

# CHILDREN AND CONFLICT IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS, BANGLADESH



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**“Official attitudes and policies of governments toward tribal peoples have been basically uniform throughout the world over the past 150 years, and have been overwhelmingly disastrous for the tribal peoples and one-sidedly beneficial for industrial civilisation.”**

- Brodly, J H, Victims of Progress, California 1975

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***“Absolute Peace prevails in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The people living there are not only happy, but jubilant.***

***Life has returned to normal.”***

Statement of the Press Wing, Prime Minister’s Office, Government of Bangladesh, The Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Post Accord Situation, 1999.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADAB</b>	Association of Development Agencies, Bangladesh
<b>AL</b>	Awami League
<b>ANSAR</b>	Bangladesh Paramilitary Force
<b>BDR</b>	Bangladesh Rifles
<b>BNP</b>	Bangladesh National Party
<b>CERD</b>	Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination
<b>CHT</b>	Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh
<b>CHTDB</b>	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board
<b>CRC</b>	International Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>EIA</b>	Environmental Impact Analysis
<b>GoB</b>	Government of Bangladesh
<b>GOC</b>	General Officer in Command
<b>GoI</b>	Government of India
<b>GoP</b>	Government of Pakistan
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HWF</b>	Hill Women's Federation
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>JRWA</b>	Jumma Refugees Welfare Association
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NHRC</b>	National Human Rights Commission (India)
<b>PCJSS</b>	Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (the Tribal Political Party of the CHT)
<b>SB</b>	Shanti Bahini (Tribal Insurgent group)
<b>TAKA</b>	Bangladeshi currency
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UPDF</b>	United Peoples Democratic Front (Anti-Peace Accord)
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WFP</b>	United Nations World Food Programme

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

*Due to the wide variety of sources used in this report, the indigenous tribes of the CHT are variously referred to as “tribals”, “Jummas” and “hill people”.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This year, Bangladesh celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday as an independent nation state. In comparison with other countries in South Asia, it is still a relative newcomer, and yet the journey has been anything but smooth. For over 20 years, 10% of the entire country was effectively shut down as a bloody insurgency was fought by tribal groups from the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, who felt themselves to be severely threatened by the government's construction of a national, homogenous identity around Bengali Islamic values. 30,000 people lost their lives as the politics of ethnicity and its related issues of territoriality, religion and culture within a 'one-nation' context were played out among the thickly forested hills. Only recently was an apparent resolution reached, in the shape of a Peace Accord signed by both the Bangladeshi government and tribal leaders on December 2, 1997. Since then, the government has issued numerous assurances that "*Absolute peace prevails in the CHT*" and that "*the people living there are not only happy, but jubilant. Life has returned to normal.*"

This report sets out the refute these notions, not merely by examining the practical impotency of the Peace Accord itself, but also by showing how factors such as displacement, terrorism, communalism, militarisation, small arms and drugs have all continued to seriously destabilise the hill tracts. Even after apparent peace has been declared on paper, conflict still persists in various forms at the micro level: between January and June 2001 alone, 36 people were killed, 219 injured and 159 arrested in the region.<sup>1</sup> This report also seeks to highlight the Government of Bangladesh's continuing responsibilities towards the children of the Chittagong Hill Tracts as outlined in Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

*'State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote **physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration** of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation or abuse; torture, or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or **armed conflicts**. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the **health, self-respect and dignity** of the child.'*  
(emphasis added)

### *Understanding the Conflict*

Despite the concerted efforts of historians, politicians and human rights activists, the boundaries of the conflict that took place in the CHT remain unclear. Establishing exactly when and why the unrest began has been variously accorded to moments in the region's history as far apart as partition in 1947 and the formation of the Bangladeshi nation in 1972. Others maintain that it was the interim exploitation under Pakistani rule that planted the seeds of conflict. Within these claims lie wide-ranging interpretations as

to the nature of the struggle, for what at first appeared to be essentially a political movement for the autonomy and recognition of a minority group, over time the insurgency absorbed into its agenda issues and disputes connected to development, communalism, land rights, religious fundamentalism and near ethnic genocide. The conflict was also often scapegoated by the GoB for many of the teething troubles of the new Bangladeshi nation, and was imbued by nationalists with important implications regarding national pride, identity and loyalty. Many politicians took advantage of media interest in the conflict as a platform to advance their own unrelated ideas and prejudices, thereby retarding any real progress in resolving the issue.

### ***The Immediate Impact of Insurgency***

For what was essentially a low-intensity conflict, the insurgency in the CHT was surprisingly complex with far-reaching social, political and economic implications. The actual numbers of conflict-related deaths may have been relatively small, but the impact on the daily lives of CHT inhabitants (of whom there are just over one million) was huge. Throughout the 20+ years of fighting the region was effectively cut-off from the rest of Bangladesh and indeed the world, following an information blackout imposed by the GOB. Approximately one-third of all military troops in Bangladesh were stationed in the CHT to protect the 400,000 Bengali settlers who had been transferred to the region, and to enforce counter-insurgency measures, which amounted in practice to widespread human rights violations and atrocities against the indigenous tribal groups. Freedom of movement was heavily restricted across the 3 districts, and the disruption to daily routines such as tending fields or going to school was lengthy and acute.

In the mid-1980s, the threat to their security from massacres, rape and persecution was enough to force around 80,000 tribal refugees into the neighbouring Indian state of Tripura. The camps were squalid and poorly maintained, yet the majority of refugees remained there for over a decade, until the Peace Accord eventually facilitated their return in 1998. This refugee population posed a huge embarrassment to the GoB, and transformed the conflict from an ‘internal problem’ to an international concern.

### ***The Peace Accord***

The confusion surrounding the nature of the conflict as discussed earlier has also complicated contemporary understandings of the CHT as a ‘post-conflict’ area, for although a Peace Accord was signed on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1997, the region is far from enjoying the ‘absolute peace’ that the GoB assert in their official statements. The agreement may have put an end to the organised armed resistance of the tribal Shanti Bahini fighters, but it has in many ways failed to address or improve the broader social injustices and inequalities that gave impetus to the conflict and continue to provoke tension. Implementation of the provisions enshrined within the Accord has been painfully slow, prompting the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, Abdelfattah Amor, to concede after a visit to the region in May 2000 that he had “*doubts as to whether the Government genuinely desired to make the Accord succeed.*”

In the opinion of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, who have conducted formal assessments of the region every 5 years from 1991,

*“...the Peace Accord has turned out to be no guarantee of lasting peace in the CHT. On the contrary, it has become a new source of conflict and instability.”* <sup>ii</sup>

Despite this assertion, the existence of the Accord alone appears to have been enough to propagate the international misconception that the rights of the tribal minority groups are now secure, and that peace once again reigns in the CHT.

### ***Why is the Protection of Children still a concern?***

Just as the problems of 20+ years of insurgency do not suddenly end with an agreement written on paper, child protection issues in the CHT are still very much a cause for concern, for in many ways their lives and futures were the most significantly disrupted. Many were orphaned in numerous village massacres or separated from their families in the chaos of escape. Thousands spent their most formative years of childhood in impoverished refugee camps or internally displaced within inhospitable jungles under a constant threat to their safety. Young tribal girls were specifically targeted by the military for rape and sexual harassment as part of an ethnic cleansing tactic not dissimilar to that effected by Serbian forces in Kosovo, while boys as young as 14 were enlisted into the service of the insurgent groups. Even before taking into account the continuing inter-ethnic violence, political terrorism and widespread displacement that persist in the wake of the Peace Accord, these children are in no way out of danger.

Contemporary studies have shown that tribal children in Bangladesh continue to experience higher incidences of poverty, illiteracy, drop-out rates and disease than the national average – partly because of the lengthy impediment to regional development that the conflict posed.<sup>iii</sup> Against this general backdrop of impoverishment, the post-conflict period has also spawned a number of other risks affecting the well-being of children in the CHT. Although the risk of physical injury from open fighting may have dropped dramatically, there still remain at least eight significant threats to child protection, many of which are closely inter-linked:

#### **1) Displacement**

On May 15, 2000, a government Task Force on Refugees in the CHT announced its official estimate that 128,364 families (approx. 600,000 individuals) were internally displaced within the CHT without proper service provision or security. This group includes all those who stayed within Bangladeshi borders during the conflict, as well as hundreds of returnee refugee families who have been unable to reclaim their original land due to confusion over title deeds and the authenticity of claims made by Bengali settlers who took over the land in their absence. The actual number of IDPs is also likely to be much higher than the official estimate, which only includes those displaced between August 1975 and August 1992.

## **2) Communalism**

The influx of 400,000+ Bengali settlers into the CHT between 1980-84 created an acute competition for resources, and posed a serious threat to the cultural identity of the tribal minorities. Using their experience of the plain land market economy, the Bengalis were quickly able to monopolise all of the commercial, administrative and political power structures in the CHT, and steered the tribal groups into a position of reluctant dependency. Discriminatory practices in areas such as employment have also hindered the social and economic advance of tribals, who are already struggling to recover from the impoverishment of the conflict. This has led to a highly volatile relationship between the two groups, where the smallest incident quickly snowballs into communal violence, house-burning and beatings.

## **3) Militarisation**

At the height of the conflict, approximately one-third of all military troops in Bangladesh were stationed in the CHT. Although the GoB has since withdrawn a number of camps following the Peace Accord, the military presence is still massive, and acts as both a permanent reminder of past abuses and a contemporary intimidatory presence ready for active deployment at any time. A large amount of land that was to be returned to refugees is still occupied for military purposes, and it is believed by many that the military are to some extent secretly encouraging unrest in the region to justify their continued presence.

## **4) Small Arms and Drug Abuse**

Sandwiched between the ‘Golden Triangle’ and the ‘Golden Crescent’ (the largest produced of drugs and the largest repository of small arms and light weapons respectively), Bangladesh finds itself at the receiving end of both these phenomena without being the primary supplier or user of either. Access to drugs and small arms has become increasingly easy in the CHT, not least because large amounts of both pass through the region to the border areas of Burma and northeast India – areas infested with protracted active insurgency. This has led to a substantial rise in inter-personal violence and lawlessness in the CHT, particularly among the dissatisfied tribal youth. Many were forced to forgo their education through the heavy restrictions on movement during the conflict or as refugees in India, and unable to secure jobs they are now turning to other unlawful means to secure an income.

## **5) Education**

Tribal children face a number of problems regarding education in the CHT. Those in their late teens today are despondent as their education and vocational development were either sacrificed altogether or severely disrupted by the conflict, making it difficult for them to compete for jobs. At the other end of the scale, their younger siblings just beginning their education have to struggle with irrelevant and heavily-biased curricula that propagate national Islamic models at the expense of their own minority cultures. While the Peace Accord made specific provision for the introduction of mother tongues

in the CHT region, the medium of instruction across all levels continues to be Bangla, forcing tribal children to learn in an unfamiliar tongue.

## **6) Human Rights Abuses**

Human rights abuses – particularly rape and sexual harassment - continue to occur with apparent impunity in the CHT, and with no indigenous representation in the security forces, many tribals believe that cultural bias will continue to take precedence over justice. The difficult terrain and isolation of many tribal communities also makes it difficult to report - let alone prove - incidents of assault or abuse. In many cases, the perpetrator of the crime belongs to the very group who are assigned to keep the peace, which is yet another factor in further discouraging people from making a statement.

## **7) Inter-tribal Tension**

The Chakma tribe makes up around 50% of the entire tribal population in the CHT, and have from the very beginning dominated the struggle for recognition and international support. Their attempt to unify the tribal groups under the banner of a ‘Jumma nation’ during the conflict was not well-received by the smaller groups, who saw it as perpetuating a Chakma hegemony and tribal hierarchy. As the most visible of the 13 tribes, Chakmas are also the most frequently targeted beneficiaries of development projects, and their status is often misconceived to be representative of all tribes in the region. The smaller groups (who are located in the most remote reaches of the CHT) are actually the ones in greater need, as their ‘invisibility’ renders them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

## **8) Ill-Conceived Development**

Development strategies in the region have so far failed to actively involve the tribal population at any stage, and have effectively ignored the long-term implications of their programmes on the environment and local livelihoods. They tend to focus on immediate gain, and prefer to recruit Bengalis rather than expend the effort to train up tribal workers. This has led to tribals being effectively sidelined in their own development, and if anything such measures have simply contributed further to the widening socio-economic divide between the two ethnic groups.

### ***What does this Assessment aim to achieve?***

PART ONE – “Pre-Conflict”, investigates the historical background to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and gives an overview of the **social, political and economic factors** that gave rise to the conflict and that prompted the once-peaceful tribal groups to take up arms. These include the **denial of constitutional recognition** and protection for ethnic minorities, **ill-conceived development** and resource exploitation, and the massive **population transfer** of government-sponsored Bengali settlers into the region.

PART TWO – “The Insurgency”, then examines the impacts of the fighting on the local inhabitants, firstly in terms of the mezo-level structures of **family and community**, and

secondly with a view to establishing the **physical** and **psychological** effects on **children** in particular.

PART THREE – “A Questionable Peace”, finally looks at how the 1997 **Peace Accord** has affected the region and reviews the **political violence** that has erupted around it. Issues of continuing concern for protection for children are then examined, beginning with an analysis of the current situation for the 600,000+ people still **displaced** by the conflict, and their struggle to reclaim the land they fled as **refugees/IDPs**. A discussion of **communalism** in the region then follows, with particular attention on how this ethnic tension is affecting both tribal and Bengali children growing up in the CHT today. The continued **military presence** in the region is then considered, followed by a review of the cultural bias of curricula and teaching in the **education** currently offered to tribal children. Correlations between this and the increasing problem of unemployment, **small arms, drug abuse** and general **lawlessness** among tribal adolescents will then conclude the report.

### *Information Sources, Limitations and Constraints*

Conducting research in the CHT entailed numerous empirical and conceptual problems due to the political sensitivity of the area and the complicated mesh of vested interests and personal agendas of those involved. For a start, access to outlying villages and rural communities is made particularly difficult not merely by the hilly terrain and lack of infrastructure, but also by the continued heavy militarisation of the area and the necessity of permits and ‘protective’ escorts. Attempting an interview with a tribal villager in the presence of numerous security and government personnel was practically impossible, and intimidation and/or censorship evidently continues to play a key role in the information that is disseminated from such sources within the region. For these reasons, many people were simply unwilling to talk, or chose to give only the most perfunctory answers.

Secondly, there are still many areas designated by the military as ‘unsafe’ or ‘too volatile’. These are the areas where anti-Peace Accord activists base themselves, or where the ease of access to small arms has led to a general state of lawlessness. These were the areas of direct relevance to this report, yet were the very locations I was immediately denied access.

A number of conceptual limitations also arose during the literature survey that forms part of the basis of this report. Firstly, the evident (and widely accepted) bias of newspapers and official sources makes it very difficult to obtain objective analysis or detail. The Bangladeshi press is “*free but not fair... every newspaper is for or against one or other political party, and actively involved in jockeying for power.*”<sup>iv</sup> State advertising is a major source of revenue for Bangladeshi papers and periodicals, and the government has been known to withhold advertising and newsprint from publications it deems anti-government, causing many papers to exercise self-censorship. Radio and television stations are also owned and controlled by the government, which results in reportage heavily biased in its favour.

A different kind of conceptual problem lies in the lack of accurate anthropological knowledge of the different tribal groups in the CHT, and in particular those communities with one or more names. The labels used by Bengalis, westerners and the ethnic groups themselves are often different, which has led to erroneous recording of the same ethnic group as separate peoples.

- e.g. Tribal name = Marma  
 Bengali name = Mog/Mogh (pejorative)  
 Other names = Mag, Mug (depending on English spelling)  
 The same people are also known as Rakhaine in Patuakhali area<sup>v</sup>

This then calls into question the accuracy of the figures collected as part of the most recent census in 1991, which form the statistical basis of the vast majority of reports analysing demography in the CHT. Huge discrepancies have been found between the census quotas and those of private researchers, an example of which is the Garo ethnic group in the Madhupur National Park area just north of Dhaka. According to the 1991 census, the population of this group was recorded as 2,112 persons. A year later a Ph.D. Dissertation estimated the same Garo population to be in the region of 25,000, based on a sample survey of 10 villages out of 30 in the area.<sup>vi</sup> This discrepancy therefore suggests that there is a high level of error in statistical research and/or training as regards ethnic minorities, and this is one area that will need much greater attention if the true extent of impacts of conflict on children in the CHT is to be realised.

Finally, there also exists a huge bias towards the tribal people in the literature on the conflict. While they were undeniably the target of most human rights abuses during the insurgency, it must also be remembered that the tribals had their own armed faction – the Shanti Bahini – which also carried out violent attacks, albeit far less frequently or severely. That the Bengali settlers also suffered to some degree is rarely accounted for in the literature, mainly because of feelings that even acknowledging them in some way equates to justifying their presence. Sensitivity surrounding settlers rights reaches far into the political sphere as well, as was recently demonstrated at a meeting of the Task Force on Refugees in the CHT in May 2000, when representatives of the PCJSS and the Jumma Refugee Welfare Association (JRWA) refused to attend because they refuse to endorse the inclusion of ‘non-tribals’ within the target IDP population.<sup>vii</sup> It is these kind of problems that further contribute to communal violence between the two ethnic groups, and that impede the realisation of any real progress on the road to lasting peace.



# Part One:



# Pre-Conflict

## REGIONAL BACKGROUND

### *The Land*

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are located in the extreme southeast part of Bangladesh and comprise the three administrative districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. It comprises a total of 13,245 sq. kilometres (about 9% of the total area of Bangladesh) and is topographically completely different to plain land Bangladesh, being instead “*a tangled mass of hill, ravine and cliff covered with dense trees, bush and creeper jungle.*”<sup>viii</sup>



**Figure 3. Typical hilly terrain in the Chittagong Hill Tracts**

Between 1964-66, a Canadian Forestry company carried out an in-depth analysis of the soil fertility of the CHT to determine the most suitable methods of agricultural development. According to their report, the soils were generally unsuitable for arable crops due to their strong acidic character, and would require relatively heavy use of fertilizers for sustained crop production. They then calculated that the ratio of arable land to people was 0.10 acres (3.2% of the total area of 3285 thousand acres with a population of 1.041 million), compared to 0.20 acres for Bangladesh as a whole.<sup>ix</sup> This is significant in that it disproves the widely-held belief that there is an abundance of land available in the CHT – an argument used by the GoB to justify the forthcoming population transfer.

### The People

According to the 1991 Bangladeshi census, the ethnic inhabitants of the CHT are divided into more than a dozen different tribes (see Table 1), which are strikingly different to their Bengali neighbours in many ways. Physically, most tribes originate from the Mongloid/Arakanese races of Southeast Asia, and subsequently enjoy their own languages, written scripts, organized religions and defined cultural practices distinct to those of Islamic Bengalis.



**Figure 4. Marma woman and child, Khagrachari, CHT**

Of these different tribes, the Chakma (Buddhist) are the largest, and constitute just under 50% of the total ethnic population. They are mainly concentrated in the central Rangamati district and parts of northern Khagrachari. Next in size are the Marma (also Buddhist), who are almost evenly distributed in all three districts. The last major group are the Tripura (Hindus, with some Christians), who are concentrated in Khagrachari district, with most of their population actually living across the border in the Indian state of Tripura. The majority of the smaller groups are concentrated in the southern Bandarban district.

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Rangamati</b>	<b>Bandarban</b>	<b>Khagrachari</b>	<b>CHT Total</b>
Chakma	27824	831	15544	44199 (46.19%)
Marma	7774	11755	8357	27885 (29.14%)
Tripura	1133	1690	9629	12452 (13.01%)
Murang	9	4225	9	4243 (4.43%)
Tanchaynga	2647	1061	-	3708 (3.87%)
Bawm	96	1253	-	1349 (1.41%)
Pankue/Panko	570	18	-	588 (0.61%)
Chak	66	306	-	372 (0.39%)
Khyang	102	265	-	367 (0.38%)
Khumi	16	222	-	238 (0.25%)
Lushai	83	41	-	124 (0.13%)
Mroo/Mru	18	-	-	18 (0.018%)
Rakhain	15	-	-	15 (0.015%)
Others	34	37	69	140 (0.15%)
<b>All</b>	<b>40387</b>	<b>21704</b>	<b>33608</b>	<b>95699</b>

**Table 1. Distribution of Tribal Households by Ethnic Group in CHT, 1991<sup>x</sup>**

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of total

Because of the Chakma dominance, all the tribes are usually lumped together under a generalised category of ‘hill people’, ‘Chakmas’ or ‘tribals’. However, this ignores the astonishing diversity between the groups, as Brauns discovered in his anthropological survey of the CHT in 1990:

*“If there is anywhere on earth where one can find within an area of a few square miles several groups exhibiting distinctly different cultures, then it is in certain regions of the southern Chittagong Hill Tracts. Here within one and the same mouza [group of villages], one may find four groups speaking completely different languages, building different types of houses, wearing different clothing and following different customs and different religions.”<sup>xi</sup>*

Ignoring these very striking differences also risks aggravating inter-tribal tensions concerning Chakma hegemony and hierarchy, discussed later.

## Regional History

It was partly as a result of this uniquely inhospitable terrain and that the region managed to remain relatively segregated (politically, socially and economically) from the rest of the country for so long. However, as the CHT is flanked by the Chittagong and Cox's Bazar plains to the west, the Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram to the north and east, and the Arakan region of Burma to the south, it has long held an important strategic significance. Following the annexation of the region to the British province of Bengal in 1860, it was administered under a succession of special laws and regulations, which allowed the inhabitants to continue their lives in relative autonomy. Entry without permission was prohibited, and provisions were made restricting the possession of land and allowing for the expulsion of non-tribals.<sup>xii</sup> Although this gave them a measure of protection against outside interference, it also left the tribals unprepared for the turmoil of partition.

It was during 1946-7, when negotiations began over the partition of India, that ownership of this unique territory first became a cause for conflict. With a Buddhist population of over 97%, it was thought by many – including the English Viceroy the Earl of Mountbatten – that the CHT should merge with India. Jawaharlal Nehru also stated his belief that the region should join India on 'cultural and religious grounds', but their efforts were overpowered by the leaders of the Pakistani movement, who successfully pleaded for the region as being the only source of hydro-electric power for the newly formed (Islamic) West Pakistan.<sup>xiii</sup>

This acquisition was a turning point in the history of the CHT, and the relative insularity of the inhabitants lives quickly deteriorated as the Pakistani government began settling Bengali Muslims from areas of East Pakistan into the region. Special status was withdrawn, and resource exploitation commenced on a huge scale with the construction in 1953 of what was to become the largest paper mill in Asia. Supported by foreign funds including a loan of US\$4.2 million from the World Bank, the mill at Chandraghona was to become a major cause of deforestation in the CHT and pollution in the Karnaphuli river. Nine years later saw the completion of another ill-conceived development project - the Kaptai dam, which alone submerged 40% of the arable land and displaced 100,000 tribal people. (For more on this, see Box 1).

## The War of Independence

Although most tribal CHT leaders remained non-committal during the 1971 War of Independence, some influential figures in the tribal population supported Pakistan while others were simply excluded from participation altogether. This created the perception that the tribal people were 'collaborators' with Pakistani soldiers and therefore against the independence of Bangladesh. By the time Sheikh Mujibur Rahman eventually became the first leader of the new Bangladeshi nation in 1972, relations between the two groups were therefore already strained through suspicions of disloyalty. Tribal appeals for constitutional recognition and greater regional autonomy were consequently rejected by the new government on the grounds that there could only be one 'nation' in Bangladesh, and during a tour of the CHT, Sheikh Mujibur officially declared that "*From today, there are no tribal sub-groups in Bangladesh; everyone is a Bengali*".

<b>CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT</b>
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### 1) Denial of Constitutional Recognition for Tribal Minorities

After the Liberation War of 1971, tribal groups were keen to secure some kind of protective autonomy or recognition of their distinct identity under the Constitution being drawn up for the new nation of Bangladesh, and presented to the committee responsible a 4-point manifesto that would safeguard their rights as a distinctive ethnic group. The main demands were as follows:

- ❑ Autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, together with provisions for a separate legislative body
- ❑ Retention of the provision of the 1900 Regulation in the Bangladesh Constitution which allowed a form of self government;
- ❑ The creation of the Office of traditional Tribal Chiefs;
- ❑ The imposition of a ban on the influx of non-tribals into the area.<sup>xiv</sup>

Their requests were, however, denied on the basis that this would threaten national unity, and to this day the recognition of separate ethnic identity has still not been addressed in the Constitution of Bangladesh, which merely grants some concessionary benefits to the hill people as a ‘backward class’.

Although there is relative homogeneity in terms of the use of Bangla as the national language, Islam as the majority religion and a population that is overwhelmingly Bengali, Bangladesh is actually a plural society with at least 27 different diverse ethnic and religious communities. However, neither the GoB nor the constitution make any effort to recognise this diversity, as was exemplified in 1992, when the GoB submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and stated that:

*“racially and culturally, Bangladesh has been a melting pot for thousands of years, and today has a completely homogenous population. There is no racial discrimination in Bangladesh, since there is but one mixed race and there are no traces of separate racial identity and prejudices.”<sup>xv</sup>*

These sentiments of intolerance have since manifest themselves in cases of forced conversion of religious minorities, particularly among the tribals of the CHT. As the US State Department’s Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Bangladesh reported in 1992, *“most proselytizing by Bengali citizens is directed towards such minority groups as Hindus and tribal peoples.”<sup>xvi</sup>*

The GoB has also expressed reservations to Article 14.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (which guarantees the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion) on the grounds that Islam does not permit conversion to other religions. According to their observations, *“a child, being immature by definition, is not in a position to consider such complex issues properly and is consequently unable to make a free and voluntary choice of its own.”<sup>xvii</sup>* This denies the basic right of religious freedom

to the children of all Christians, Hindus and Buddhists in Bangladesh, who together comprise no less than 12% of the population.<sup>xviii</sup> Children of the tribal minorities – who are nearly all Buddhist - have particularly suffered from this intolerance, and their plight was raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, who noted in its Concluding Observations to the Initial State Party Report of Bangladesh in 1997 that “*discriminatory attitudes towards... children belonging to tribal minorities [is] a matter of concern.*”<sup>xix</sup>

Even the Peace Accord drawn up in the same year fails to address this problem, and what little protection it does afford tribal heritage runs the risk of simply being ignored by subsequent governments, who are not bound to uphold its promises as it is not tied to the Constitution.

It was this kind of intolerance, so deeply embedded in the constitutional framework, that played a significant part in the creation of an armed insurgent movement in the CHT back in 1973. It also forms the basis of the tribal struggle for autonomy that continues today as headed by the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF), which suggests that unless the discriminatory nature of these legal considerations is redressed, the threat of rejuvenated conflict will continue to unsettle the region for some time to come.

## 2) Ill-conceived Development

Development, population and environment are inexorably linked, and the relationship between them is more pronounced in less-developed countries such as Bangladesh, particularly in a region like the CHT, which lags far behind the national average. Overall, Bangladesh is extremely poor in terms of resources – its main advantage is in having a very sizable human workforce, but this is useless without materials to exploit. This is why the CHT, an area of abundant timber, bamboo and other natural resources, is so important to the GoB. Yet hasty exploitation has in the past ignored the long term social, economic or emotional costs of development in favour of the short term material gains. A prime example of this is the construction of the Kaptai dam (or ‘Karnafuli Multipurpose Project’ to give it its full title) in the early 1960s, which submerged 40% of the total arable land in the CHT and displaced around 100,000 tribal people without adequate warning or compensation (for details, see Box 1).

Studies have since shown that the reckless construction of the Kaptai dam was not an exception to the rule, for none of the major CHT development programmes undertaken in the past bothered to incorporate an Environmental Impact Analysis into their planning stage. Very few - if any - of those who would be most affected were even consulted as to their needs and aspirations.<sup>xx</sup> After the signing of the Peace Accord, the GoB submitted a series of proposals for donor funding, amounting to some \$500 million. Most of this money is likely to be targeted for the improvement of infrastructure in the CHT, and while there is a definite need for improved transport and communication networks, there is equally significant concern among the tribals that this will simply increase infiltration of the remoter areas by settlers and facilitate further unchecked exploitation.

While deforestation is a familiar sight in India and other countries in the developing world, what makes the uncontrolled felling of trees in the CHT so ruinous is the vital life-sustaining role that this resource plays in the tribal agrarian-forest economy. The daily lives, rituals and cultural values of the tribal people are closely intertwined with their environment, which means that the exploitation of resources in the CHT is at the same time the exploitation and endangerment of a people. Over the last three decades, as a result of poorly-planned development initiatives and military clearing of forest for surveillance purposes during the conflict, the landscape of the CHT has been severely degraded. As Loffler commented:

*“The sight actually shocked me the most... The sight I refer to are bare hills devoid of any larger tree or any bamboo, so urgently needed in the local economy – quite a contrast to the luxuriant green cover I had seen thirty years ago. From places where the road crosses a hill, one can see that these bare hills stretch far into the interior.”*<sup>xxi</sup>

This was confirmed by my own visit to the CHT, where, aside from the naked hillsides cleared for military installations, I witnessed at least 7 or 8 truckloads of timber and teak leave Rangamati for Chittagong city everyday.



**Figure 5. Current Deforestation in Rangamati district**

There is also the problem that many of the areas approved for ‘development’ programmes such as rubber plantations are places where ownership of the land is as yet unresolved. As the Land Commission set up by the Peace Accord to deal with these matters has yet to start functioning effectively (even after 3 years), embarking on such programmes using disputed land only serves to accentuate existing tension and actively reduces the faith people place in the GoB and the Peace Accord. There needs therefore to

be absolute transparency in as many levels as possible of the development process, and for it to actively involve local people at every step if the chance of further unrest is to be minimised.

The economic benefits of this large-scale exploitation of resources have – for the tribals – been scarce to say the least. Out of a 6000-strong workforce at the Karnaphuli Paper Mill at Chandraghona (constructed in 1953), only 40 are tribal.<sup>xxii</sup> In fact, they are frequently blamed by the GoB and the national media as being the ‘true despoilers’ of the environment through their traditional ‘*jhum*’ (slash and burn) method of agriculture. They have consistently regarded *jhumming* as an ‘evil’ practice, and newspapers continue to use pictures of burning vegetation or tribal people with fuelwood on their heads as ‘representative of deforestation’. Philip Gain, who has studied environmental issues in the CHT for many years, believes there is a more sinister design behind such actions:

*“The primary factors behind condemnation of jhum cultivation... have been tax collection, facilitation of development projects (not necessarily in the interest of the local communities), Bengali settlement, hiding the ill effects of militarisation and human rights abuses, industrial plantation and so forth.”*<sup>xxiii</sup>

Having felt the effects of these ‘development’ projects, the tribals quickly realized the need to reorganise themselves effectively to secure outside help. A new middle class was born within tribal society (though mainly among the dominant Chakmas) who were educated enough or had access to the right facilities to begin articulating their struggle to the outside world. The surge in tribal literacy rates around this time was therefore a direct consequence of their political awakening, and in this way, ‘development’ was responsible for sowing the seeds – and capability – for the conflict that was to follow.

### 3) Population Transfer

Although the Pakistan government had begun to move Muslim families into the CHT in the early 1950s, the actual numbers remained relatively small. It was during the mid-1970s to late 1980s that saw the biggest relocation effort, when the GoB moved more than 400,000 Bengali settlers into the CHT. It did so on the basis that

*“the people of Bangladesh have to share the available resources in an equitable manner within severe economic constraints well known to the international community.”*<sup>xxiv</sup>

The scarcity of land is a common problem in Bangladesh irrespective of ethnicity. However, if ‘sharing available resources’ really was the GoB’s true intention in relocating Bengali settlers into the CHT, it seems strange that it did not sponsor similar population movements into other districts which had higher average sizes of farm holdings. For example, according to the 1981 census, Patuakhali district had an average land holding of 6.2 acres per family in comparison to 4.9 acres in the CHT.<sup>xxv</sup> The GoB was also aware of the study commissioned by the Government of Pakistan in 1967 which concluded that *“as far as its developed resources are concerned, the hill tracts are as*

*constrained as the most thickly populated district... The emptiness of the hill tracts is a myth.* <sup>xxvi</sup>

In spite of there already being a serious cultivable land crisis following the Kaptai dam, the GoB nevertheless gave 2.5 acres of paddyland, 5 acres of hilly land and 4 acres of mixed land to each settler family they moved there from the plains, in addition to money, free transport to the CHT, free rations (which continue to this day) and protection from the security forces. The demographic change to the region over the last few decades is astonishing, with the proportion of non-tribal residents of the CHT rising from just 12% in 1961 to a massive 52% majority in 1991.<sup>xxvii</sup> Although there has since been no further official transfer of settlers on this scale, there remain no provisions in CHT law or the Peace Accord to prevent the continued influx of people, and the balance is likely to swing even further in the Bengali favour.

### **Box 1. The Karnafuli Multipurpose Project**<sup>xxviii</sup>

#### Background to the Project

In October 1957, construction of a dam started over Karnafuli River at Kaptai village, Chandraghona Thana, Rangamati district. Work was eventually completed in January 1962, and the President of Pakistan officially inaugurated the dam in March. The project was designed around the following intended benefits:

- 1) Power generation
- 2) Irrigation and Drainage
- 3) Flood control
- 4) Enhancement of river navigability
- 5) Exploitation of forest resources from inaccessible areas of the CHT

The project was implemented under the USAID programme at a cost of Rs. 49 crore, but without carrying out any EIA whatsoever.

#### The Immediate Consequences

The dam created a huge artificial reservoir (known as Kaptai lake) covering an area of 663 square kilometres. It submerged beneath its waters the houses of no less than 18,000 tribal families and displaced around 100,000 (more than 25% of the total CHT population at the time), many of whom were then forced to migrate to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. At the same time, the reservoir submerged 54,000 acres of arable land, which constituted around 40% of the total suitable for cultivation, as well as 689 square kilometres of forest area.

*Continued...>>>*

### Inadequate Compensation

Although the Pakistani government adopted a number of rehabilitation programmes for families displaced by the project, the compensation received was quite insufficient in proportion to their loss. Some families were given land on the upper reaches of Kassalong and Chengri rivers, but it was of poor quality and cash compensation was as little as Rs.250 per acre of arable land lost and Rs.400 per acre of homestead – figures that were well below the actual market value of the lands they lost.



**Figure 6. Kaptai Lake, as seen from Rangamati town**

### Social Impact

The Project also changed the occupational pattern of tribals in the area, particularly those displaced by the dam. By submerging so much arable land, it forced many to take up activities for survival that were alien to their culture and traditional livelihood, such as fishing, fruit plantation and the felling of trees for sale. Communities were physically torn apart, and the competition for resources became even more acute.

*Continued...>>>*

### Environmental Impact

For the construction of the dam alone, massive deforestation was required to enable suitable access to the area by road and other infrastructural facilities. Enhanced access via the lake to previously inaccessible areas also permitted further exploitation of resources such as wood, timber, bamboo and cane, all of which led to considerable soil erosion, loss of nutrients and organic matter depletion.

Water in the lake has also become increasingly polluted by chemical fertilizer and pesticides used in the surrounding crop fields, and is being used as a dumping ground by many different groups of people. As many as 5 tons of waste and sewage are believed to be dumped in the lake everyday, and this has made it the perfect breeding ground for water borne diseases, including malaria.

### The Failure of Expected Benefits

The principle objective of the Karnafuli Multipurpose Project was to generate electricity, but the resulting widespread deforestation has in the last 37 years contributed to reducing the volume of rainfall in the region to such an extent that realising its potential has become almost impossible. According to the Water Development Board of Bangladesh, a minimum of 120 inches of rainfall is required annually for the normal functioning of the electricity generation plant, but in the last 15 years this target has rarely been reached. On June 4, 1986 for example, the water level of the reservoir was as low as 63 feet as against the minimum required level of 109 feet, as a result of which no more than 30mw of electricity could be produced (compared to its installed capacity of 130mw).

One of the secondary benefits expected from the project was fish culture, but again, over time it has been observed that the proportion of desirable species in the total catch of the lake (such as major carps) has drastically declined, from 78% in 1964/5 to a meagre 3.4% in 1994/5.

All in all, the Karnafuli Multipurpose Project has changed not only the flora and fauna of the region, but has also helped to proliferate and prolong economic, social and political problems in the region. Development of this kind cannot therefore be seen as anything less than a key factor influencing the call to armed insurgency.

# Part Two:



# The Insurgency

**IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICT ON FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**

### Family Separation

Family life in the CHT was deeply disrupted by the conflict, most obviously by the mass displacement of around 60,000 tribal refugees into India. Although exact statistics are unavailable, it is very likely that in the chaos of flight following mass atrocities, a large number of family members will have been at least temporarily separated, and many permanently. It is also estimated that more than 2,500 innocent tribal civilians were killed in at least 11 major massacres and routine extra-judicial executions carried out by settlers and security forces. There were also a number of "disappearances" and abductions reportedly perpetrated by or with the connivance of the Bangladesh law enforcement personnel.<sup>xxix</sup> With little or no formal investigation into these abuses, many incomplete families had no idea whether their loved ones were alive or dead.

The Shanti Bahini movement also had a profound effect on tribal families in the CHT, who were the constant targets of army intelligence interrogation. Those who did not supply information about the identity or location of SB members were often arrested and taken into custody, and many adult men fled their villages through fear of arrest alone. Women also tried to avoid sending their teenage boys to the market place too often, lest they were picked up and beaten by the army under suspicion of being an SB member. According to Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, who conducted a large number of interviews in the region concerning the civilian experience of conflict,

*"It was not difficult to find families which had been separated by forced eviction and dwindling resources, and in cases of families who had members fighting in the Shanti Bahini, the pressure from collaborators and spies often caused internal migration."*<sup>xxx</sup>

While most tribal families appear to have supported the Shanti Bahini movement, they were afraid to be linked to it in any way as this caused them a great deal of trouble. To shelter an SB member in your house or to simply be related to a recruit was very dangerous, and this led to an atmosphere of acute mistrust across the region between different communities and even between the members of a single family. Dr. Guhathakurta also relates the story of Anuching Marma, a young tribal girl who lived with her mother (who suffered severe arthritis) and three brothers:

*"Once, the army came to their house and banged the door down looking for Shanti Bahini suspects. They noticed a syringe, which her mother used to relieve her pain. They seized it and accused them of sheltering and treating wounded members of the Shanti Bahini. They struck blows at her mother. After a lot of pleading, they let them go."*<sup>xxxi</sup>

According to the 1991 report of the CHT Commission, the Shanti Bahini would ‘punish by kidnapping or death those people who give information to the government or who publicly condemn the SB.’<sup>xxxii</sup> Whether or not this is true, it gives some idea as to the intense psychological pressure tribal families in the CHT were under from both sides during the conflict. Yet it also appears that most of the people interrogated would have known very little about the activities of the Shanti Bahini anyway, for a recent sample survey of 400 households across the three CHT districts revealed that in the region as a whole, less than 10% of families admitted having a member who was part of the SB (see Table 2). Awareness about exactly what the SB were fighting for also ranged dramatically among the three districts, with more than a quarter of the households surveyed in Bandarban district having no idea at all. This shows how differently people experienced the conflict according to their location.

	<b>Rangamati</b>	<b>Bandarban</b>	<b>Khagrachari</b>	<b>CHT Total</b>
<b><i>Why did Shanti Bahini fight?</i></b>	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Freedom	93.28	38.81	61.36	64.5
Autonomy	4.48	34.33	37.88	25.5
Not Known	2.24	26.87	0.76	10.0
<b><i>Did any of your family join SB?</i></b>				
YES	12.69	7.46	16.67	9.75
NO	87.31	92.54	83.33	90.25

**Table 2. Opinions on and Involvement in the Shanti Bahini Movement<sup>xxxiii</sup>**

Those tribals who were found to be involved in the resistance had lengthy prison sentences imposed on them, and when they were eventually released, many prisoners found that their entire village had either disappeared, been burnt down or taken over by settlers.

### ***Forced Relocation***

Many families in strategic/politically sensitive areas were forcibly relocated into cluster villages where they were held under constant army supervision with effectively prison-like restraints on their freedom. They survived predominantly on government handouts of food and provisions such as rice every few weeks, though in many areas the conflict made delivery of these rations erratic and unreliable. Conditions in some cluster villages were worse than those in the refugee camps in Tripura, and women were particularly at risk of rape by army personnel, sometimes being forced to spend the night with their rapist. Such cluster villages were therefore regularly referred to by tribals as ‘concentration camps’.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

## ***Family Impoverishment***

During the insurgency, tribal villagers were forced to give the army large amounts of their produce free of charge, or to sell it to them in the market at specially reduced prices imposed by the GOB. At the same time, they also faced the added burden of supporting the Shanti Bahini movement both financially and in terms of food, and were thus exploited by both factions to the point of severe economic insecurity. As one international observer to the region put it in 1991,

*“People suffer under the acts of both sides. The Shanti Bahini, once meant to defend the rights of the tribals, have (in their quest to raise money for their fight) taken to extorting money from everyone, not only from Bengali contractors or well-to-do tribal people in the CHT (who in the case of non-contribution must fear for their lives), but also from refugees in the camps in Tripura state...”<sup>xxxv</sup>*

The freedom of movement of CHT inhabitants was also severely restricted by the military during the insurgency, and this had a deeply disruptive impact on the tribals’ traditional seasonal cycle of jhum ‘slash and burn’ cultivation, upon which the families depended for a living. Huge areas of forest land had been cleared and destroyed by the army to prevent guerrilla activity, making access to adequate land for farming increasingly difficult, particularly in the most volatile regions of the CHT where military presence was the highest (such as Khagrachari). As a result, while some families simply fell deeper and deeper into conditions of severe food insecurity and poverty, many became internal economic migrants, traveling south across rugged terrain into areas less-affected by the conflict such as Bandarban.



**Figure 8. Marma children survey the store of fuelwood in a village just south of Rangamati.**

## Refugees

As a result of the violence, intimidation and abuse perpetrated by both sides during the insurgency, thousands of innocent civilian families lost their homes, livelihoods and personal security, and were forced to flee. Initially, this meant securing refuge in the nearest jungle or forest, but many were driven across the neighbouring borders of Tripura and Mizoram, which posed the nearest and most accessible escape routes for the densely populated areas in the north. An undocumented number of men, women and children lost their lives in the process, struggling across difficult terrain and through heavily militarised regions without adequate food or shelter. Many were refused access at the border, and were forced to further risk their lives in attempting to cross by stealth.

The large number of tribal refugees in Tripura (estimated at around 60,000) turned the CHT conflict into an issue for international concern, and heavily jeopardised Bangladesh's chances of receiving the foreign aid on which it was so dependent. The tribals nevertheless spent anything from 5-15 years as refugees in makeshift camps before the Peace Accord eventually made provisions for their return.

Conditions in the six camps set up in Amarpur and Sabroom subdivisions of South Tripura camps were difficult to monitor, as India denied UNHCR and related relief agencies access to the exiled tribal families. The Jumma refugees qualified as 'Category 1 Refugees' in India, which entitled them to 'full protection according to the standards set by the Government of India'.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In practice, the provisions accorded to the refugees were both inadequate and ineffective. Xinhua News Agency reported in May 1990 that 7,000 refugees had died from disease and malnutrition in Tripura camps, including an unknown number of children. Food riots broke out, and the general health of the refugees continued to decline, with GoI agencies paying only scant attention to the prevention of communicable diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera and malaria.<sup>xxxvii</sup> On the rare occasions that doctors did visit the camps, they usually issued prescriptions for medicine that the refugees were simply too poor to buy.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Conditions were then made worse by the introduction of India's 'Voluntary Repatriation' campaign in October 1992, which sought to persuade tribal refugees to return to the CHT by suspending many of the ration items on which they depended. Food provisions were given out on 10-day cycles, but the quantity usually only sufficed for 8 days, without taking into account the regular delays of up to 5 days in the ration deliveries.<sup>xxxix</sup> Children in the camps were literally on the point of starvation, and according to the Indian Press in 1993, were severely affected by malnutrition of "epidemic proportions".<sup>xl</sup>

A visit by the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC) in 1996 confirmed the squalor in which the refugees were living. The team reported a shortage of water, inadequate accommodation and almost non-existent medical facilities. They found that rations were 'meagre' and were often suspended. Many of the tube wells were out of order, the camps were dirty and bore signs of neglect, and children in particular were noted as suffering from malnutrition and various water-borne diseases, including malaria. Despite this, the team found no evidence of efforts to improve these conditions.<sup>xli</sup>

Education was similarly poor. Volunteer teachers from the camps were given minimal salaries to teach an estimated 10,000 students, and were provided with only a few basic materials. For example, in 1994, the 528 students in the Karbook Camp High School had only 92 textbooks between them.<sup>xliii</sup> The Tripura State Government also refused to let refugee students sit the Class X examinations, which meant that for children who reached this stage education abruptly ended, without even a certificate to prove they had reached that standard – essential for further education on their return to Bangladesh. Although the Tripura government were in 1997 forced to accept tribal candidates for the examination in the face of heavy protests, the infrastructure and facilities made available for these students were conspicuously poor. As the refugees had no opportunity to undertake self-provisioning activities, a whole generation of refugee children grew up without any skills to prepare them for adult livelihoods on their return to Bangladesh.

Family units were also disrupted by inadequate protection mechanisms in the camps, and in 1992 it was reported that around 4,000 young tribal girls had ‘disappeared’. Bangladeshi officials believe the girls were sold and trafficked as prostitutes into Pakistan and other Indian states, and their claim has since been supported by the human rights group Save the Mother and Child. No action has been taken however to investigate the whereabouts of the missing girls.<sup>xliiii</sup>

### ***Internally Displaced People***

A large percentage of the tribals – and a small number of Bengalis - remained internally displaced during the conflict, trapped in a life of continuous migration to secure safety and sustenance. When the conflict was at its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s, thousands of families were hiding in forest and woodland, surviving on meagre supplies of berries and natural roots, some for years at a time before finding a place to resettle. During this time they had no access to basic services such as health and education, and lived in a continuous state of acute physical and mental exhaustion. As one young boy described to Survival International:

*“We had to flee. We ran silently and terrified into the woods. We had to stay in the woods for weeks. We had no food so we dug for roots. Some people were so weak they fell into holes and never got out again, they were so emotionally drained... We were trained not to speak [and] used a pinch as a warning sign if we heard someone coming. We had leeches all over us... barefoot, bleeding. I just remember running and running all the time. The killers were still about.”<sup>xliiv</sup>*

## PHYSICAL IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

### Direct Casualties

Data from NGOs, researchers and eyewitnesses attests to the fact that tribal children were seriously affected by the armed conflict that was fought around them for more than two decades. As Jyoti Grech wrote in “Ours is a Beautiful Country”,

*“The Jumma [tribal] children have...been arbitrarily arrested, detained, tortured, burnt to death and murdered at bayonet point. Jumma girls have been systematically raped by the security forces and illegal Bengali settlers.”<sup>xlvi</sup>*

Due to the nature of the conflict, which was essentially a low-intensity insurgency with characteristics of hit and run attacks rather than sustained warfare, the actual number of direct child casualties is likely to have been relatively low. Estimates of total casualties have recently been estimated at around 30,000, but disaggregation by age is unheard of.<sup>xlvi</sup> However, eyewitness reports from across the board confirm that not only were children killed, injured and sometimes disabled by arbitrary violence unleashed by the massacres, but that they were often specific targets. As Survival International reported in 1984:

*“Normally the soldiers surround a village, round up all men, women and children, and then subject them to different forms of torture. The men and the boys are either shot dead or crippled by having their fingers and legs broken. Many of the victims succumb to the injuries and those who survive become invalidated for life. They are not provided with any kind of medical treatment. Evidently the men and the boys are often crippled to prevent them from holding weapons. The girls and the housewives are raped.”<sup>xlvii</sup>*

It is not known exactly how many children were purposefully maimed and disabled in this manner, but the likelihood of them being able to receive proper healthcare or rehabilitative treatment is slight to say the least, and they are likely to suffer the numerous disadvantages of these physical injuries for the rest of their lives.

Other reports offer a similarly grim account of abuse against children. According to accounts of the Logang village massacre in Khagrachari district on 10 April 1992, “some eight hundred houses were burnt down and about 1200 Jummas, mostly old people, women and **children were killed**...Another survivor and eyewitness, Mr. Chandra Sagor Chakma (witness 71) had seen from a neighbouring house **Jumma children being thrown into the fire by the military.**”(my emphasis)<sup>xlvi</sup>

It is difficult to verify such reports as these incidents were evidently highly chaotic and emotional experiences and such statements were made in the absence of any independent, impartial body experienced in the documentation of human rights violations. However, the few personal testimonies that are available do seem to confirm

that a significant number of tribal children did indeed lose their lives in such attacks. Arun was only 6 years old when the army struck his home village of Latiban, but as a child was lucky to escape with his life, and his story both echoes that reported by Survival International while also giving some idea of the terrible confusion and chaos of the attack:

*“One day in 1986, we were all playing games in the afternoon. Suddenly, lots of army came and surrounded our village. It thought it was another search operation. But this time it was different. All the Jummas from a few villages were assembled under the banyan and mango trees nearby the main road.*

*The army ordered the Jummas to line up facing the west as the army and Bengali settlers surrounded us. The army then ordered killing the Chakmas. I saw our ajhu [grandfather] being hacked to death with a long dao[spear]. Then the next two or three people were hacked by the Bengali settlers.*

*Suddenly, someone from the assembled Jummas said ‘Run, otherwise all will be killed’. Then everyone started running for their lives. The army did not fire but remained silent while the settlers chased the Jummas with daos and other weapons. **Many Jummas, especially the children, were butchered on the spot.***

*I did not have time to look at anyone and ran for my life... After trekking for two days we reached Karbook in Tripura [India]. I realised then that I had left my family somewhere. I cried a lot. I did not know where my parents, brothers and sisters were.”<sup>xlix</sup>*



**Figure 9. Marma children from a rural village south of Rangamati**

## Rape and Sexual Harassment

Gender-based and sexual violence during conflict takes many different forms, from random acts of assault by enemy troops, bandits and border guards, to rape as a deliberate strategy of ethnic cleansing, explicitly ordered and condoned by military authorities. As early as 1973, this kind of tactic against tribal women was voiced by Lieutenant Kabir of the Bangladeshi military, who lined up all of the tribal teachers and students of the Dighinala High School (Khagrachari district) and proclaimed “*There will be born a Bengali Muslim child in the womb of every tribal woman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*”. The students were all under 16 years of age.<sup>1</sup> This strategy was also confirmed by another eyewitness, who told Survival International that

*“They [the Bangladeshi government] wanted all tribal women to bear only Bengali children. They would load up trucks with women and take them to military camps until they became pregnant by the soldiers.”*<sup>li</sup>

The prominence of sexual violence is partly due to the polarisation of gender roles in the context of conflict, where men are seen as macho, aggressive and misogynist, and the women as bearers of the cultural identity. In a statement to the Twelfth Session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva, 1994, a spokeswoman for the Hill Women’s Federation made clear their concerns for the particular vulnerability of tribal women in the CHT:

*“Jumma women are discriminated against on the basis of race and gender. They are targeted for being Jummas, indigenous to the CHT, and subjected to rape, sexual harassment and physical and mental torture due to the prevailing political situation in the area... In the absence of their male partners (due to arrest, detention and death) Jumma women also have to carry the burden of feeding and nurturing the entire family including children and elders.”*<sup>lii</sup>

The physical and psychological effects of rape are also intensified during conflict, with the victim often being unable (due to lack of health services or prevented access) to seek assistance in the immediate aftermath of the assault. They may also be unwilling to suffer the cultural stigma of rape and the shame it can bring upon an individual in a social context. The absence of a safe and supportive environment further prolongs the healing process, and can lead to irreparable physical and psychological damage.

In 1990, information from one of the Jumma refugee camps in India indicated that 1 in every 10 of the total tribal female population in the CHT had been a victim of rape. Over 94% of the alleged assaults were by ‘security forces’, and of these, over 40% of the women raped were girls under the age of 18.<sup>liii</sup> Rape was thus an omnipresent threat to the physical and cultural integrity of every girl in the CHT. Unaccompanied children were at particular risk, as were the younger girls who were more likely to be specifically selected for rape by men wary of HIV infection. Those girls raped under the age of 15 very likely suffered severe mutilation or damage to their genitals, and were at a greatly increased risk of infection. Because of fear and intimidation, tribal girls were reluctant to report the assaults to Bangladeshi authorities who were at the same time ‘predators’ as well as self-proclaimed ‘protectors’.

Incidents of rape and sexual harassment continue to be reported even after the Peace Accord, but are rarely investigated or taken seriously. One reason for this is that when dealing with survivors of rape, the first 24 hours is crucial in collecting physical evidence against the perpetrator. This is made very difficult in the case of the CHT, where rugged terrain permits only a skeleton infrastructure. Slow response times by police in combination with the remoteness of many villages mean that simply being able to make a statement is a lengthy process, let alone being able to retrieve evidence in time. Circumstantial evidence is not enough, and this makes rape victims in the CHT particularly vulnerable to such abuses.

## Torture

Although Bangladesh has not ratified the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), it does include within its Constitution an almost identically-worded provision against such acts in Article 35 (5). Nevertheless, during the conflict hundreds of tribal children were themselves tortured, or forced to watch and even participate in the torture of their parents or close relatives. Models of authority were purposefully humiliated and degraded in an attempt to intimidate those around them, at the same time destroying a child's most accessible sources of protection and security. This was confirmed in 1986 by the Venerable Bimal Bhikku in an interview with the 'New Internationalist':

*"They [Bangladeshi soldiers] come in the night or in the early hours of the morning. They announce their arrival with a round of blank fire. They set fire to houses and some of the younger people are taken to prison and tortured for information about the Shanti Bahini... Others are tortured and killed there and then, in front of their families."*<sup>liv</sup>

Similarly, on March 30, 1992, Gyana Ratan Chakma was murdered in front of his wife Namata and their four children. Namata broke down and began to cry as her husband was killed. The Quartermaster of Rajmani Para Army Camp, Mohammed Safi, apparently irritated by her crying, beat her and forced her children to watch.<sup>lv</sup>

## Military Involvement

In situations of ethnic conflict, it is relatively common for adolescent children to participate, either through notions of revenge for past abuses, as a way of overcoming the fear of being a passive victim, for their own sense of dignity or ethnic pride, or simply to feel that they are playing a useful role in the community. Involvement in an armed group can also provide a child with food, money, power and status, and although the exact role of children in the CHT insurgency remains unclear, it has been shown that they were indeed part of the Shanti Bahini movement. According to Rupayan Dewan, a senior member of the SB from 1973 and currently a member of the CHT Regional Council, *"there were boys as young as 14 and 15 years old working for us during the conflict"*.<sup>lvi</sup> While their duties were usually restricted to intelligence (acting as scouts/messengers), it

has been shown that a large number of the older teenagers were at least willing to pursue more active fighting roles. As Dr. Amena Moshin (who has studied the CHT throughout the conflict) relates,

*“The youths, predominantly the Chakmas, the most educated and politically conscious section of the hill population, together with the hill people who had taken shelter in the refugee camps in Tripura and Mizoram, provided a pool of manpower to the SB.”<sup>lvii</sup>*

A different source estimated that in 1993 the SB had a reserve force of as many as 50,000 trained youth organised in militia units both inside Bangladesh and on the Indian borders.<sup>lviii</sup> Whether this force was actually used remains unclear, but unlikely given the repeatedly extended cease-fire declared by the SB from 1992 onwards.

Although the actual level of children involved in the fighting was low, there appeared to be a very strong movement among tribal youth advocating participation in the struggle. Support for the resistance was widespread among teenagers who felt protest to be essential in maintaining their dignity and ethnic pride. This is manifest in one of the songs uncovered after the insurgency, where the archetype of the heroic mother who sends her children off to fight is given great value:

*“Mother, we have to go  
Join the demo in the street  
We have to face the bullets.  
Oh mother don't forbid us  
Don't pull us from behind  
The streets quake  
With the slogans  
And the sound of protest.  
We all have to fight!  
Mother, don't worry about us  
Stay calm and happy  
If we are killed  
Then think yourself the mother of a martyr.”<sup>lix</sup>*

During the conflict many children were also used in the battle of propaganda, including incidents whereby the military coerced young tribal students to pose as surrendered Shanti Bahini members in front of press photographers. One such case was documented by the Hill Watch Human Rights Forum:

*“Students of Shanti Niketan Hostel were taken by force to Khagrachari Brigade Headquarters and were dressed like Shanti Bahini. They gave a bulletless rifle to each and finally the military people took their photographs and made a video record.”<sup>lx</sup>*

## Orphanages

Many children who were separated from or lost parents during the fighting ended up being sent by their friends or relatives to one of the orphanages in the CHT run by Buddhist monks. These institutions had been originally built for tribal children affected by the War of Independence in 1971, but became excellent refuges for children who had lost their homes or family members. Other families that had become so impoverished by the prolonged insurgency found themselves no longer able to sufficiently provide for their sons and daughters, and sent them to the orphanages where they knew the child would receive shelter, nutrition, healthcare and education throughout the conflict. However, even here the children were not completely safe from military harassment, as one boy related to Survival International:

*“Sometimes soldiers would barge into the dormitories at night and point huge torches in our faces. They would line us up naked in the yard in the middle of winter and get us to make tea for them. The elder boys were hung upside down and beaten senseless. The head monk and assistant monk were beaten and put into jail without any charges. The army regards the monks as the main barrier for the mass conversion of tribal peoples.”<sup>1xi</sup>*

Children in these orphanages also suffered deep distress, sometimes at being separated from familiar friends and environment, and sometimes as a result of the atrocities they had witnessed during the conflict. These will be discussed in the section on ‘Psychological Impacts’, with a special focus on the future of the Moanoghar orphanage in Rangamati in Part Three – A Questionable Peace.

<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS ON CHILDREN</b>
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## Exposure to Violence

During the conflict, a large number of tribal children were witness to the rape, murder and abuse of their adult relatives in village massacres and more prolonged systematic abuse. These incidents left many children severely distressed. As Mrinal Chakma, now in her early twenties living in exile in India recalls,

*“Since my childhood I have seen the atrocities and repression of the Bangladeshi military. I have seen my friends killed in front of me, I have seen my uncles dragged into military vans and later on killed. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts there are human rights abuses of every kind, from arbitrary killing, arson, and rape to forcible displacement of population and occupation of indigenous people’s lands.”<sup>lxii</sup>*

Another young child remembers watching in horror as his family were massacred around him, and relates how the incident has affected him in the long-term:

*“They shot my uncle through the chest. He screamed out for his mother as he died. Then they lined us all up against the well. There was my father, uncle, grandmother, mother and me. Then they shot my father. They shot him through the neck. I was pushed into a bush with my aunt and her newborn baby. I can just remember how she held her hand over the baby’s mouth to stop it crying because of all the mosquitoes in the bush. Then they wanted to kill my other uncle. The women lay on top of him to try and save him. They butted him with their rifles. He did survive. Then they raped my cousin who was 16...*

*I will never forget these things. I was only a little boy, but they will always be with me. I didn’t cry when they killed my father. I thought, ‘If I cry he won’t come alive again.’<sup>lxiii</sup>*

Many of the children in the orphanages discussed earlier suffered prolonged distress resulting from the atrocities they had witnessed, while the younger children would cry for their parents and relatives, afraid of their new surroundings. As one of the supervising monks told me on a visit to one such orphanage on the outskirts of Dhaka,

*“I remember many of the children were very distressed by what they had experienced in the CHT. Some were physically scarred by dao wounds, having been beaten by the settlers and military, while others remained constantly afraid and unhappy. Many had seen their parents, relatives or friends shot or stabbed in riots, or had seen massacred bodies closehand. They could not forget these things and would see them again in nightmares. Many of the older boys wanted to join the Shanti Bahini because they wanted revenge, but we tried to help them understand that violence was not the answer.”<sup>lxiv</sup>*

Children in the orphanage were not the only ones to have been spurred on to activism by the horrors they witnessed – this kind of motivation is echoed in the personal testimonies of many tribal adults currently protesting today. Subodh Bikash Chakma is now a leading campaigner for the rights of the tribal people in the CHT, and draws a direct link between his personal experience of the conflict as a child and his motivation in continuing the struggle as an adult:

*“I was in grade three when my home was submerged under the waters of the Kaptai dam... That was the beginning of my anger, and, I suppose, of my activism... My wife was beaten up when our second son was only three months old. Everywhere I met people who had been traumatized by rape, by beatings, by the horrors they had witnessed. All these things made me stronger and more motivated to campaign for the rights of my people.”<sup>lxv</sup>*

## A Culture of Violence

According to one Bengali academic who has studied the CHT closely throughout the conflict, the insurgency has had a huge effect on the collective psychology of the tribal people. 20+ years of violence have been internalised into the society and social consciousness of the generations that grew up under constant military harassment, and this has led to a far greater dependency on violence as a problem-solving strategy. The youth in particular exhibit a greater readiness and propensity to use violence in the pursuit of their goals, whether this involves small-scale tax collection as part of a political faction or simply in resolving a domestic dispute.<sup>lxvi</sup> Amnesty International also support this notion in their 2000 assessment of the CHT situation, remarking that “A *culture of violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, developed during years of armed confrontation, has allowed human rights violations to be committed in the majority of cases with impunity.*”<sup>lxvii</sup> As will be discussed, increased access to small arms and light weaponry has also facilitated this change in mentality, and this is unfortunately something no Peace Accord can rectify.

Similarly, the conflict has also destabilised the fabric of tribal society, and impacted heavily on the traditional role models children look up to. Village chiefs, who were once viewed as the epitome of authority and wisdom, have since been overshadowed and belittled by the military omnipresence. Their lack of perceived power mirrors that of tribal parents, and the only real visible authority in the CHT is that of the military, which further explains the increasing predisposition to violence.

# Part Three:



# A Questionable Peace

<b>THE PEACE ACCORD</b>
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Negotiations between the GoB and the insurgents first began in the mid-1980s, when 300 members of a faction of the Shanti Bahini accepted an amnesty offer. Modest concessions were then made in legislation in 1989 that created 3 district councils, each with a two-thirds tribal majority and a tribal chairperson. By 1992, the Shanti Bahini had declared a unilateral cease-fire, and a cabinet committee was established by the then BNP government to make recommendations on how to solve the conflict. But while the process of negotiation began under the BNP, it was not until the Awami League came into power that a genuine prospect for peace emerged, and on 2 December 1997, the Government of Bangladesh and Tribal political Party PCJSS signed an agreement officially ending the conflict.

The salient features of the Peace Accord were as follows:

- a) Decommissioning and deposit of arms by Shanti Bahini under a general amnesty
- b) Rehabilitation of the international refugees and internally displaced people
- c) Dismantling of non-permanent military camps and the return of soldiers to their regular barracks within cantonments
- d) Self-government through district and regional councils and indigenous institutions
- e) Land and resource rights
- f) Recognition of the cultural identity of the indigenous people

Two important areas that were not given enough attention in the accord are:

- 1) More safeguards for the interests of the **smaller tribal groups**, whose economic conditions and relative lack of access to education and other services has rendered them far more vulnerable than the larger tribes (e.g. Chakmas) who are well represented.
- 2) More safeguards regarding **resource rights**, for the rights of villagers to forest and grazing commons and other resources such as water bodies was not specifically provided for. The poorer sections of rural communities are very likely therefore to remain very marginalised.

There are also many important issues that the Accord failed to even address at all:

- 1) The Accord is not protected by **constitutional safeguards**, which means that the accompanying legislation may be amended with a simple majority in parliament, or even revoked altogether. The absence of constitutional recognition for the Accord also brings into question how committed the administration really is to the long-term needs and rights of the CHT tribes.
- 2) The Accord at no point addresses **gender issues** other than to specify that one-seventh of the seats in the Hill District Councils and Regional Council are reserved for women. Women and their particular needs are therefore likely to

remain marginalised in the social and political spheres, despite the important contribution they make economically.

- 3) **Environmental issues** are not addressed at all, despite the CHT facing considerable long-term damage from deforestation and other forms of uncontrolled resource exploitation.
- 4) The Accord makes no mention of how to deal with the problem of **land disputes** other than to set up a Land Commission (which is still to function effectively). There are also no guidelines concerning the future of those Bengali families who are required to return their land to tribals. Is it ethical to forcibly eject these 'illegal' occupants, who are probably as poor and deprived as the person whose land they are occupying?
- 5) The Accord makes no mention of any efforts to stop the continuing infiltration of **illegal settlers** into the area, which constitutes a very real threat to the survival of tribal culture and heritage in the region.
- 6) Finally, the Accord makes no effort to address the very real problem of **ethnic and communal tension** between the tribals and Bengali settlers. Some form of economic and social reconciliation must be devised whereby justice can be provided to the dispossessed tribals without violating the rights of the Bengali inhabitants. This is critical to the establishment of lasting peace.

### ***Reactions to the Peace Accord***

The peace accord has, like many other important issues in the country, been caught in the cross confrontation of Bangladesh party politics. While the Awami League continually refer to it as a mark of their success, the BNP opposition refuse to even recognize it, and consistently decries the accord as a threat to Bangladesh's sovereignty. They demonstrated their dissatisfaction by boycotting parliament and calling for street protests and strikes. Dissension was also expressed within the tribal political movement, and anti-Accord groups such as the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) splintered from the PCJSS, arguing that full autonomy was the only satisfactory outcome. As the opinions expressed in Box 2 show, most people tend to view the Accord more as a promising step in the right direction rather than as a satisfactory solution in itself, which means that this period is critical in ensuring that all voices are heard and all remaining tensions diffused.

## Box 2. Reactions to the Peace Accord

*“The agreement is infantile; it brings temporary relief but in the long run it might not be very helpful.”*

**Ananta Bihari Khisha, Senior Colleague of the Founder of the PCJSS<sup>lxviii</sup>**

*“The Peace Accord has become a curtain to suppress the Jummas and a show-piece for the Government of Bangladesh to collect money in the name of the development of the CHT.”*

**Statement of the Jumma Peoples Network<sup>lxix</sup>**

*“The Accord should be looked upon as a reasonable compromise for the greater interest of peace. It should also not be looked upon as the final culmination of the struggle of the downtrodden peoples of the CHT but as the beginning of a new struggle, through democratic and peaceful means.”*

**Raja Devasish Roy, Chakma King and Tribal Leader<sup>lxx</sup>**

*“This unique peace endeavour has widely been acclaimed in and outside the country; nevertheless, a state of bleakness is still existing. It is because the seeds of conflict, bloodshed, disunity and mistrust during the past troubled decades are still prevailing.”*

**Shamsul Huda, Director of the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB)<sup>lxxi</sup>**

*“The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord is a statement of intent. Peace can neither be established by mere signing of the Accord nor can the piece of paper signed by the JSS and Government of Bangladesh bring peace on its own.”*

**Asian Indigenous & Tribal People’s Network<sup>lxxii</sup>**

*“We see the Accord as total compromise. We hold that lack of commitment in the PCJSS leaders have compelled them to sign such a humiliating and incomplete treaty. The treaty will bring only some financial benefits to the PCJSS leaders. A section from both the hill and Bengali communities will get a share of the benefits. The mass people will remain in the same destitute situation as ever.”*

**Proshit Bikash Khisa, General Secretary of the faction of the Hill People’s Council opposed to the Accord<sup>lxxiii</sup>**

## Political Violence and ‘Internal Terrorism’

On 26 December 1998, tribal activists who were unwilling to accept the Peace Accord because it did not offer ‘full autonomy’ launched a new political party, the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF) whose argue that the Accord has failed to:

*“reflect the genuine hopes and aspirations of the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and has failed to fulfil the main demands of the Jumma people – namely, constitutional recognition to the national ethnic minorities of the CHT with guarantee for full autonomy, restoration of traditional land rights, demilitarisation of the area, and withdrawal and resettlement of the Bengali settlers in the plain land.”*<sup>lxxiv</sup>

This has brought the UPDF into opposition on the one hand from the GoB, who brand them as ‘terrorists’, and on the other from the PCJSS, who signed the Peace Accord. A violent power struggle has thus arisen in the political sphere of the CHT, particularly between the two tribal groups, who accuse each other of numerous attacks, kidnappings and killings. This ‘internal terrorism’ has not only strained the social cohesion and loyalties of the tribal people as a whole, but has significantly changed the lives of the civilians caught in the middle. According to many tribals I interviewed from all backgrounds, publicly expressing allegiance to one party over another would land you in serious trouble, and would create unnecessary tensions within separate families of a single community. It has also had a serious impact on the tribal youth, who have been attracted to the UPDF because of their growing disillusionment with the implementation of the Accord. The Bangladeshi ‘Daily Star’ noted that the factions who had stated their opposition to the treaty included “*a small but visible group of young boys and girls.*”<sup>lxxv</sup> This was then confirmed by the CHT Commission report in 2000:

*“When the conflict between the PCJSS and the UPDF began in earnest, students gradually became involved... Many Jumma activists who are now involved are teenagers, many are high school students or high school dropouts. They are involved in activities ranging from the collection of taxes to killings. Their political activity means that they have become less respectful of the authority of their elders, and that many give up their studies. In this way, the conflict between the PCJSS and the UPDF is creating a generation of Jummas who have sacrificed their education.”*<sup>lxxvi</sup>

## ***Rehabilitation of Refugees***

Those families who have been ‘rehabilitated’ from India are having great difficulty in rebuilding their lives, for a great deal of change was effected in their absence in terms of how the region operates both socially and economically. It has not been as easy as simply rejoining old livelihoods and routines, for new demographic and economic pressures have led to different agricultural methods and demands. The traditional ‘domestic economy’ of the tribals – whereby production was focused around self-provisioning rather than exchange – has been replaced by a market economy where survival is determined by external economic forces they have no power over. Tribals lack the skill and knowledge base to participate effectively within this market, and have as a result tended to physically retreat further and further into the few remote areas of the CHT where jhum cultivation may still be practiced. Even in these areas, many tribal families have had to adopt multiple livelihood strategies (including day labouring or plantation work) to supplement their income, as traditional agriculture is no longer enough to support them. The net result of this is the increased social and economic marginalisation of the tribal people.



**Figure 11. The Refugee Transit Camp at Dighinala, Khagrachari district**

## ***Refugee Transit Camps***

During my brief visit to Khagrachari district, I was permitted to visit the refugee transit camp at Dighinala, where a number of families who had been unable to reclaim their land were sheltering in a disused primary school. Although the makeshift camp is

supposed to be only a temporary base while the land dispute is being ‘looked into’, the vast majority of the families had already spent 3 years there without any apparent progress in their cases. Most became refugees in 1986 following a particularly violent spate of military assaults, and spent 12 years in India before the Accord gave them confidence to come home, only to find their land occupied and its tenants defiant. Nor are they alone in this, for according to a survey by the Jumma Refugee Welfare Association in February 1999, 3,055 (or 25% of all repatriated families) have been similarly unable to reclaim their land as promised, while 40 entire villages have not been returned to the refugees at all because they are still completely occupied by settlers.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Under the terms of the agreement, the GoB promised to provide all returning refugees with nine months of rations, as they would not be able to obtain crops from their land or alternative income immediately. While this was recently extended for a further 9 months after a European Union delegation visit, the GoB nevertheless seems no nearer to resolving the problem of land, and the families in the camps – as well as those sheltering with relatives elsewhere – are likely to face this insecurity for some time. While the conditions inside the classrooms are not particularly bad, these people have no opportunity to rebuild their lives. They are forced to remain entirely dependent on rations that are only extended under sufficient international pressure, and on top of this they face the added insecurity of being moved on again. On 20 September 1999, twelve refugee families from the transit camp at Dighinala model primary school were forcibly evicted by the police in order to move them to another transit camp. The police used force as the refugees were reluctant to move to yet another camp, and in the ensuing scuffle, eleven refugees, mostly women, were wounded and a 6-month old baby received a blow to his head from a policeman’s stick. All consequently required hospital treatment.<sup>lxxviii</sup>



**Figure 12. Members of a refugee family in their classroom hostel in Dighinala Transit Camp. A newborn baby lies in the wicker cradle.**

### The 'Invisible' Internally Displaced

According to the GoB Task force on Refugees in the CHT, there are still 128,364 internally displaced families throughout the region, of which 90,208 were classed as 'tribal' and 38,156 'non-tribal'.<sup>lxxix</sup> It has taken more than two years for them to be acknowledged, and the GoB has been slow to realise the responsibilities it has towards them. Any further progress has now been jeopardized by internal dissension over the official figures. Two representatives of the JSS and Jumma Refugee Welfare Association (JRWA) have refused to attend future meetings of the Task Force on the grounds that in their view, 'non-tribals' (i.e. Bengali settlers) should not be included as IDPs.

Meanwhile, refugee leaders continue to accuse the GoB of purposefully ignoring the tribal IDPs on the basis of racial bias or discrimination, and point to its unwavering loyalty to the Bengali settler families as an example. While the returnee tribal refugees received 18 months of rations, the IDPs are yet to receive any. By contrast, Bengali families living in cluster villages have been receiving food rations ever since they arrived. In Khagrachari district alone, where the majority of IDPs are also scattered, there are 80 of these Bengali cluster villages inhabited by 26,262 families, all of whom continue to receive free rations through the World Food Programme to this day. Yet the IDPs get nothing.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Failing to qualify for government rehabilitation ration packages, the majority of IDPs therefore continue to live unaided in starvation conditions, with little or no access to any kind of service. In 1998, a Jumma NGO, Taungya, reported on the IDP populations in Langadu thana and Baghaichhari thana in Rangamati district, where they investigated the deaths of 40 people from malnutrition and lack of medical facilities. In both areas, people had become internally displaced in the late 70s and 80s, but had returned to their original areas after the Accord. However, they had found their lands still occupied by settlers, and were forced to live off wild potatoes bananas for weeks, waiting for the harvest of jhum cultivation which they had taken up through necessity. Meanwhile, the Baghaichhari thana health complex had been without a doctor for eight years.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

One year later, in July 1999, concern for the condition of the IDPs was expressed once more in the Report to the 17<sup>th</sup> Working Session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and particular attention was drawn to the situation of children within the group:

*“Most of these displaced people are now living in remote and inhospitable hill and forest areas without a decent livelihood and with no access at all to health-care facilities from the government or other agencies. Many of these people have suffered from severe malnutrition, diarrhoea, dysentery and malaria... The condition of the children, mothers of infants and elderly persons is especially acute.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup>*

## ***Land Disputes and Forced Eviction***

Although the Peace Accord made specific provisions regarding the return of land to tribal refugees, this process has been complicated by the difficulty of proving ownership. Prior to the conflict, tribal communities owned land on a communal basis, and very little documentation was actually seen to be necessary, let alone enforced. The arrival of the Bengali settlers introduced a new framework of land demarcation, and the issue of ownership became more complicated. Today, the land dispute is at somewhat of an impasse – some families have original titles and deeds, others have those they ‘negotiated’ during the conflict, some have simply created false documents in the real owner’s absence, and many were of course simply destroyed in the looting and burning that accompanied the fighting. A recent survey of 400 tribal households across the three districts found that a massive 71.5% did not have any official papers or documents for the land on which they were living, and this gives some idea of how widespread and complicated the issue of land ownership has become. According to the Jumma Refugee Welfare Association, the large number of refugees unable to regain their original land have been forced to join the swelling numbers of those still internally displaced.



**Figure 13. Some of the refugee families sheltering at Kobahali Transit Camp on the outskirts of Dighinala, all of whom had documents asserting their ownership of the disputed land.**

The issue is further complicated by the military, who continue to occupy large tracts of land for their own purposes of ‘surveillance and security’ – despite provisions in the Peace Accord that all army camps would be dismantled and removed. At the same time, the GOB is expanding the areas of CHT forest designated as ‘Reserve Forest’,

where agricultural practices are forbidden, and where even the daily necessity of collecting firewood becomes a crime warranting a court appearance. Unable to survive under these restrictions, thousands of people (the vast majority tribal) have been effectively forcibly evicted from their land and homesteads without compensation or assistance, including almost the entire Khyang tribe (see Box 3).<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

### Box 3. Expansion of Reserve Forests in the CHT

Although the Peace Accord has ended the insurgency, encroachment of commons and private property continues to threaten the survival of tribal people in the CHT. In areas recently notified as Reserved Forest by the GoB, access to much-needed resources has been drastically restricted, further impoverishing families and entire communities. Approximately 24% of the CHT is already declared as reserved forest, and the latest expansion – estimated at around 217,790 acres - brings the land crisis to new levels of desperation.

In Dhanuchhari Mouza the Khyang tribe can no more practice traditional *Jhum* (slash 'n' burn) cultivation, and the subsistence economy on which they depended has been totally ruined. According to Aung Saw Khyang of Arachhari Headman Para,

*“We used to produce all our food items in the Jhum fields. Since 1976 jhum cultivation has been stopped because of expansion of pulpwood plantation and reserved forests. We can now produce very little food. We have to buy food, which is very expensive for us, and we have to walk longer distances to buy food. We are now in a tough struggle to survive.”*

The Chakma chief, Raja Devasish Roy, also highlights just how widespread the effects of such expansion are, with estimates of affected people hovering around the 200,000 mark:

*“Tens of thousands of people in all of the three districts – hill people and ethnic Bengali residents who were displaced by the Kaptai dam in 1960; almost the entire population of the indigenous Khyang people; and hill people who were rehabilitated under government-run afforestation and agriculture projects of the Forest Department, the BADC and the CHT Development Board – have been affected.”*

The tribal groups have not declared themselves against the principle of protected forest in general because their lives and cultures are in many ways very much linked to it. What they are concerned about is the way in which being arbitrarily evicted breaches their customary rights and disrupts their entire lifestyle. As one village headman complained,

*“In our Mouza [group of villages], we have all become illegal residents. Out of 30 Khyang families in my mouza 23 have disappeared. Of the other 600 families, 200 have virtually become refugees.”*

As yet there has been little effort on the part of the GoB to resolve the problem, and the evictions are likely to continue occurring until the Land Commission provided for under the Peace Accord actually starts functioning as it should.

## Communalism and Ethnic Violence

The relationship between the ‘development’ of a state and the protection of its ethnic variation has always been a traumatic and unstable affair, particularly so in the case of the hill tribes living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Concepts, roles and perceptions of identity have continually fluctuated and evolved in response to the changing political, social and cultural pressures that the conflict placed on both tribal and Bengali people. Today, the strength of a tribal identity depends very much on its negation of and ‘separateness’ from the Bengali dominant culture, emphasising that tribals are *not* Islamic, that Bengali is *not* their mother tongue, that development in the region is *not* in their benefit. Drawing upon antagonism above independence, this is why the interplay of ethnic identity in the CHT has continued to cause problems long after the advent of the Peace Accord.



**Figure 14. Khagrachari town is a perfect example of communal segregation – all businesses are Bengali, and tribals remain marginalised on the outskirts**

From the late 1950s onwards, when national interest in the CHT region began to increase, both tribal and Bengali children have grown up under the influence of negative, stereotypical perceptions that portray the other as a kind of ‘natural enemy’. In one sense this has arisen from the very terminology used to categorise them, much of which has pejorative undertones. For example, tribal groups may be referred to as *upajati*, ‘sub-caste or subcommunity’, which underlines the subordinate structural position of tribals within the larger society. Or they may be alluded to as *adibashi*, or ‘original inhabitants’ in the anthropological sense of a ‘primitive people’ with connotations of cultural inferiority. Finally, tribals may also be termed *pahari*, or ‘hill people’ by virtue of their relative cultural, ecological and structural isolation. The point is that beneath many of these paternalistic assertions lies what Peter J Bertocci calls “*a fundamental presumption*

*of tribal backwardness and insularity in relation to the notion of cultural evolution and progress.*<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

The handful of early studies conducted among tribes in the CHT found evidence of a similar antipathy toward the Bengalis. As early as 1960, one French anthropologist recorded that tribal society was built in part around derogatory images where *“the Bengali is the administration, the police, the greedy merchant, the sometimes unscrupulous money-lender, and so on; the Marma’s list is endless.”*<sup>lxxxv</sup> The government’s decision to impose a blackout on information dissemination from the area during the insurgency further reduced any chance of an understanding between the two groups, and created the perfect environment for ignorance to intensify and manifest already existing seeds of ethnic prejudice.

Those children who grew up during the insurgency needed very little encouragement to take on these attitudes, for the conflict provided them with first-hand experience of this ethnic tension in action. Propaganda disseminated from both sides and from the national media, in combination with a lack of education have also added to the problem. Many tribal adolescents have shown themselves to be unable to disassociate Bengalis from the context of fear in which they first saw them as young children during massacres or village attacks. As one such teenager explained to Amena Mohsin:

*“When I was around 4 or 5 years old, the fighting was widespread in my area. I remember the first time I saw a Bengali I realised that everyone around me was running from their houses, frightened and screaming. My mother was so afraid, and she could not stop crying. She carried me to the safety of the trees behind the village, and then went back to fetch my brother. When she returned her clothes were ripped and tattered and there was blood on her hands. She had rescued my brother, but my father had been killed. It is something I cannot forget, or forgive.”*<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Such memories of violence, humiliation, resentment and injustice can in cases like this affect a child far more deeply than the immediate poverty of his or her situation, and the Peace Accord has proved itself useless in this regard. Prejudicial sentiments continue to be passed on to the younger generations both intentionally and indirectly by parents who have been left to struggle with the legacy left by the conflict. Daily routines, such as the practice of singing lullabies, have become infused with ethnicity, for as Amena Mohsin discovered, many tribal women sing verses where nursery villains such as the bogeyman are substituted with Bengalis. Similarly, it still remains common among tribal societies today to chastise the bad habits of children as being ‘typically Bengali’, and to invoke the Bengali culture as a model for distaste. While this kind of attitude is less common in the urban areas where children of the two groups mix more frequently, it is nevertheless ‘rife’ in the rural areas.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Communal divisions have also spread into the public service sector, and discouraged many tribals from accessing healthcare facilities, even when they can do so with ease. Exploitation and extortion are commonly reported practices, and are both particularly prominent in the more isolated communities, where discrimination appears rampant:

*“Doctors and pharmacists over-prescribe drugs and fail to communicate the dosage levels and frequency. Reports of malaria treatment costs of 2600 taka in one Bandarban village and 5500 take in another village indicate that villagers have been exploited... In general, discrimination and exploitation have effectively rendered health services to be inaccessible to many Jumma people living in the CHT.”<sup>lxxxviii</sup>*

This ethnic tension continues to make the CHT particularly vulnerable to incidences of communal violence, and personal security remains very low. Numerous attacks upon houses, villages and temples have been recorded in the last few years, and the region as a whole has made little progress in improving relations between the two ethnic groups. Small-scale disputes have quickly assumed much larger proportions, and with a typical pattern of continued aggravated retaliation, it is quite common for a dispute between two people to end up with the burning down of several houses. If the initial dispute should involve children, the ensuing clashes are likely to be even more severe, for children are a central focal point around which whole communities readily mobilise.

Box 4 gives just a few incidents of communal rioting and violence that have continued to plague the area following the Accord, while many more are documented in Amnesty International’s 2000 update and the report by the Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network, Elusive Peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, March 2000.

**Box 4. Selected Incidents of Communalism after the Accord** <sup>lxxxix</sup>**6 April 1998**

*Two Bengali children drowned while taking a bath in the Mayani river in the CHT. The police and a medical officer investigated the cause of death and certified that they had died of natural causes. But Bengali settlers staged a protest demonstration the next day claiming that the children had been killed by tribals. They attacked tribals passing on the road and injured 4, including two 18 year-old boys, one of whom had to be admitted to hospital. On 9 April, tribals held a protest meeting in Dighinala town against the attack and while returning home some tribals were again attacked by settlers, tacitly supported by an army patrol group. When a large group of tribals rushed to the spot, the settlers fled, setting fire to two tribal houses.*

**3 July 1998**

*A clash between tribals and settlers started in Rangamati town after a Bengali, who was gambling with other shopkeepers, scolded a group of tribals who then tried to prevent the shopkeepers from gambling. The rumour of the incident spread and Bengalis started attacking tribals and tried to set some tribal houses on fire. The police did not intervene. Bengalis also ransacked a Buddhist temple and injured a tribal monk. The next day Bengalis again attacked tribals with iron rods in another part of Rangamati town, injuring eleven tribals. That same night, more tribals were attacked and several injured.*

**18 February 1999**

*During a Hindu festival in Khagrachari district, tribals were attacked by settlers armed with knives and sticks. This happened after a taxi driver had demanded an abnormally high fare from some tribals and started abusing them when they refused to pay. The settlers also ransacked the local Hindu temple. At one point, on-looking soldiers came to help the settlers and opened fire on the tribals. Fifteen tribals were arrested and several had to be treated in hospital.*

**27 March 1999**

*Tribals and settlers got involved in a violent clash after a Bengali shopkeeper in Khagrachari town reportedly pushed a few tribals with his elbow, for which the tribals demanded an apology. After the clash, the shopkeeper went to inform the local Awami League leader, Mr. Zahedul Alom, who then went to the tribal area of town with a group of settlers shouting racist slogans. In the confrontation that followed, the security forces came to the help of the settlers and fired rubber bullets and tear gas shells. Houses of several tribals were ransacked.*

## Continued Military Presence

During the conflict, the CHT underwent unprecedented heavy militarisation. In the early 1980s the total strength of the Bangladeshi army and auxiliary forces was calculated to be over 120,000, which at the time provided for one armed soldier for every tribal person.<sup>xc</sup> Military presence infiltrated every pore of society, and the number of police stations in the region also doubled. With the Disturbed Areas Law of 1981, the lowest ranking army and police personnel enjoyed unrestricted powers to shoot anyone suspected of anti-state activities, and intimidatory activities were practiced on a huge scale.<sup>xc<sup>i</sup></sup> The terrified inhabitants quickly understood that the military was, in effect, untouchable:

*“Military authorities can do whatever they like in Bandarban district. They acquire vast areas for their camps, residences, playgrounds, etc. without paying compensation... In fact, the military authorities are the real administrators of Bandarban. All administrations are run through them. The local authorities are only there for signing papers, because no development work can be done without clearance from the military authorities.”*<sup>xc<sup>ii</sup></sup>



**Figure 15. Military trucks like this one on Khagrachari main street are still a very visible part of daily life in the CHT.**

The situation post-Accord has not changed very much, and military presence risks becoming a normal phenomenon of life in the CHT. Although Section 4 (17) of the Agreement provided for the removal of “*all temporary camps of army, ansar and village defence force in the Chittagong Hill Tracts excepting Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and permanent cantonments*” (of which there are six in total), it did not specify a deadline by which time this withdrawal should be completed. As such, 3 years after the Accord was signed, only 32 military camps from a total of over 500 have been dismantled according to the JSS. The Minister for CHT Affairs quibbles that this figure is actually 75, but either way the process has been pitifully slow.<sup>xc<sup>iii</sup></sup>

Quite how this heavy military presence affects the CHT inhabitants – particularly their children – is yet to be assessed. However, it appears from recent interviews and reports that the military still hold a great deal of power in the administration of social and economic affairs. For example, the CHT Commission reported in 2000 that it still the GOC of 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of Chittagong (in charge of all army operations in the CHT) who selects tribal students for admission to medical colleges, dental colleges and agricultural university.<sup>xciv</sup> An interview with Rupayan Dewan, Member of the CHT Regional Council also revealed that the army had managed - through intimidation - to prevent an area of Rangamati town being developed as a tribal market, even though they actually held no administrative or judicial power to do so.<sup>xcv</sup>

## Language, Culture and Biased Education

The conflict had a huge effect on education in the CHT, not merely in the practical sense of making it more difficult for children to physically get to schools, but also psychologically, by using education as an instrument of propaganda to advance mainstream cultural values. Education is universally acknowledged to be a very important part of the process by which a child situates himself and his identity within a social and national context, and the values that a student learns in this time should be in agreement with those set down by Article 29 (c) of the CRC, which provides that State parties should direct education to “*the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values*” . In the case of the CHT this has been largely ignored, and even after the Accord brought an end to open fighting, the ethnic discrimination that lay behind it is still widespread in the schooling system.

For the hill people of the CHT, formal education is still somewhat of a recent phenomenon. Many tribal groups traditionally relied on a strong oral tradition and an informal scheme of imitation, as Claus-Dieter Brauns discovered from fieldwork with the Mru tribe in the south of the CHT:

*“Children are not forced to learn. On their own initiative they must observe and appropriate for themselves those abilities and that knowledge they wish to possess. Parents do not instruct, they do not explain how one should do things; rarely do they correct mistakes. It is left up to the children to observe and imitate; and most children’s games involve the imitation of adult activities.”<sup>xcvi</sup>*

Inherent in this *laissez-faire* attitude to child development is a respect for the child as a human being in the process of becoming. If a child says or does something wrong, it is put down to a lack of knowledge or ability, and this renders punishment in such cases pointless. Tribal parents seemed to be aware that unpleasant experiences are part of the learning process, and according to Brauns, rarely interfered to defend their children in situations where the child has done wrong.

However, as discussed earlier, the disastrous aftermath of development projects such as the Kaptai dam and the onset of conflict in the region led tribals to view education as one of their prime weapons in fighting for their rights. As Survival Campaigner Sophie Grig noted on a recent trip to the CHT,

*“Even in remote villages, education is considered of the utmost importance. One Chakma girl sang me a song about urging her brother to study hard, as both their parents were dead and his education was their only hope. Many people’s education had been disturbed by the troubles; they only had a few years of formal schooling but had studied hard on their own so that their English would be good enough to pass on news of their suffering to people outside.”<sup>xcvii</sup>*



**Figure 16. Two brothers from the Marma tribe attend a local Paracentre set up by UNICEF/GoB where they are given preparation for primary school**

Linking formal schooling and literacy with the survival of their identity and heritage is to be expected in this context, but this is where the problems began, because the type of education offered by government schooling was in many ways focused on submerging ethnic distinctions beneath national mainstream values. This remains the case even after the Peace Accord, which only provides weak safeguards in the area of

education. For example, although the Accord set down that the primary education of tribals should be disseminated in their mother tongue, this has not been the case in practice, and the medium of instruction continues to be predominantly Bangla.<sup>xcviii</sup> Reasoning behind this links back to the GoB drive to increase the national literacy rate, yet the knock-on effect of forcing tribal children to learn in an unfamiliar tongue is to disadvantage them in school examinations and areas of competition later in life such as employment and public representation.



**Figure 17. The Government School for Bengali settlers in Boalkhali, where there had previously stood an orphanage run by Buddhist monks since 1961 before it was burnt to the ground by the military in 1986 to allow settlers to move in.**

Of equal concern is the biased curriculum enforced in schools in the CHT, which is entirely oriented to the dominant Bengali model and which allows no room for the religious values, ideas and aspirations of tribal cultures. Many tribal intellectuals have also pointed out the number of inaccuracies and disrespectful data/references to the languages and cultures of tribals in the national curriculum which continue to be absorbed by children without question. Conformity to the national ‘norm’ lies at the heart

of the lessons learnt, and this renders them largely irrelevant to the context in which most tribal children grow up. As Mr. Hemol Dewan, a tribal intellectual commented in 1998,

*“The tribal children are familiar with the hills, deep forest, wild animals etc. since their early boyhood. But there is no reflection of their tribal life in any primer. So the schools do not attract them at all.”<sup>xcix</sup>*

Furthermore, promises made to assist tribal children in the pursuit of higher education remain largely unfulfilled. In section 4(10) of the Peace Accord it is written that “...the government will provide more scholarships for tribal boys/girls in educational institutions...[and] necessary scholarships for taking education abroad and research pursuit.” Yet according to information collected by Amnesty International in 2000, “The government has neither increased the number of stipends for tribal students in educational institutions nor has it provided scholarships for higher education and research in foreign countries.”<sup>c</sup>

This has serious consequences for tribal youth, for education is essential in lifting them out of impoverishment and into independence. Even those that do manage to get good qualifications find it impossible to get jobs, as the employment sector is utterly dominated by Bengali settlers. This was evident not only from simply walking around the urban areas (where even the businesses selling tribal handicrafts were Bengali-run), but was also confirmed by the director of the Moanoghar orphanage, who followed with great sadness the failure of even his most qualified students to secure a job. Though many children continued to apply to the orphanage for their education, since the Peace Accord funding for the centre has stopped, and the children are now struggling in conditions of acute overcrowding and poor facilities (see Box 5).



**Figure 18. A Marma woman works on a loom in a rural village outside Rangamati.**

Shamsul Huda, Director of the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh, also saw the unemployment of youth as a significant problem at a recent workshop:

*“It has been observed that the hill peoples, recently, have shown a great interest towards education. A great number of boys and girls are jobless after passing secondary, higher secondary and degree level education. They can’t be brought to the plain land as teachers, while on the other side they are not able to integrate themselves in ‘Jhum’ cultivation or in other activities. Social problems may arise if these educated jobless boys and girls can’t be used in appropriate jobs.”<sup>ci</sup>*

Social problems have indeed arisen among the disheartened and disillusioned tribal youth, whose vulnerability has made them all the more open to other avenues of gaining authority involving small arms and/or drugs.

## Small Arms and Lawlessness

Sandwiched between the ‘Golden Triangle’ and the ‘Golden Crescent’ (the largest producer of drugs and the largest repository of small arms and light weapons respectively), Bangladesh finds itself at the receiving end of both these phenomena without being the primary supplier or user of either. It also shares common borders with the Northeastern states of India and Southwestern tip of Burma – areas that are infested with protracted active insurgency. More than 20 insurgent groups are active in the vicinity of the borders, with Cox’s Bazar and Chittagong acting as proven entry points for a large number of the arms destined for these areas.<sup>cii</sup>

The impact of small arms on human security is often overlooked in the context of Bangladesh and the CHT because the region already faces diverse problems – poverty, natural calamities, overpopulation, limited resources and unemployment. 23 years of insurgency in the CHT brought a significant amount of small arms into the area, mainly from bases inside the Indian border. While some of these weapons were handed over to the government after the Peace Accord, a large number have been kept aside in secret caches, which have been looted from time to time since then.<sup>ciii</sup>

According to the Bangladeshi Human Rights NGO Odhikar, who have been monitoring developments in the CHT for many years, the law and order situation in CHT deteriorated in many ways following the signing of the Peace Accord:

*“A section of the hilly youth are now feeling that they are beyond any control of law. Toll collection, kidnapping and demand of ransom has become a regular phenomenon. Many illegal arms and weapons are still in circulation and these arms are being used.”<sup>civ</sup>*

This has been confirmed in recent months by Bangladeshi newspapers, who state that incidents of abduction, highway robbery, killing and extortion have become rampant in the three CHT districts over the last few years, and small arms have played a prominent role. Businessmen, passenger buses and other commercial transports are forced to pay tolls on roads either to gangs opposed to the Accord or to those who support it. More than

50 cases of abduction were reported in the last six months. Highway robbery has become so common in the hill districts that transport companies are moving elsewhere in the country with their business, and have stopped services in 'notorious' areas.<sup>cv</sup>

In February 2001 the lack of security in the CHT became an international concern when 3 engineers (one Briton and two Danes) were kidnapped by tribal guerrillas while working on a project funded by the Danish government. Although they were eventually released without harm, it took over a month of negotiations and ultimately a military storm to free the three hostages. In the meantime, accusations flew back and forth between the GoB and the UPDF as to who was responsible, with many suspecting that the GoB had actually engineered the whole thing as a stunt to justify the continued militarisation of the area. Once again however, it was the innocent civilians who suffered the most, and in early March many villagers were forced to flee from their homes following military intimidation used to find those thought to be connected with the kidnappers.<sup>cvi</sup> Whoever was responsible, the kidnapping was both indicative of the easy access to arms and a very visible sign that all is still not well in the CHT.

## Drug Abuse

Before the Peace Accord, most drug use was apparently confined to certain groups within the military, who enjoyed unrestricted mobility in the region and were able to smuggle substances in from nearby Chittagong City.<sup>cvi</sup> Since the cessation of organised resistance and the opening up of the region, drug use has become more accessible and has spread into the wider community. It remained difficult to get a clear picture of exactly which drugs were being taken, or indeed which groups were the heaviest users as people did not like to discuss the issue. However, it appears from a number of sources that the incidence of drug abuse is most prominent among the unemployed tribal youth.<sup>cvi</sup> Although the Peace Accord provided that tribal adolescents would get special consideration in terms of finding jobs and vocations in the CHT, this has still not been implemented and unemployment has become a huge problem among tribal adolescents, particularly in the urban areas. With little else to do, they spend most of their time drinking, smoking and hanging around in the bazars, and are particularly vulnerable to drugs. It has also been alleged that political groups such as the PCJSS give away money in order to attract supporters, and as such are helping to finance and prolong the drug habits of tribal teenagers.<sup>cix</sup>

In 1999, the Rangamati Hill District Chairman officially informed the Superintendent of Police of the areas where he knew drug abuse to be taking place, but the police took no action, and no reason was given.<sup>cx</sup> Many tribals suspect that the police and military actually encourage drug abuse among tribal youths because this effectively reduces the threat this generation will pose to them in the future. They also benefit financially and socially by propagating the tribals as a dependent underclass, and by ensuring the continuance of social problems, justify their own presence as 'law-enforcers'. Judging by the concern expressed by various tribal politicians and NGO workers I spoke to, the problem of drugs in the CHT looks to be growing fast, and more research is desperately needed in this area to find out exactly why, how and who is involved.

### Box 5. The Moanoghar Orphanage, Rangamati

The Rangamati branch of the Moanoghar orphanage network was established in 1974 by the Venerable Jnanashree Mahathero. 'Moanoghar' is a Chakma word which means 'hill home', and for the last 27 years, thousands of orphans from across the tribal groups have passed through its doors. Its mission is:

*"To elevate the quality of life of the indigenous communities of hill districts by providing need-based support through establishment of formal, non-formal, general, technical, vocational and professional education programmes with the objects of grooming the children to grow up as peace-loving, compassionate, human citizens and to enable them to stand on their feet as adults."*<sup>cxii</sup>



**Figure 19. The Entrance Sign to Moanoghar Orphanage, Rangamati**

Up until 1997, the orphanage drew its funding from a French NGO, but with the advent of the Peace Accord it was assumed that problems in the region had ceased, and Moanoghar are now struggling to survive on minimal support from the CHT Development Board. Even three years after the conflict ceased, the institution is still heavily oversubscribed by children whose lives have in different ways been disadvantaged by the insurgency. Although not all of them are now orphans in the strict sense of the word, at least 50% of the children enrolled in the orphanage at the time of my visit had lost one or both parents or stemmed from refugee families unable to reclaim their land.

Because of the decreased funding, the facilities at Moanoghar have declined in both quantity and quality. Each of the classrooms suffered from huge overcrowding, with as many as 70-80 children following the direction of a single teacher. The classes were also quite mixed in terms of age groups, for the children had all had different levels of primary education according to the remoteness of their home settlements. However, the orphanage has a reputation for high standards of education nonetheless, and their rate of exam success is usually higher than that of the local government schools.



**Figure 20. A typically overcrowded classroom in Moanoghar, Rangamati**

Dormitory facilities suffer from similar overcrowding and the majority have little or no furnishing to speak of. An average of 26 children are crammed in to a single room, with only mats on the floor as beds.



**Figure 21. One of the dormitories in the Girls Hostel**

It is not certain how long the CHT Development Board plans to keep supporting the orphanage, for they, like many other institutions, believe that the Peace Accord has brought an end to the problems in the region. Yet as the Ven. Prajnananda Mahathera, General Secretary of the Moanoghar orphanages told me, both the GoB and the international community have a long-term responsibility to these children, at least until all promises set out in the Accord have been fulfilled:

*“The conflict has caused a great deal of social and economic hardship to tribal families in the CHT, and with the slow implementation of the Peace Accord it is the children who are losing their chance to make a future for themselves. Their problems do not end because of an agreement written on paper.”<sup>cxii</sup>*



**Figure 22. One of the Buddhist monks working at an Orphanage near Khagrachari town**

## NOTES:

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- <sup>ii</sup> Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, Life is not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 2000 Update, p78.
- <sup>iii</sup> See BBS, UNICEF, SURCH, Situation of Tribal Women and Children in Bangladesh: Evidence from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys 1994-1998.
- <sup>iv</sup> IPS, 1 April 1993, quoted in Bangladesh: Human Rights Situation, Research Directorate, Documentation, Information and Research Branch, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa, Canada, 1997, Appendix 3.
- <sup>v</sup> For more on this, see K Khaleque, *Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh*, in Philip Gain (ed.) Bangladesh: Land, Forest and Forest People, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), 1998, p8.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid*, p13.
- <sup>vii</sup> Gain, Philip, *Facts that Count for the Chittagong Hill Tracts* in Philip Gain (ed.) The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), July 2000, p120.
- <sup>viii</sup> Statistics quoted in Centre for Policy Dialogue/UNFPA, Impact of Development Programmes on Environment and Demographic Phenomena of the Ethnic Minorities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, July 2000, p3. Description of CHT topography taken from *Bangladesh District Gazeter: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Establishment Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1975, p1.
- <sup>ix</sup> Forestal Forestry and Engineering International Ltd, Chittagong Hill Tracts Soil and Land Use Survey Report, 1964-66 (In Nine Volumes).
- <sup>x</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 1997, Dhaka.
- <sup>xi</sup> Brauns, Claus-Dieter and Loffler, Lorenz, Mru. Hill People on the Border of Bangladesh, 1990.
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- <sup>xiii</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, The Transfer of Power: 1942-47, Vol. 12, 8 July-15 August 1947, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1981.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Mukherji, Saradindu, Subjects, Citizens and Refugees – Tragedy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (1947-1998), Indian Centre for the Study of Forced Migration, New Delhi, 2000, p39.
- <sup>xv</sup> South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, Racial Discrimination: The Record of Bangladesh – A Report to the UN CERD Committee, New Delhi, 24 February 1999.
- <sup>xvi</sup> As reported in Jumma People's Network, Alternate Report and Commentary on the first report of the Bangladesh Government to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, New Delhi, 6 April 1996.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Blanchet, Therese, Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhoods, 1996, p40.
- <sup>xviii</sup> South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, Racial Discrimination: The Record of Bangladesh – A Report to the UN CERD Committee, New Delhi, 24 February 1999, p3.
- <sup>xix</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, 15<sup>th</sup> Session, Draft Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Bangladesh, 6 June 1997, Future CRC/C/15/Add.74. Par.15.
- <sup>xx</sup> Centre for Policy Dialogue/UNFPA, Impact of Development Programmes on Environment and Demographic Phenomena of the Ethnic Minorities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, July 2000, piii.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Loffler, L.G, Ecology and Human Right: Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, 1991, Zurich, p2.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Mohammed, Anu, *Aggression of Development and the Hill Economy* in Dr. Jyoti Prakash Dutta (ed.), The Hill Economy and Environment, Bangladesh Economic Association, Dhaka, December 1999, p104.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Gain, Philip, *Life and Nature at Risk* in Philip Gain (ed.) The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), July 2000, p23.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Statement of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, Geneva before the Working Group on Indigenous Populations on 12 August 1983, in a reply to a statement by the Anti-Slavery Society, London.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Chittagong Hill Tracts District Statistics 1983, published by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
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- <sup>xxviii</sup> Information taken from Centre for Policy Dialogue/UNFPA, Impact of Development Programmes on Environment and Demographic Phenomena of the Ethnic Minorities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, July 2000, pp14-18.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Amnesty International, Bangladesh: Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, February 2000.
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- <sup>xxxiv</sup> For more on cluster villages, see Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, Life is not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1991.
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