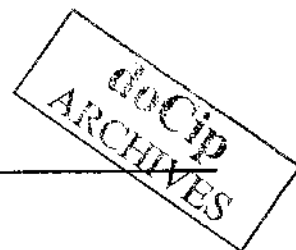


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UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

3rd Session, 10 -21 May 2004

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Agenda Item 4 (a): Economic and Social Development

Statement by: Rev. Prajnalankar Bhikkhu

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Most of the problems of indigenous peoples are political. No substantive economic and social development for indigenous peoples is possible without resolution to these problems.

In the **Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)**, the government of Bangladesh and the **Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS)** sought to resolve the problems of Jumma indigenous people through the CHT Accord signed between the two sides in 1997. It has been more than six years since the signing of the Accord. But the government failed to comply with its obligation to the Accord. It resulted in the exclusion of the indigenous people from political and development processes.

The socio-economic condition of the indigenous people has worsened after taking over the office by a four-party coalition government led by the **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)** in October 2001. Under the influence of the Islamic fundamentalist coalition partners – **Jamat-e-Islam, Islami Okyo Jote and Bangladesh Jatiya Party** – the government continues to support the Bengali Muslim population transfer and settlement program in violation of the CHT Accord. According to a report¹ in Bengali (the report has been translated into English and enclosed with this statement), there are 26,220 families of settlers in Khagrachari hill district and 1,605 families of the same in Rangamati hill district. The report says that presently each family is being provided with only 21 kg rice/ration at free of cost per week though it is entitled to get Tk. 1,500/- for construction of house, Tk. 300/- as grant per month and 21 kg rice per week as per the "**Amanisha Declaration of 1988**".² The report further says that there are also "many families who are yet to get ration card". The report does not refer to the number of settler families in Bandarban hill district worst hit by overwhelming presence of settlers (61.88%).³

The government continues to provide Tk. 450/- and Tk. 612.50 as allowance per month respectively to each member and platoon commander of the **Village Defense Party (VDP)**, an auxiliary force drawn from the young settlers to combat indigenous fighters during the conflict-period.⁴ The number of VDP members is estimated to be around 100,000. In addition, there are 80,000 army personnel, 25,000 BDR personnel, 8,000 Ansvars (Islamic Guards) and 1,500 navy servicemen in the CHT.⁵

There has been an increasing inflow of new Bengali settlers into the CHT. Islamic fundamentalism is on increase in the region to an alarming extent. According to a Bangladesh government website, www.bangladesh.gov.bd, there are 224 Madrasas

¹ A report in Bengali entitled "**Parbatya Bangalider Punarbasan Prakaipa Bastabayan Karar Lakye Settlement Zone Leaderder Sabha**" (Meeting among the Leaders of Settlement Zones for Implementation of the Bengali Rehabilitation Project) written by a reporter from Dighinala Upazilla Md. Abdur Razzak on 22 April 2002.

² A project undertaken by former military ruler and President of Bangladesh Lt. General H. M. Ershad for settlement of Bengali Muslim settlers in the CHT

³ District electoral rolls 2001

⁴ Report on payment to VDP members of Madhya Boyalkhali under Betchari army camp dated 25 April 2002.

⁵ The CHT Commission Report: Life is not Ours - Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, May 1991, P. 41

(Islamic schools)/masques in Rangamati hill district alone. Khagrachari hill district has more than 300. These figures do not include the Madrasas in the Bandarban hill district and nearly 1,700 mosques mushroomed in the tiny hill region. Apart from Islamic education, students are taught prejudiced education that contributes to development of racism and militancy in their psyche. Many national and international Islamic organizations and NGOs, such as Bangladesh Islamic Foundation and Al-Haramline Islamic Foundation, provide fund for spread of Islam in the CHT. Settlers have already outnumbered the local indigenous population in many areas in the CHT like Alikadam, Lama, Nakyangchari, Ramu, Roangchari, Gulmara, Merung, Ramgarh, Matiranga, Gomti, Langudu etc. Many suspected international "Islamic militants" are seen in these areas. The leaking out of 10 trucks laden with 10,000 illegal sophisticated arms in Chittagong on 2 April 2004 could have links with them (see a picture of the arms attached). Soon after leaking out of the arms, Prime Minister of Bangladesh Ms. Begum Khaleda Zia called upon the reporters not to flash news and pictures harmful to the interest of the nation in media at a meeting with the representatives of the Dhaka Reporters' Unity on 6 April 2004.⁶ This is not the only arms haul in Bangladesh, and it is an indication of increasing Islamic fundamentalism in the CHT and Bangladesh.

The government, especially the illegally appointed Chairman of the CHT Development Board (CHTDB) and Member of Parliament elected through electoral frauds from the Khagrachari hill district Md. Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan, is giving all required support and co-operation to new settlers for settlement in the CHT. The Prothom Alo, one of the leading Bengali dailies in Bangladesh, published a long article entitled "Anusandhan" (In Quest) in several parts in March 2004 dealing with the corruptions and irregularities of Md. Bhuiyan. In the article Md. Bhuiyan has been charged with huge misappropriation of fund allocated to the CHTDB. The article alleges that government has formed an Islamic armed militant group consisting of 150 cadres and more than 100 goons in the CHT under his leadership. With the help of this group the government silenced its political opponents including media persons like district reporter Azimul Haq of the Prothom Alo and Narul Azam of the Dainik Jugantar in the CHT. With the fund allocated to the CHTDB for development of the indigenous people, Md. Bhuiyan has established new villages, "Wadud Pally", for settlers after his name throughout the CHT as part of the government-sponsored Bengali Muslim population transfer and settlement program in the CHT. Two district administrators Mazibur Rahman Halder and Humayun Kabir in the Khagrachari hill district had to face transfer to other plain districts for their differences with him. The PCJSS and its front organizations observed a series of strikes demanding his resignation from his post.

The government is spending millions of Taka for Islamization and militarization in the CHT at the cost of the indigenous people. This spending is unproductive in terms of socio-economic development and peace building in the region. This money should be used for rehabilitation of Jumma refugees and internally displaced Jummas, drinking water, healthcare, education, electricity, road-construction and agricultural development in rural areas through the CHT local governmental bodies, such as the CHT Regional Council.

International development partners met at the Bangladesh Development Forum from 8 to 10 May 2004 in Dhaka to consider aid to Bangladesh for development. We requested them to strongly press the government for proper implementation of the "CHT Accord", a prerequisite for economic and social development in the CHT.

Mr. Chairperson, many indigenous peoples in the world face situation like that of the Jummas in the CHT. It is a threat to their existence. Therefore, Peace Campaign Group would like to recommend –

1. a comprehensive study on forced population transfer into indigenous lands and territories by an independent international body,
2. provide necessary international support and assistance for proper implementation of constructive agreements, such as the CHT Accord, signed between states and indigenous peoples; and
3. early adoption and implementation of the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for your kind attention!

⁶ The Inqilab, 7 April 2004, Dhaka

Report on a Meeting among the Leaders of Settlement Zones for Implementation of the Bengali Rehabilitation Project

Md. Abdur Razzak from Dighinala

Md. Unusur Rahman, a leader from Kabakhali village under Dighinala Upazilla in Khagrachari hill district, called a meeting with the leaders of the Upazilla for Implementation of the Bengali Rehabilitation Project on 22 April 2002 at 10 a.m. at Kabakhali Bazar.

Leader Ali Ashrab, leader Sirajuddin, leader Nurul Islam, leader Akbar Hussein, leader Afaz Uddin, leader Iman Ali, leader Ahmed Mannan Mistry, leader Amzad Hussein, leader Muzibur Bepari, leader Ahmed Aziz, leader Md. Godar Ali, leader Mujibur Haq Munsif, leader Habibullah, leader Nurul Islam, leader Siddikur Rahman, leader Hussein Ali and others addressed the meeting.

The speakers said that an epochal decision had already been taken to implement the Bengali Rehabilitation Project. The Commitments and Declaration of the honorable President late Ziaur Rahman for settlement of Bengalis in the CHT continued to be enshrined in the High Court Division of the Supreme of Bangladesh from 1979 to 1985. Then the Amanisha Project of 1988 was brought into effect during the rule of President H. M. Ershad. A writ petition was lodged to the High Court Division of the Bangladesh Supreme Court for enjoyment and realization of human rights and fundamental rights including all facilities/demands stated in these two Projects. After four weeks, the High Court served a notice to the government asking for its reply to the petition. It is stated in the Declaration of the honorable President that each Bengali family will be provided with 5 (five) acres of land at free of cost, cash Tk. 2,500/-, 2 bundles of iron-sheet, ration for 18 months and more, if necessary, 1 pair of bulks or Tk. 15,000/-, Tk. 10,000/- as loan for horticulture, and all necessary cooperation for self-reliance within one year. Presently each family is being provided with only 21 kg rice/ration at free of cost per week though it is entitled to get cash Tk. 1,500/- for construction of house, Tk. 300/- as grant per month and 21 kg rice per week as per the Amanisha Declaration of 1988. There are many families who have not got ration card yet. Cash Tk. 15,000/- for construction of house and Tk. 300/- as grant per month are not being provided. They are losing many ration cards for irregularities in the distribution system and regulation of administrative black-laws in many ways, the speakers complained. According to their estimate, 30% ration cards are under the illegal possession and consumption of Adivasis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The speakers also referred to the commitments of the Amanisha Declaration of 1988 that speak about security, settlement of Khas land (state owned land) and creation of employment opportunities for Bengalis. The 203rd Infantry through Khagrachari Bridget Commander has submitted an application to the Director of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Cluster Villages -- General Officer Commanding (GOC) -- for recovery of illegal ration cards and corruption in the Cluster Villages on 27 March 2002. Leader Unusur Rahman has submitted a writ petition to the High Court Division of the Bangladesh Supreme Court as per Article 102 (1), 27, 31, 36, 42 and 44 of the Bangladesh Constitution for legal recognition and implementation of the facilities/demands stated in the above two Projects and human rights and fundamental rights. Writ petition No. 6329/2001 dated 10/12/2001.

The military authorities are carrying out the activities of the Cluster Villages including distribution of ration without any consultation with and participation of the Settlement Leaders. They (Settlement Leaders) demanded to hand over the responsibility to them for implementation of the Bengali Settlement Project and management of the Cluster Villages including distribution of ration as per the Declaration of the honorable President late Ziaur Rahman.

(Md. Abdur Razzak)
Upazilla Reporter
Dighinala, Khagrachari
22/04/2002

10 arms laden trucks seized in Chittagong

2 April 2004,

From: Muktipagol

Police seized huge cache of heavy weapons, including Rocket launcher, Chinese SMG, SMC, Semi-Auto Sporting rifle, Anti-tank rifle, Hand grenade, Optical lance, AK-47 & 56, pistol, revolver and 300000 bullets from the port city of Chittagong early Friday.

Initial report says, police seized the arms while being loaded into 10 trucks from two trawlers at Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Ghat on the bank of the Karnaphuli River.

The arms were packed in several hundred cartons, The two trawlers were also seized.

Police, BDR and army personnel were guarding the Dampara Police Lines in Chittagong city where the 10 arms-loaded trucks were kept. Police arrested five people from the port for interrogation.

It could not be ascertained from where the arms were being smuggled into Bangladesh.

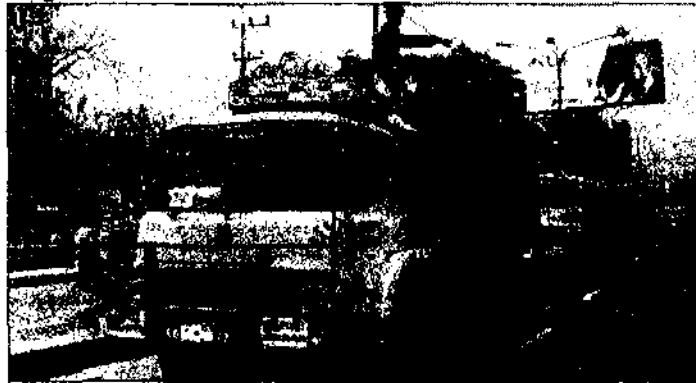
It's however suspected that the arms were carried by a foreign ship and offloaded at the outer anchorage.

State Minister for Home Affairs Luthfuzzaman Babar flew from Dhaka for Chittagong Friday afternoon.

This is the largest haul of illegal weapons in Bangladesh. Last year, police recovered around 1,00,000 bullets of Chinese rifles from a truck in northern city of Bogra.

But the police could not dig out the exact clue of those bullets.

Largest ever arms haul



"Parties like Jamaat-e-Islami which is using force to establish a certain type of government," he alleged, adding, "They should be investigated and we have to make sure that probe findings are not suppressed again."

Jatiya Samajtantrik Party-Inu (JSD) also expressed concern, saying an international terrorist syndicate had hand in the gunrunning and the seizure confirms the existence of international terrorist networks in Bangladesh in a parody to repeated government denials.

Trying to hide information on international terrorists in Bangladesh, the government has put sovereignty and internal security at stake, he said in a press statement.

Largest ever arms haul

The Daily Star, 3 April 2004

Ten truckloads of 10,000 arms, including submachine-guns, AK 47 rifles, rocket shells and launchers, 2,000 grenades and 3 lakh bullets seized in Chittagong yesterday.

Joint forces seized 10 truckloads of submachine-guns, AK-47 assault rifles, other firearms and bullets on tip-off in the largest ever arms haul in an early morning swoop on the Karnaphuli coast in Chittagong yesterday