

EURO-PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ON BANGLADESH



P5_TA-PROV (2002) 0572

Situation in Bangladesh

PE 325.105

European Parliament resolution on Bangladesh

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Bangladesh,
- having regard to the EU-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement,

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Land left behind to save lives

- Hounded Bangladeshis flee to 'relief camps' in Bengal

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1021225/asp/frontpage/story_1513956.asp

SUNANDO SARKAR

The Telegraph

calcutta, india



Picture (Courtesy: The Telegraph): A woman who fled with her child. Picture by Amit Datta

Bagdah (North 24-Parganas), Dec. 24: "We are going to take your head if you don't part with your land." Faced with the grim choices she had, Shefali Ray ran. She started on her journey — from Madra village of Khulna district in Bangladesh to a place near Gobrapur village of North 24-Parganas in India — before dawn the evening after she learnt what fate had in store for her.

She reached India with her family and the clothes she wore. The dalal (a member of a "syndicate" that arranged for the cross-border journey) took everything, including the earrings she was wearing. But she was lucky.

Bijaya Baidya reached here without her husband; he was beheaded while returning from the village market.

Siddheswar Biswas reached here with his immediate family but without the niece who was "just picked up and vanished one evening".

- having regard to the mounting criticism of alleged violations of the human rights of those detained, as by Amnesty International and the International Organisation against Torture (OMCT),
- having regard to the report of the US Department of State,
 - A. whereas the Government of Bangladesh allegedly deployed 40 000 members of the armed forces and launched "Operation Clean Heart" on 17 October 2002,
 - B. whereas authorities claim that the operation has been launched in order to fight rising levels of crime in the country and the number of fire arms in private possession, whereas however the legal status of the army's involvement as well as the time frame are not clear,
 - C. whereas the military immediately started house-to-house raids and searches, stopped, questioned and searched vehicles and picked up occupants for questioning, all without warrants,
 - D. whereas thousands have so far been arrested and detained incommunicado, many reportedly tortured during detention and interrogation, resulting in 25 deaths in the first 25 days of the said military operation, with almost all the killings taking place during military custody,
 - E. whereas the government, while acknowledging deaths in custody, has claimed that all the deaths were the result of 'heart attacks', while families of victims have insisted that the detainees died because of torture and, as they were taken to hospital, witnesses reported marks on the bodies consistent with infliction of torture,
 - F. whereas the military have, without any judicial mandate, arrested members of the Bangladesh Parliament, as well as other political leaders and party followers of the opposition; and whereas the opposition's Centre for Research and Information has been raided, computers damaged and documents taken by the military,
 - G. noting that a four-party coalition government, including two Islamist parties, were voted into power in the parliamentary general election on 1 October 2001, and immediately thereafter Bangladesh witnessed an outburst of violence against the losing Awami League's (AL) voters, party workers and, in particular, the Hindu community,

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In a throwback to the immediate aftermath of the 2001 election in Bangladesh, which saw the Bangladesh Nationalist Party come to power with the help of assorted Islamic fundamentalist organisations, more and more Bangladeshis are flowing into Bengal now.

In almost every case, the two most vulnerable entities — land and women — were made the target, uprooting a people. The number that is coming over to this side of the border would not be insignificant.

Within a 5-km radius along the road that connects Bongaon and Bagdah, three "relief camps" have sprung up, at Kundipur, Patra and Colonypara — each with at least 100 men, women and children. There are many more who have taken shelter in the homes of relatives who crossed over last year.

All the "relief camps", like the one at Kundipur, are meagre affairs with refugees huddling together under a wall-less tarpaulin shed. With nobody sure of the administration's response — that of the ruling party hasn't appeared encouraging — the men and women don't want to attract attention though it's difficult for 100 people to stay concealed for long.

So it's the shed for the children — some of them less than a year old and without any warm clothes — and the women, with the men spending the night under the cold December sky.

"I don't feel the cold," Siddheshwar, 55, said. "I can't really feel anything if I can't protect my wife and children," he said.

Siddheshwar and his immediate family fled their home (Kekania village of Gopalganj district, post: Sultanshahi) in late November after they saw what happened to his 18-year-old niece, Urmila. "They (some neighbours) just entered our courtyard, picked up Urmila and beat us up," he said.

"Her parents have stayed put, hoping to get her back. But I did not see any sense in that," he said. He has three daughters, Aparna, 16, Archana, 14, and Jaba, 10, and a 12-year-old son, Subhankar.

Bijaya Baidya's husband, Amal Krishna (of Baruibhita village, Gopalganj), was killed more than a year ago after he protested against the forcible harvesting of his crop. "He was killed in the open market," Bijaya said. "This time, too, we were told not to reap what we sowed. There was no point in staying back." She said she could not let her four sons, between 11 and 20 years old, meet their father's fate. More fortunate is the family of Purnima Biswas, who lived near Gopalganj (town).

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[EU continued..]

- H. noting further that there seem to be no members of the Jamaat among those having been seized under "Operation Clean Heart" although this movement is renowned as being equipped with a considerable amount of arms,
- I. whereas the widespread and systematic attack on minority Hindus has continued unabated,
- J. noting that the EU-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement is based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, and that violation of Article 1 is a breach that can lead to suspension of the Agreement,
- K. whereas the Commission must ensure that the human rights situation in Bangladesh is monitored and that the European Parliament is kept informed of it,
- L. noting that Bangladesh has obligations under international law as a State party to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,
1. Expresses its serious concern at the arbitrary arrests, detention, torture, killings in military custody and the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh following the military's "Operation Clean Heart", and fears that the crackdown on crime is also being used for politically partisan purposes;
 2. Understands the need for the Bangladesh authorities to improve the state of law and order in the country and counteract the fast-growing levels of various types of criminal activity;
 3. Expresses its concern at the fact that the situation of minorities, especially Hindus, has not improved;
 4. Expresses its concern at the growing Islamic radicalisation in the country;
 5. Calls on the government to immediately institute an independent body to conduct a prompt and fair investigation into the killings and acts of torture, and to ensure that its findings are made public and that those responsible for deaths and ill-treatment are made accountable before courts of law;

[Land left behind continued..]

She had a brother living here; he had come just a year ago. "I followed my brother here," she said. Purnima could afford to lose the 4 bighas she had.

What is happening to the land they owned in Bangladesh became clearer from Shanti Biswas's (of Keshabpur village in Noral sub-division) story.

Her neighbour, Sattar Mian, arranged for the *dalal*, she said, and he would "take care" of their land while they were away. "But he also told us not to come back," Shanti said.

Bangladesh: Celebrations and Bombs



http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/DL21Df01.html

By Bertil Lintner

More than 3 million Muslim devotees from 52 countries gathered along the banks of the Turag river, 30 kilometers north of Dhaka in Bangladesh at Tongi, Gazipur, for the three-day annual Biswa Ijtema (World Congregation) between December 14 and 16. The significance of the event was underlined by the profile of political leaders who attended: present at the concluding prayers were Bangladesh President Iajuddin Ahmed; the Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia; the leader of the opposition in parliament, Sheikh Hasina, and other political, civil and military leaders. The Ijtema is organized annually by the Tablighi Jamaat.

The Biswa Ijtema, the second largest congregation of Muslims in the world after the Hajj, ended peacefully despite rumors that some international terrorist groups may have planned to disrupt the event. But the fact that millions of Muslim devotees from across the world gathered in Bangladesh emphasizes the role that the country has come to play in the context of international Islamic brotherhood. Although the government in Dhaka has reacted fiercely to any suggestion that the country is becoming a haven for Islamic extremists, reports from Asian and Western intelligence services suggest otherwise. Shortly after the fall of Kandahar in late 2001, several hundred Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters escaped by ship from Karachi to Chittagong. They were then trucked down to hidden camps in the Ukhia area, south of Cox's Bazaar.

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6. 6. Calls on the government to release members of parliament and opposition political leaders, to cease attacks and harassment of opposition activists and to stop arbitrary mass arrests, detentions, acts of torture and killings in military custody, and other custodial deaths and to guarantee adequate reparation to all those who have been injured;
7. Strongly urges that a Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission be established without further delay, endowed with adequate powers and sufficient staff to perform effectively and properly, and that the military should not be kept out of the Commission's purview;
8. Calls for the perpetrators of human rights violations not to be granted impunity under any circumstances;
9. Encourages the Government of Bangladesh to protect human rights and apply democratic principles in all areas, including their action to deal with rising crime rates;
10. Calls on the Commission to engage with the Government of Bangladesh under the EU-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement to ensure that violations stop, human rights are protected and the European Parliament is kept informed;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Parliament and Government of Bangladesh.

Resentment in the hills



<http://www.rnw.nl/hotspots/html/ban021206.html>

by Sakil Faizullah, 6 December 2002

Five years after a long-running insurgency ended in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southeastern Bangladesh, matters are not entirely peaceful in the region. Two decades of fighting between the government and indigenous tribespeople still tell heavily on the impoverished area, and tensions remain between the locals and Bengali settlers.

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[Celebrations....continued..]

Local people report seeing heavily armed men, with a few Bangladeshis among them, in those camps. They were told that they would be killed if anyone told "outsiders" about this regrouping of ex-Afghanistan fighters in this remote corner of southeastern Bangladesh.

According to other reports from Asian security services, militants from the Jemaah Islamiah - which is connected to al-Qaeda and wants to set up a gigantic Islamic state encompassing Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and southern Philippines - are also hiding out in these camps, which were set up in the early 1990s to train rebels from the Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar's Rakhine State. In more recent years, these camps have in effect been run by Bangladesh's most extreme Islamic outfit, the Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami (HuJI), which was set up in 1992, reportedly with financial support from Osama bin Laden.

The Jemaah Islamiah is suspected of being behind a number of planned - but foiled - attacks against Western targets in Singapore, as well as the devastating bomb blast on the Indonesian island of Bali on October 12, in which nearly 200 people were killed, most of them Western tourists.

The Jemaah Islamiah militants in hiding in southeastern Bangladesh are believed to be mostly Malaysian and Singaporean citizens. It is, however, uncertain to what extent the Bangladeshi security services have been involved in their relocation. But well-placed local sources say that it would have been impossible without at least some tacit agreement with the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Bangladesh's chief intelligence agency, which is closely connected with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Security concerns heightened over the holding of the Biswa Ijtema in Tongi only a week after at least 18 persons were killed and 300 injured in bomb blasts in four cinema halls in the central Bangladeshi town of Mymensingh on December 7. Without being specific, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia described these as a "planned terrorist attack", while opposition leader Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League claimed that an "identified fanatic terrorist group within [the ruling] alliance is behind these heinous bomb blasts". The international news agency Reuters first reported that Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury had said that bin Laden's al-Qaeda network was behind the blast, but later had to retract the report after denials from the minister.

Subsequently, the police raided the local office of Reuters in Dhaka. Dozens of opposition activists were also arrested, but no link to them could be established.

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Picture (Courtesy Netherlands Radio): A man of the Marma tribe at work in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Visit <http://www.omroep.nl/cgi-bin/streams/?rnw/hotspots/ban021206.rm> to hear the report.

At the annual Khothin Chibor Dan festival in Rangamati, Buddhists from all over the Chittagong Hill Tracts converge with offerings for the monks. This area is home to more than ten indigenous multilingual groups. Only a few years ago it was the centre of a long running guerrilla war between the Shanti Bahini rebel group and the Bangladesh army.

Thousands were killed on both sides, but in 1997 a peace treaty was signed. Today the former leader of the Shanti Bahini, Shantu Lama, accuses the government of failing to honour the treaty and reneging on some of its commitments.

"Five years have already passed, but the agreement has yet to be implemented properly. So the indigenous people particularly are leading a very miserable life. Moreover we see there is a military administration in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, so the common people, they're not in a position to move from one place to another place freely, to find out some profession so that they can survive, they can lead a family life. People always live in fear."

Broken promises

Most indigenous communities in the Rangamati area are only accessible by boat. For the people who live there, the peace treaty has not brought much improvement. There's still a heavy army presence, and they still have no electricity, no running water, little healthcare, and few schools. Tension between them and Bengali settlers remains high because many indigenous people feel that they have not been given land promised to them in the 1997 treaty. Arup Chakma is a teenager from the main indigenous group, the Chakmas:

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[Celebrations.....contd..]

The raid on Reuters and the arrest of opposition politicians came only days after a British TV team and their local helpers had been arrested for trying to document the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh and its possible consequences on the country's non-Muslim minorities. Many foreign observers may contend that the Bangladeshi authorities are simply overreacting to international press coverage, but it could also be that the DGFI has too much to hide, and therefore wants to silence any reports suggesting that their country has become a hot-bed of Islamic fundamentalism.

The four-party alliance that won the Bangladeshi elections in October 2001 includes the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami, which has two ministers in the present government. Its youth organization, the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), was behind Bangladesh's most devastating bomb blast before the cinemas in Mymensingh were hit - an explosion on June 15, 2001, at the Awami League office in Narayanganj, in which 21 persons were killed and over 100 others injured. The same government-connected outfit is also suspected of being behind several other bomb blasts as well as attacks on secular Bangladeshi politicians, journalists and writers.

The ICS is closely connected with the most militant of the Rohingya organizations along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), which also has links to the al-Qaeda. Video footage released by the American cable television network CNN in August this year and obtained from al-Qaeda shows Rohingyas as well as Bangladeshis training in camps near the country's southeastern border, but well inside Bangladesh.

Al-Qaeda's involvement in Bangladesh was confirmed in September this year when the police in Dhaka arrested seven "aid workers" working for the Saudi-based Al Haramain Islamic Institute. The men, who came from Libya, Algeria, Sudan and Yemen, belonged to an organization that had first come to Bangladesh to help Rohingya refugees, but later became involved in running Islamic centers all over the country. The so-called institute has been named by several sources as a front for al-Qaeda. Perhaps not surprisingly, nothing came out of the arrests and the whole affair was quickly hushed up by the Bangladeshi authorities, suggesting that the "arrests" were a mistake by some local police officer. The United States has so far accepted the Bangladeshi government's assurances that the country is not playing host to international terrorist movements, and that it is a reliable partner in the global war on terror. But this ostrich-like mentality may change as more evidence to the contrary comes to light. The arrests of foreign journalists and the raid on Reuters in Dhaka are worrying signs of increasing intolerance in Bangladesh. And the hosting of the Biswa Ijtema is bound to attract the attention of "friendly" Islamic organizations, which see the country as a perfect place to

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[Resentment.. continued..]

"Indigenous people are very cordial to the prominent Bengalis - those who are living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts from the very beginning - but the settlers they don't treat the hill people as human beings. So there is tension between them . . . I'm optimistic . . . but if the government doesn't implement the peace accords, I think our lives will not be better."



Picture (Courtesy Netherlands Radio): *An indigenous village in the Hill Tracts*

It's in the villages of the Chittagong Hill Tracts that the after-effects of the 20-year insurgency are most keenly felt. The demographics of the area have changed radically. The population of around 1.4 million people is now evenly split between indigenous people and Bengali settlers. Many villagers complain they've not been properly compensated for land seized by settlers who began moving into the area in the late 1970s.

Feuding tribes

The government that came to power last year pledged to revoke the 1997 treaty, saying it had made too many concessions to indigenous people. But now it says it wants to re-assess the situation thoroughly before making any decisions. In the meantime, the deputy minister for Hill Tracts Affairs Moni Swapan Dewan says that a heavy military presence is required in the region to stop violent feuding between different factions of indigenous groups.



Picture (Courtesy Netherlands Radio): *Most tribespeople in the CHT live in poverty.*

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[Celebrations and bomb...Contd..]

hide out when international attention is focused on events in more high-profile countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia.

Bertil Lintner, senior writer, Far Eastern Economic Review.

Bangladesh Assessment 2002

<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/index.htm>



Barring a few sporadic incidents, the first three months of the year 2002 remained largely peaceful and free from terrorist violence for Bangladesh. However, increasing use of Bangladeshi territory for terrorist and subversive activities of religious extremists and pan-Islamic terrorist outfits and insurgents operating in India's Northeast remain the most serious threat to political stability and internal security in the country. Rising discontentment in the Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT), where the [Accord of 1997](#) promised lasting peace and stability, has once again become a matter of serious concern. Since the elections of October 2001, and the installation of a new right wing regime headed by Begum Khalida Zia, and backed by the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), communal tensions and Islamist extremist mobilisation have also risen dramatically. The militant and pro-Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami has 16 members elected to the Bangladesh Parliament. The Jamaat, which has two Ministers in the new government, has also allegedly received support from the ISI, which includes funding arms flow, and technical and training support. During the election campaign, the Islamist organizations had declared that if voted to power, they would make Bangladesh an Islamic state. There has also been a sudden escalation in atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh since the BNP came to power, leading to increased distress migration into the Indian State of Tripura.

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"We have been facing the economical problems and the law and order situation, but I am trying to keep the Chittagong Hill Tracts in peace. Among the tribals and Bengali peoples, we don't have any misunderstandings. But there are two groups [of indigenous people] still fighting each other. One group is for the implementation of the peace accord and another group are opposing the peace accord. Its obvious we are suffering due to the fighting between the two groups. That is fact. It's hampering the development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and has caused some problems."

Case Study: Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts



http://www.caa.org.au/oxfam/advocacy/indigenous_australia/chittagong.html

Oxfam International Investigation Mission

Background

The peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in south-eastern Bangladesh comprise about half a million persons from 13 mainly Buddhist Sino-Tibetan ethnic groups, the largest being the Chakma and the Marma. Under British colonial rule, the plains-dwelling Bengali people who constitute the majority of the population were banned from settling in the Hill Tracts and transfer of land to them was prohibited. From 1935 the hills became a 'totally excluded area', out of the control of the Bengal administration, with a form of self-government under tribal chiefs.

From the end of British rule in 1947, there was steady encroachment into the Hill Tracts by Bengali settlers, often with the tacit support of successive governments of Pakistan then Bangladesh. Today about half the population of the Hill Tracts is Bengali. Development projects, mainly water storages, also reduced traditional lands.

After failing to win provisions for autonomous rule in the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Indigenous people began a political and an armed struggle. Three councils, with guaranteed Indigenous majorities and limited control over some government functions, were won in 1985. At the end of 1997, after five years of ceasefire, a peace accord was agreed including provision for surrender of weapons, return of refugees from exile in India, and a Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, with a degree of autonomy from the central government, and a Land Commission to settle land disputes with settlers. The accord is opposed by the parliamentary opposition in Bangladesh, and its terms are opposed by dissident groups from the hill tracts, resulting in sporadic violence.

Provisions in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Article 28. Discrimination on grounds of religion, etc.

[Assessment...Contd.]

A number of transnational Islamist terrorist groups, including the [Al Qaeda](#), have established a presence in Bangladesh in alliance with various militant fundamentalist organisations there. Investigations into the January 22, 2002, terrorist attacks on the American Center in India's Kolkata, brought these linkages to the fore. The self-styled Asif Reza Commando Force (ARCF), which claimed responsibility for the January 22 attack, is essentially a criminal group allied to the [Harkat-ul-Jehadi-e-Islami](#), Bangladesh (HuJI-BD). The HuJI-BD has very close links with Pakistan's external intelligence agency the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). The arrest of Aftab Ansari alias Aftab Ahmed alias Farhan Malik, the prime accused in the American Centre attack, led to further disclosures regarding the international linkages between the Jaish-e-Mohammed ([JeM](#)), Lashkar-e-Toiba ([LeT](#)) and HuJI based in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Ansari is reportedly linked to the ISI and to Omar Shiekh, a prominent leader of the JeM and prime accused in the abduction and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl, in Pakistan. Ansari was reportedly taken to Islamabad in August 2001 and asked by Omar Sheikh to provide cover and logistical support for terrorist operations from Bangladesh.

HuJI-BD was established with direct aid from [Osama bin Laden](#) in 1992, and is led by Shawkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid. Imtiaz Quddus is the General Secretary of the organisation, which has an estimated strength of about 15,000 cadres and seeks to establish Islamic *hukumat* (rule) in Bangladesh. HuJI-BD is reported to maintain six camps in the hilly areas of Chittagong, where cadres are trained in the use of weapons. Several hundred recruits have also been trained in various training camps of Afghanistan. The cadres are recruited mainly from students of various *madarsas* and call themselves the 'Bangladeshi Taliban'. Harkat activists regularly cross over into several Indian States and maintain links with terrorist groups there, including those in India's Northeast, such as the United Liberation Front of Asom ([ULFA](#)) and a number of marginal Islamist organisations that have mushroomed along the borders with Bangladesh. Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) is reported to support HuJI-BD. Sources indicate that Bin Laden maintained links with Islamist militant organisations in Bangladesh through an organisation called the 'Servants of Suffering Humanity International', Dhaka, which bin Laden funded. It is also reported that a 25-member team of the [Taliban](#) arrived in Bangladesh in June 2001 from Afghanistan, to train HuJI-BD cadres. HuJI-BD reportedly receives financial assistance from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan through Muslim Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Bangladesh, including Adarsa Kutir, Al Faruk Islamic Foundation and Hataddin. Operational linkages also exist with a number of foreign Islamist organisations and militants. For instance, in the latter half of January 1999, police in Bangladesh arrested five HuJI members suspected of plotting the January 18

- (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race caste, sex or place of birth.
- (2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life.
- (3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.
- (4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

Legislation and administration

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council provides for 22 members elected by members of the three Hill District Councils. The head of the Council must be Indigenous and has the same status as a state minister. Two thirds of the ordinary members must be Indigenous, with quotas for each ethnic group and for women, while the remaining seven members are from the Bengali population. The Council has responsibilities for general administration, development, law and order, NGO activities, disaster management and relief activities, while the Hill District Councils retain the limited responsibilities they were given in 1985. Land transfers require the Regional Council's permission, and new settlement of Bengalis from the plains is severely restricted.

The Land Commission, headed by a former judge, will deal both with resettlement disputes involving refugees returning from India and Burma, and rightful ownership of lands that have been settled illegally. Decisions are final and there are no appeals.

The peace accord also established a Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, which must be headed by an Indigenous hill person, while the presence of military and security personnel was restricted.

Economic empowerment

Except for those who spent long periods as refugees, the ethnic groups of the hill tribes have retained their ability to participate in normal economic activities throughout their protracted struggle for recognition of their rights. Their challenge has been to retain their lands for economic production in the face of constant encroachment.

Right to life and security

On both sides of the struggle in the Hill Tracts, there were many abuses of the right to life and security in the form of massacres, extrajudicial killings, disappearances and continual threats. The members of the Shanti Bahini, the forces of the Indigenous ethnic groups, have been given amnesty, while members of the armed forces and police forces of Bangladesh have not. This contradiction still rankles. Conflict with dissident groups continues to threaten the accord. The right to life and security is still under serious threat.

Sources: Sanjoy Hazarika, *Refugees Within, Refugees Without* Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*.

[Assessment...Contd..]

1999, assassination-attempt on celebrated poet Shamsur Rahman. Over the following days, information provided by these activists led to the detention of an interesting melange of people, including, apart from two more Bangladeshis, an Afghan, a Pakistani and two South Africans.

HuJI-BD was assigned the task of recruiting Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims to fight in Jammu and Kashmir under the command of HuM. In Bangladesh, HuJI terrorists have been active against secular politicians and intellectuals. The professed objective of this Islamic group is to turn Bangladesh into a *Dar-ul-Islam* or a land of believers. The previous Awami League government had introduced some measures to curb the activities of the group and had arrested several of its leaders and cadres. Evidently, the new right wing regime created a more favourable context for the operation of extremist forces in the country.

However, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and increasing pressure on Islamist terrorist outfits to curb subversive activities, the BNP regime has been cautious in dealing with extremist forces in the country. Despite pressure from the Jamaat and other Islamist extremist forces, the new regime has portrayed itself as an ally of the US and decided to uphold the decision taken by the caretaker government to support the US-led alliance forces in global war against terrorism. As a result, there has been a lull in terrorist activities, in part because of declining international tolerance for terrorism, and partly because the imperatives of internal anti-state violence declined after Islamist extremist groups such as the Jamaat gained a share in the State structure. Available evidence prior to the October 1, 2001, general elections suggested increasing involvement of Islamic fundamentalist organisations in terrorist and subversive activities in Bangladesh. On January 20, 2001, there were two separate bomb blasts in Dhaka in which an estimated six persons were killed and 50 others injured. The then Home Minister Mohammad Nasim held the Jamaat-e-Islami and its associated organisations responsible for the blasts. The Water Resource Minister Abdur Razzak blamed the ISI for its complicity in this incident. In the same month, an alliance of Islamic fundamentalist groups, Islamic Okiya Jote (IOJ) [the Islamic Unity Front], another member of the new ruling alliance, had intensified its campaign against a December 2000 High Court verdict banning two *fatwas* (religious edicts). The alliance declared the two judges, Golam Rabbani and Nazmun Ara Sultana, who had delivered the verdict, as *murtad* (enemies of Islam) and pronounced death sentences on them. The IOJ had also declared a *jihad* against the United Forum of Citizens, a group of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) which supported the High Court's action of banning the *fatwas*. A series of strikes had been organised by the BNP alliance in protest.

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Petition Called by RSF: Government delays the release of Saleem Samad.



24.12.02

The government delays the release of Saleem Samad

The government refused to allow the release today of Saleem Samad, ordered by the High Court on 23 December. Because of the Christmas holidays, he cannot now be freed until 26 December. Friends of Samad, who is local correspondent of Reporters Without Borders, fear the government might use the Special Powers Act to extend his imprisonment by a month. The Act is being used to hold journalist and human rights campaigner Shahriar Kabir, who was arrested on 8 December.

23.12.02

Priscilla Raj freed after one month in detention. High court orders release of Saleem Samad

Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières) today welcomed yesterday's release of human rights activist Priscilla Raj and the high court's decision today to order the release of journalist Saleem Samad on bail. The two were arrested in connection with their work for a team from Britain's Channel 4 television.

The organisation also called on the government and judicial authorities to drop all charges against Raj and Samad, as well as a third Bangladeshi national who assisted the Channel 4 team, human rights activist Mainul Islam Khan, and the Channel 4 team itself, Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino. Malik and Sorrentino were expelled from Bangladesh on 11 December, while Khan fled the country to avoid arrest.

Raj, who worked as an interpreter for the Channel 4 team, was freed from Dhaka prison five days after her lawyers obtained a high court ruling in favour of her release on bail. She confirmed to the press that she was subjected to psychological and physical torture, including electric shocks.

It is thought that Samad, a Reporters Without Borders correspondent, could be freed tomorrow if the authorities do not obstruct implementation of the high court decision, issued in response a petition by his lawyer Amir ul-Islam. Samad, who worked as a fixer for the Channel 4 team, has

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Assessment...Contd.]

On April 6, 2001, over 100 persons were injured in Jamaat-e-Islami—police clashes in Dhaka. The next day, two leaders of the Awami League's youth and student front were killed by Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) cadres at Satkania. The ICS is the the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Two days later, nine activists of the ICS were arrested in Stakania in connection with the April 7 killings. On April 14, 2001, at least eight persons were killed in a bomb blast at a Bengali New Year cultural function in Dhaka. Later, police arrested four persons including Maulana Mohammad Akbar Hossain, Vice Principal of Siddirganj Madrassah, for their alleged involvement in the blast. On April 23, 2001, four bomb explosions were reported in Dhaka in which two police personnel were injured. In the same month, Indian and Western intelligence agencies reportedly informed Bangladesh of a plot by army officers responsible for the 1975 coup, the ISI and the Jamaat, to assassinate the then Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed. On May 28, 2001, 15 *madrassa* students and suspected Taliban activists were arrested from Balurmath area of Labonchora in Khulna. Ten persons were killed and 25 others injured in a bomb blast at a Catholic Church mission church at Baniachar, Gopalganj district, on June 3, 2001. Again on June 15, 2001, an estimated 21 persons were killed and over 100 injured in a bomb blast at the Awami League party office at Narayanganj town. The then Foreign Minister had stated that the unholy nexus of extreme religious zealots and fundamentalist elements with organised international terrorist groups was responsible for the blast. On June 29, 2001, police arrested an ICS activist for his alleged involvement in the Narayanganj blast.

On September 24, 2001, eight persons were killed and over a hundred injured in a bomb blast at an election rally at Mollarhat, Bagerhat district. Again, on September 25, 2001, four persons were killed in an explosion near the venue of an Awami League election meeting at Shullah, Sunamganj district. On the same day, two persons were killed in another explosion in Sylhet town. Various terrorist groups operating in India's Northeast continue to find safe havens and operating bases on Bangladeshi territory for subversive activities against India. Recent reports indicate that Northeast terrorist groups operating from Bangladesh have started regrouping and shifting several of their camps from Bhutan to the bordering areas in Bangladesh. Outfits like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) have now been emboldened by the new BNP government in Bangladesh, which in its previous term was seen as supportive of these terrorist groupings. Many leaders of the ruling party are reported have direct business linkages, including partnerships with corporations and financial operations that are run by or co-owned with leaders of such terrorist organisations. During its previous regime between 1991 and 1996, the BNP is reported to have provided these groups with unhindered facilities, such as training camps, bank accounts, arms purchases, and so on. As a result these

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also been tortured during interrogation sessions. A fourth Bangladeshi national, journalist and human rights activist Shahriar Kabir, was arrested on 8 December because he had given testimony to the Channel 4 team about the political situation in Bangladesh. He was tortured during an interrogation session and suffered a heart attack. He was transferred to Gazipur prison (north of Dhaka) on 22 December.

18.02.02

Campaign for the release of Saleem Samad and Priscilla Raj, held without charge

Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans frontières) today reiterated its calls for the release of journalist Saleem Samad and human rights activist Priscilla Raj, who were arrested on 25 and 29 November in connection with their work for European television journalists Zaiba Malik (Britain) and Bruno Sorrentino (Italy). The high court today ruled that Raj should be released on bail, but the authorities have not yet complied with the ruling.

Raj was detained while interpreting for Malik and Sorrentino, who were working for Britain's Channel 4. She had undergone torture during interrogation sessions, including torture by electric shock. Samad, who is a Reporters Without Borders correspondent, was working as a fixer for the European journalists. He has been held for 20 days in Dhaka prison and has been beaten during interrogation by the police and intelligence services. The two European journalists, who were also originally detained, were expelled from Bangladesh on 11 December.

Reporters Without Borders deplors the fact that the European journalists's Bangladeshi assistants are still being detained although the European journalists themselves were released. "This case has already gone on too long. It should be closed, no further action should be taken, and no charges should be pressed against Samad or Raj," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Robert Ménard said. Since their release, Malik and Sorrentino have called for the release of their assistants. "We are very concerned that Priscilla and Saleem are still being held without charge," Malik wrote on 13 December. "We are relieved to have been released and it makes no sense to hold on to Priscilla and Saleem any longer. We appeal to the Bangladeshi authorities to release them too, and to ensure their future safety and their families' safety." More than 550 persons, including many journalists, have already signed the petition for the release of Samad and Raj which is still available on the Reporters Without Borders website (www.rsf.org).

Bangladeshi journalist Tipu Sultan, the recent recipient of a Committee to Project Journalists (CPJ) award, has said this

[Assessment...Contd..]

terrorist groups, on the run in India's Northeast due to persistent Army operations, found a much-needed breathing space to regroup and re-launch their offensive against the Indian state.

According to Indian government sources, terrorist groups such as the ULFA, All Tripura Tiger Force ([ATTF](#)) and National Liberation Front of Tripura ([NLFT](#)) run several base camps in the jungles of Sylhet and the CHT areas of eastern Bangladesh. These camps are reportedly used for training of cadres and to hold hostages abducted for ransom. ULFA also reportedly runs a transit camp at the Senaibati area in Sherpur district of Bangladesh. Available evidence also indicates close linkages between the Northeast terrorist groups and Islamist terrorist outfits in Bangladesh. Some of the ULFA camps situated in the CHT along the Tripura-Bangladesh borders are reportedly being run by the HuJI. Some of these camps were activated after the October 1, 2001, general elections. Reports also indicate that the ULFA relocated some of their bases from Bhutan to Bangladesh via Meghalaya after the Bhutanese government gave an ultimatum to the ULFA to wind up its camps by the end of December 2001.

The previous Awami League regime in Bangladesh had taken steps against the use of the country's territory by terrorist groups operating in India's Northeast. On February 18, 2001, Anup Chetia, former general secretary of the ULFA, who was arrested in December 1997, was sentenced to three years in jail for illegal possession of foreign currencies by a special tribunal in Dhaka. Paresh Barua, who runs his headquarters from Dhaka, is reported to have escaped three attacks in the Bangladesh capital in 2001, though details on these are not available. After the attacks, he was reportedly aided by the ISI in fleeing to Karachi. Barua has several business interests in Bangladesh. These include a tannery, department store, garment factories, travel agencies, transport companies and investments in the capital market.

Despite the overwhelming international consensus evolving against international terrorism, reports suggest that Bangladesh is yet to curb some of its overt support to terrorist groups operating in India. The Directorate of General Forces Intelligence (DGFI) is reported to use these groups for 'offensive intelligence' activities, and is said to have continued to sheltered leaders of these groups despite strong government pressure during the erstwhile Awami League regime. A strong factor in such support is link between the DGFI, a section of Bangladeshi army, and the ISI. Even if the BNP government now decides to withdraw covert support to these terrorist outfits under international pressure, it remains to be seen how much control the government can exercise over such renegade elements within the state apparatus.

about Samad : "After having been attacked in 2001 by the men of an Awami League member of parliament, I received the support of many people in Bangladesh including Saleem Samad. He provided international organisations with information about the way MP Joynal Hazari's men tried to kill me. Samad is a press freedom activist and a serious journalist. I am sure he would do nothing against our country. I call on Mrs. Khaleda Zia's government to free him and end the threats against his family."

Samad's immediate family has had to go into hiding in Dhaka because the police threatened to arrest Samad's young son Atisha. Samad's arrest has had a traumatic effect on Atisha at a moment when he is about to take important school exams.

Muntasir Mamun and Shahriar Kabir, both journalists and human rights activists, have also been detained by police since 8 December for having given testimony to the Channel 4 team on the political situation in Bangladesh. Kabir was tortured during interrogation and suffered a heart attack. Finally, a press freedom activist who had assisted the Channel 4 team, Mainul Islam Khan, had to flee the country for fear of being arrested.

Meanwhile, the government of Bangladesh has still not given any response to the visa request made Reporters Without Borders' secretary-general on 4 December. The embassy of Bangladesh in Paris has said it could take "several weeks."

Two British TV journalists freed but two local colleagues stay in prison and two others are arrested



Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières) welcomed today's release by the Bangladeshi government of two British TV journalists after more than two weeks in detention for alleged anti State activities but called for the "immediate and unconditional" release of their local assistants who remained in prison and were being treated as criminal and plotters. The journalists, reporter Zaiba Malik and cameraman Bruno Sorrentino, of the British TV station Channel 4, were freed and deported a few hours later. Two Bangladeshis who had worked with them - journalist Saleem Samad (photo), the local correspondent of Reporters Without Borders, and interpreter Priscilla Raj - were not freed. The press freedom organisation also asked the government to explain why two local journalists and human rights activists, Muntasir Mamun and Shahriar Kabir, were arrested on 8 December, apparently on suspicion of having connections with the British journalists. Kabir had a heart attack while being interrogated at a police station during the night of 10-11 December but his doctor and family were not allowed to see him.

[Assessment...Contd..]

Resentment against the [Chittagong Hill Tracts \(CHT\) Accord of December 1997](#), which resulted in relative peace in the region, intensified in 2001. The accord promised the tribal restitution of their land, greater participation in government, greater participation in government and a reduction in the Bangladesh military presence in the CHT. However, the accord did not solve many outstanding questions and its implementation ran into snags so that its full potential for peace, development and coexistence between the tribal and settler segments of the region's inhabitants remained practically unrealised.

The reclamation of land by returning tribal remains a contentious issue. Much of the land cultivated by the indigenous population never had formal ownership. Thus in the absence of formal documentation, the indigenous may be unable to contest rights to land they had previously occupied and cultivated. The land commission, which would have an essential role in the reclamation of land of returning refugees and internally displaced, is still not operational.

Apart from the land question, other parts of the accord remain unimplemented, the most serious being that most of the non-permanent army camps have not been shut down. Moreover, the tribal population feels frustrated over slow implementation of the accord. The Chittagong Hills Tract Regional Council, which was created after the peace accord, is also not happy with the pace of implementation. The Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) allege that the government is failing to implement the Peace Accord and threatens to go back to armed struggle. On May 13, 2001, a four-member team of the CHT Regional Council met CHT Affairs Minister Kalpa Ranjan Chakma in Dhaka to expedite the process of the full implementation of the 1997 Accord. On May 18, 2001, the team met the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. On July 1, 2001, after a meeting between the PCJSS chief and CHT Regional Council Chairman Jyotindra Bodhipriya Larma and the CHT Task Force Affairs Chairman Dipankar Talukdar, the government and the PCJSS agreed to jointly work for the quick implementation of the CHT Accord. The major source of mutual distrust is that there is almost no reconciliation between the indigenous people and the Bengali settlers. To ensure a truly sustainable peace, the animosity that was built over two decades of insurgency needs to be overcome.

The Bengali settlers have great expectation from the new BNP government. The BNP has always held that the accord discriminates against the Bengali population in the CHT. In its election manifesto, the party had promised that if voted to power, they would review the terms of the Accord.

[Assessment...Contd..]

Both men were due to be sent to Dhaka prison on 11 December.

"The jailing and deporting of Malik and Sorrentino proves that it was a political matter seeking to frighten off foreign journalists wanting to report freely on the situation in the country," said Reporters Without Border secretary-general Robert Ménard. "We have witnessed a parody of justice and noted the ill-treatment of Samad under interrogation. Now we have a double-standard - one for European journalists and another for their Bangladeshi colleagues," he said.

Announcing the release of the Channel 4 journalists, foreign affairs minister Reaz Rahman told a press conference the government had made an "extraordinary gesture" by freeing them after they had apologised for investigating without press visas the presence of Al-Qaeda militants in Bangladesh. He said they had agreed not to use any of the film they had shot.

Rahman said the cases of Samad and Raj would be considered later in the light of "the laws of the motherland." Samad, who was arrested in Dhaka on 29 November, four days after Malik and Sorrentino, said he had been beaten in prison by a policeman, Kohinoor Miah, during interrogation. The two Channel 4 journalists were arrested on 25 November, along with Raj and their driver Mujib (since released), as they were about to cross the eastern border into India at Benapole. Since then, police have persistently obstructed the course of justice. Mamun, a columnist and academic, and Kabir, a freelance journalist and human rights activist, were picked up at their homes for no apparent reason, but sources in Dhaka said their arrest could be to do with the police investigation of the Channel 4 journalists. Kabir was jailed for more than two months at the end of 2001 for investigating violence against Hindus. He was released on bail but still faces charges of "sedition."

A petition for the release of Samad and Raj can be found and signed at www.rsf.org.

Application for Samad's release on bail rejected

Saleem Samad appeared on 9 December before the judge handling his case and after a hearing of only a few minutes, his lawyers' application for his release on bail was rejected. However the judge said they and Samad's relatives could visit him in prison. He seemed to be in good health.

Samad transferred to Dhaka central prison, legal procedures still held up

The police transferred Reporters Without Borders correspondent Saleem Samad to Dhaka central prison on 4 December after a hearing at which his lawyers and family were unable to gain access to him. Although he had been interrogated for five days, the police handled his transfer to

After coming to power, the government has reiterated this intent, and has promised to assess whether the Accord has guaranteed the rights of the tribal people within the framework of the Constitution and national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bangladesh. On December 11, 2001, a delegation of the PCJSS met the Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, and was assured that the Accord would undergo a review.

Within the tribal community there is a persistent tension between pro- and anti-peace accord groups. On February 16, 2001, three foreign nationals – one British and two Danish engineers were abducted in the Naniarchar forests of the Rangamati Hill District, Chittagong, reportedly by suspected activists of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF). The UPDF, however, denies its involvement in the abduction. The UPDF was formed by former associates of Shanto Larma, with whom the government signed the 1997 Accord. The group now opposes the 1997 Accord, and has declared that they would continue to struggle for full autonomy for the CHT. The hostages were released following a commando action on March 17, 2001. Throughout the year there were a number of clashes between the pro- and anti-Accord groups. On October 31, 2001, a delegation of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP), a student front aligned to the PCJSS, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister through the Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachhari, demanding an end to the terrorist activities by some tribal groups who oppose the CHT Accord of 1997.

Hindu Puja Mandop ransacked and icon ravaged



Picture: (Courtesy Daily Janakantha) At Left, desecrated and destroyed Idol of Goddess Kali at Shubedya Pashchimpara of Keraniganj. Attacking the opposition as a result (middle). Army arrested one in this connection (right)

Report Daily Janakantha - Wednesday, November 10, 2002.

Keraniganj: One puja mandop at Karaniganj of Dhaka was desecrated, ransacked and destroyed by miscreants on Friday. Once resisted by local Hindu community,

prison in such a way that his lawyer was unable to obtain his signature to a document granting power of attorney, which would have enabled the lawyer to take additional legal initiatives for his release.

The next hearing is due to take place on 9 December. But certain sources in Dhaka said the officers of the Criminal Investigation Department, now in charge of the case, could resume interrogating Samad after the festivities ending the month of Ramadan

Meanwhile, Samad's family has continued to receive threats from police and members of the secret services. His younger brother Shamim, who had filed a request for his release on bail, was himself threatened with arrest and had to go into hiding for several days. His father, Abdus Samad, 81, was obliged to get up in the middle of the night to answer questions from police officers, who raided and searched the family home at least three times. His sister-in-law has been receiving daily threats. His wife and son have gone into hiding. Journalists Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino of Britain's Channel 4 television and their translator Priscilla Raj were taken to Dhaka prison on 2 December, while their driver was released the same day. Lawyers and diplomats finally obtained access to them in the prison at 8 p.m. on 2 December. Previously, the police had refused to comply with a high court of justice decision authorising access. Representatives of the Italian and British embassies said the two journalists and their translator had not been beaten during interrogation. The prison governor received the journalists in his office before they were taken to their cells. The authorities have still not told the lawyers what exactly their clients are being charged with. The court has simply said that the two European journalists are accused of entering Bangladesh on "false identities" and "conspiring against the country".

Reporters Without Borders starts worldwide petition to free the Channel 4 journalists and its local correspondent Samad

Reporters Without Borders has posted on its website (www.rsf.org) a petition to Bangladesh prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia calling for the release of its local correspondent, Saleem Samad, and two journalists of the British television station Channel 4, Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino, as well as their translator Priscilla Raj. They are detained in Dhaka and have been accused of "sedition", which can carry the death penalty. Reporters Without Borders calls on journalists everywhere, along with human rights campaigner and the general public, to sign the petition for their release. Journalists, even if they work without special visas, can under no circumstances be considered as people engaged in "underground" and "dangerous anti-state activities." Bangladesh has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, whose article 19 guarantees press freedom.

A protest demonstration was held in front of the press club in Dhaka on 3 December.

[Assessment...Contd..]

miscreants sexually assaulted four minority women at the Puja promise. According to eye witness, 15/20 people were carrying the Idol of Goddess Kali for Puja on Friday afternoon at Shubedya Pashchimpara Hindu Cemetery for Kali Puja. At that time, a group of miscreants of Najir group attacked the puja mandop. They exploded couple of hand bomb and desecrated two idols. Local Hindus tried to resist the miscreants who went on rampage at the premise and sexually assaulted four minority women namely Bhalobasha Rani, Munu, Jolpana and Nirasha. The ages of the assaulted women are 25, 50, 40 and 25 respectively. Later in Saturday, members of puja committee strongly resisted the misadventure of the miscreants which invoked attack and counter attacks. Hearing the news of street fighting, army rushed to the spot and arrested two persons namely Hira (17) and Ibrahim (20). The arrested persons are the members of Najir group.

Further details:

http://www.hrcbm.org/news/keraniganj_puja.html

Visit our web site for " **Investigative Report**" from Bhola at <http://www.hrcbm.org/news/Bhola1.html>



Rabindra Ghosh, HRCBM talking with Golam Mostafa, DIG of Police (left) SP. Bhola (Middle) asking for security of religious minorities in Barisal zone including Bhola.



Mr. Ghosh of HRCBM talking with the victims at Bhola at Lalmoohan PS.



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AFP

Bombs hit cinemas in Bangladesh: BBC