesh governments was further accentuated by the North-East Indian tribals organizing themselves into rebel groups and taking shelter in CHT region and the Chakma refugees from these areas in turn being sheltered in the Indian State of Tripura. In fact, the first notable incident in the CHT region came to the force in 1977 when the Chakma exodus took place into the Indian State of Tripura. Thus, as a result of the government’s resettlement policies in the CHT, by early 1980s the number of migrant people mostly Bengali Muslims who had settled in the three Districts of CHT rose to 45 per cent of the total population of CHT which was about 1.2 million. On the other hand, the Buddhist Chakma tribal population, which consisted of 55 per cent, did not increase much. The figures of settlers given in one Indian source under the various governments are as follows:

	Number of Muslims Settled in CHT
Sheikh Mujib’s Government (16 December 1971 – 15 August 1975)	50,000
Zia-ur Rehman’s Government (November 1975 – May 1981)	150,000
Lt. Gen. Ershad’s Government (24 March 1982 onwards)	241,000
Total	----- 441,000 -----

(Source: cited in Debbarma and George: 46)

IV

After the assassination of President Zia-ur Rehman on 30 May 1981, Bangladesh experienced political unrest until Lt. General H.M. Ershad, Chief of Staff, took over control of the Government in a swift bloodless coup on 24 March 1982. The year 1982 was very bleak for *Jana Samhati Samiti* (JSS) as members of *Shanti Bahini* lost faith in the party leadership. The internal split between the two resulted in the killing of all thirty members of the *Shanti Bahini* and injuring twenty-two others. Manabendra Narayan Larma, the leader of *Shanti Bahini* was also killed on 10 November 1983. After his death his younger brother Jyotindra Narayan Larma alleged as pro-Chinese and the other by Priti Kumar Chakma known as pro-Indian led the faction loyal to Manabendra Narayan Larma. (Shikha Bose: 1996: 109)

During this entire period, the situation in the CHT region worsened. Moreover the Chakmas might have realized that it would be very difficult to survive in CHT under the constant threat of Bangladesh military and persecution. To quote (Syed and Chakma: 970)

The relatively small tribal population in the country and the large Bengali settlements in tribal areas also have made the more pragmatic among the insurgents realize it would be almost impossible to force the government to surrender.

As a result many of the Chakmas began to migrate to the bordering states of India as refugees. According to Brigadier Sailo, the then Chief Minister of Mizoram, about 40,000 Chakmas had entered Mizoram in 1983 and in April-May 1986 about 50,000 Chakma refugees entered the Indian state of Tripura and these refugees encamped in the south district of the state in five refugee camps situated at Kathalchhari, Karbook, Pancharampara, Silachhari and Takumbari. (Debbarma and George: 50)

The trauma of Chakmas from internally displaced people to refugees in India was not highlighted or publicized till almost 11 May 1986 especially their migration from the CHT into the Indian State of Tripura as an International Committee of investigation on violence of human rights in CHT submitted a paper at its conference held at Amsterdam.

Their existence in India put them into a predicament of whether they were Indian nationals or refugees. At the beginning a similar feature of survival amalgamated these Chakma refugees in to northeastern states of India. For instance, Chakmas also practise *jhum* cultivation or shifting cultivation for their livelihood like the other tribes of North East India, in which paddy and vegetables are grown. But later on in March 1989, Bangladesh Parliament (*Jatiya Sansad*) passed four bills of Hill District Council namely, (*Rangamati Parbatyia Sthaniya Sarkar Parishad; Khaagarachari Parbatyia Sthaniya Sarkar Parishad; Bandarban Parbatyia Sthaniya Sarkar Parishad and Parbatyia Zilla Special Bill*) aimed at resolving more than twenty years old long-standing conflict. According to this bill the Bangladesh Government granted autonomy to the above-mentioned three areas only while undermining the other ethnic minorities support for *Shanti Bahini* in the CHT. During this period although hundreds of followers of *Shanti Bahini* surrendered but the movement for Regional Autonomy all over the CHT and insurgency did not stop. This led to frustrating the efforts of Bangladesh government in conducting elections in the CHT. So the Bangladesh Security forces raised arms against these internally displaced and compelled more than 4500 Chakma tribals to cross over into Indian state of Tripura. (Talukdar: 87) By 24 May 1989 the total number of Chakama refugees reached around 54000 and they were sheltered at *Jatanbari* and *Takumbarni*, the biggest refugee camps in Tripura.

In the mean time however, in the newspapers of eastern India, especially the Calcutta-based *The Statesman* regularly highlighted the issue of the plight of Chakma refugees, ups and downs in the Indo-Bangladesh relations over the Chakma issue and violation of human rights by the Bangladesh government. Although the Indian public in general hardly knows the history of Chakmas or anything about their culture Chakmas were shown extreme sympathy and a strong Indian public opinion was formed to protect them from their miseries. As a result in November 1990, the CHT Commission an independent body was permitted by the Bangladesh government to visit CHT and Chakma refugee camps in Tripura on a fact-finding mission of violation of human rights.

In its report titled Life Not Ours, published in 1991 the Commission concludes that:

The Commission found extensive and continuing violations of human rights. It concludes that there had been massive illegality in land matters in the CHT, under Bangladesh law. The commission concludes that the present system of District councils is inadequate as a system of autonomy for territorial cultural minority. Remedying these problem will not be easy and, necessarily, will take some time. (Cited in Talukdar: 88-89)

Thus, in the early nineties, both the Government of India and Government of Bangladesh during Begum Khaleda Zia's period took initiatives to discuss the problems of the return of Chakma refugees and decided to set up a joint task force headed by the two respective Home Secretaries for the early repatriation of these refugees living in the camps of south Tripura. According to S. Bhattacharya:

Here two factors must have played a vital role: first, the ever increasing financial burden for India never accepted any outside help by Indian or foreign NGOs etc., and second, the realization of the truth that Bangladesh also wanted an early solution to the problem. To give a concrete shape to these friendly gestures 400 families comprising 2,500 persons were sent back. This process ended on 22 February 1994. Upendra Lal Chakma, the President of the Hill Chittagong Refugee Welfare Association, wanted that refugee repatriation should not be hurried upon and that an absolute peaceful situation should prevail in the CHT. (S. Bhattacharya: 2001: 322).

According to Sanjoy Hazarika, the Chakmas were internally displaced in four groups.

Firstly; internal displaced within CHT, secondly; another 80,000 Chakmas are to be found concentrated in the southwest of Mizoram, the Indian state that is sandwiched between Burma and the CHT, thirdly; the recent arrivals located in Tripura are 50,000 in numbers, fourthly; group of Chakma consists of those displaced by the Kaptai Dam reservoir in 1964, who were forced to fend for themselves when the erstwhile government of East Pakistan failed to pay compensation. About 30,000 of these Chakma "development refugees" ended up in the Cachar and Lushai hills (which later became the Mizo Hills, and then the state of Mizoram). At least 20,000 more left for the Arakan hills in Burma, where they are now settled. (Sanjoy Hazarika: 2002: 3)

In addition to this, there were systematic attempts by All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) of Arunachal Pradesh to drive out the Kaptai Dam (1957-62) victims settled in Arunachal Pradesh. Despite the Indian Supreme Court directives against the anti-Chakma drive, (B.S.Chimni: 2000: 505-514) the Arunachali leaders and agitators continued their campaign to repatriate these refugees. (USCR: Bangladesh: 2000)

Despite the goodwill and cooperation of both the governments the process of repatriation in 1995 and 1996 could only be characterized as slowly moving, but it took a new turn when Sheikh Hasina came to power. It became also easier for her to take decisions because the Awami League won all the three seats from CHT. On 23 June 1996, the Awami League under Sheikh Hasina's leadership set up a new government. This inaugurated an aura in India-Bangladesh relations, especially or at least so for the CHT is concerned. Negotiations between the National Committee on CHT and *Parbatya Chattragram Jana Samhati Samiti* (PCJSS) continued throughout the period and finally an historic CHT peace accord was signed on 2 December 1997 with a view to establishing peace, stability and development in the region. This accord signed by Abul Hasnat Abdullah and Jyotirindra Boddhipriya Larma, The issue of repatriation of Tripura refugees figured prominently. It was stated that all the refugees stranded in south Tripura camps would be taken back to their homes and would be given the necessary help and incentives for starting their new lives. Moreover the accord was expected to empower the indigenous people in certain areas by devolution of power through the following measures:

1. Establishment of a Ministry of CHT Affairs, which is to be headed by one indigenous person from CHT.
 2. Creation of Regional Council for the entire CHT with a two-thirds majority of indigenous people in representation.
 3. Widening the areas of functioning of already existing Hill District Councils by adding new subjects under its jurisdiction.
 4. Creation of an independent Land Commission to resolve the dispute over land rights acting as tribunal for hearing the complaints and dispossession of lands.
 5. Withdrawal of military camps from the CHT region except the cantonments.
- (Mrinal Kanti Chakma : 2001: 356)

Five years have passed since the accord was signed between the government and the JSS but the future of the accord is uncertain as the promises given by the Bangladesh government have not been fulfilled.

In fact, from the very outset, mistrust plagued the JSS leadership. J.B. Larma's relationship with the government on the issue of Regional Council's leadership and its composition was under strain. Although the Regional Council is viewed as the key body

for implementation of peace accord it took the JSS almost two year to accept its chairmanship. (Mrinal Kanti Chakma : 356)

One could see the fate of Chakma refugees in the post- 1997 years as the Peace Accord became more prone to the violation of human rights. They were repatriated forcefully from Indian territories and when they went back to their home in CHT, they found their homes had disappeared. They were compelled to live in hutment areas and temporary transit houses provided by the government; even the agricultural land owned by them was already occupied by the Bengali Muslims settlers with the support of local administration and military officials. In contrast to this, the state administration considered this 1997 accord to be responsible for the main success of the return of some 65,000 refugees who fled their homes in CHT and had taken shelter in Tripura in 1986 and deposition of arms and ammunition by the armed cadres of the JSS. On top of this, from the official point of view the rehabilitation of the returnee refugees according to the accord is almost complete, rations are still being given despite expiry of the stipulated period of one year and they are being helped with cash and kind for resettlement. (M.K. Chakma: 356) But in reality, USCR: Country Reports: Bangladesh 2000, reported the facts revealed by the *UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations*.

The situation of more than 60,000 Chakmas and other Jummas who became internally displaced during the last three decades also remained unresolved at the year's end. Many still did not have access to land, education, and other social services. Most of these displaced people are now living in remote and inhospitable hill and forest areas without a decent livelihood and with no access to health care facilities.

While assessing the post-repatriation situation in CHT by the returnee refugees it has been observed that according to a press release issued by the *Returnee Jumma Refugee Welfare Association (RJRWA)* on 25 July 1999 at Khagrachari,

40 villages of the refugees and the lands of 3,055 families are still under the occupation of the settlers and military authority. The RJRWA started a lawsuit in the Dhaka High Court against the government of Bangladesh for failing to fulfill its written agreement with them that was signed on 9 March 1997 at Agartala, Tripura. They further complained that the settlers who had forcibly occupied their houses and lands had been receiving rations and other facilities from the various government-run programmes since the date of their settlement in 1979 under the government-sponsored transmigration programme. It had been also reported that the settlers are also receiving support from many Islamic NGOs operating in the CHT region. (Cited in M.K. Chakma: 357-58)

However as a part of the rehabilitation work of the repatriated *Jumma* refugees and the internally displaced people of CHT, a nine-member Task Force Committee was formed by Representatives from JSS, RJRWA, Members of the three Hill District Councils, Member of the Parliament from the CHT region, representative of the twenty-fourth Infantry Division of the Bangladesh Army and Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Division. There were reports of serious controversy over the identification of internally displaced persons among the members of the Task Force Committee. Ironically, it was reported that the ruling party members of parliament from CHT and some other members of the committee wanted to include the non-indigenous people of the settlers' families in the internally displaced people's list as they were also displaced because of prevailing disturbed situations. The logic behind this could be that due to repatriation of Chakma refugees in CHT, the Bengali Muslim settlers were also displaced. But, the JSS and RJRWA members opposed this stance and held that it went against the terms and spirit of the accord. The committee could not reach any decision on the issue even after several meetings being held, which ultimately led to a stalemate situation with regard to rehabilitation activities of the repatriated refugees and the internally displaced people. The government unilaterally made a list of the internally displaced people that shows now that there are at least 1,28,364 internally displaced families in the CHT of which 90,208 families are 'tribal' and 38,156 are 'non-tribal'. (M.K. Chakma: 358)

VI

It is said that according to the accord a Land Commission was to be instituted to settle down the disputes regarding the land and cases between the indigenous people and the settlers in CHT. But in practice nothing has happened, as it is yet to be made functional. A report of *Daily Star*, English daily from Dhaka, reveals that the Land Commission Bill is on its way to be passed in the parliament of Bangladesh after three years of signing of the accord. According to M.K. Chakma who is the victim of this internal displacement and also an activist:

Considering the huge number of cases and resource constraints of the expected Land Commission it is hard to believe that it will be able to resolve the disputes or provide social justice to the dispossessed indigenous people in an effective and speedy manner.

Some observers believe that the top-to-down adjudication of land disputes will merely justify the claims of the influential people in rural areas at the expense of the powerless poor. (M.K.Chakma: 358)

According to the accord, the implementation of withdrawal of Army camps from the CHT is yet to begin in a true sense, because according to the government report, only 62 out of 500 camps have been withdrawn till May 2000. The existence of more than 100 Bangladesh Rifles paramilitary camps in CHT provides a feeling of constant threat and sense of insecurity among the returnee IDPs. Moreover, the accord is silent about the time frame of withdrawal of the military camps and perhaps that is yet another flaw in the accord. But one cannot ignore the fact that in the event of crisis the direct or indirect involvement of military forces can hamper the establishment of a democratic process not only in CHT but also over all in Bangladesh.

Moreover the internal strife and split in the indigenous movement of CHT could be self-suicidal if the egoistic attitudes and personal vested interests of the leaders dominate the cause autonomy of the CHT region. A section of youth supporters among the students and women's front in the bush war days are now demanding 'full autonomy' under the banner of a new party – United People's Democratic Front. Against this background the future of the accord hangs on balance. Thus continuation of escalation of low intensity conflict and terrorist activities or mass killings or that matter any violent method to achieve its objective means nothing except lengthening the chain of displacement, further bloodshed and immense human sufferings as well violating human rights on our own hands. To avoid this, there is a need for regeneration of all the positive forces from all sides and corners especially within and along with international sympathy.

Predicting something about the destiny of Chakmas as refugees or the internally displaced people is very difficult. It will not be easy for Bangladesh or for that matter, even for India, to cope with the repercussions, in case these Chakmas take arms or join hands with those who have faith in violence to resolve their problems of survival and security. Looking at present circumstances in CHT, Bangladesh and overall, at the problems of the Indian sub-continent especially when it is challenged by a chronic

disease like cross-border terrorism no one is secure and safe. Thus the peace and tranquility of the CHT region is equally vital for the peace security of other south Asian states and its people.

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Tittel: FROM INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT TO REFUGEES: THE
TRAUMA OF CHAKMAS IN BANGLADESH
Emne:
Forfatter: Prof. Rajesh Kharat
Nøkkelord:
Merknader:
Opprettelsesdato: 24.01.2003 15:06
Versjonsnummer: 2
Sist lagret: 24.01.2003 15:06
Sist lagret av: kjerlauk
Samlet redigeringstid: 8 minutter
Sist skrevet ut: 24.01.2003 15:06
Ved siste fullstendige utskrift
Antall sider: 18
Antall ord: 5 506 (ca.)
Antall tegn: 31 388 (ca.)