

Hill people press for lasting solution

By S Y Bakht back from CHT

The 16-year-old insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region by the Shantibahini, the armed wing of the Parbatia Chattagram Jano Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), lingers on despite repeated attempts by successive governments to find a permanent solution to the problem.

However, a consensus seems to have evolved over the years among various sections of people in the region that a political solution has to be found for this national problem.

Although an overwhelming majority of the people this correspondent talked to during a recent week-long visit to the region agreed that a political solution would have to be found, no one, including tribals, non-tribals, politicians and administrators could provide an outline for it.

According to an official of the security forces, the latest initiative for a dialogue between the government and the PCJSS, based in the refugee camps across the border, has made little progress.

A six-member liaison committee headed by Hongshodosh Chakma, a Khagrachari-based politician, was formed in February 1991 to act as a go-between in establishing a common ground for opening a dialogue between the two sides.

The publicity secretary of PCJSS, Rupayan Dewan, in a letter in November last year set three preconditions in reply to a government offer to hold talks. The government rejected the pre-conditions

namely setting up of a parliamentary committee on CHT, putting up a minister at the head of the delegation at the talks and announcement of the names of the delegation members beforehand, in December.

In January this year the PCJSS reiterated its three-point demand while the liaison committee unofficially wrote to them saying that unless they were more accommodating to a democratic government it would be difficult to hold the talks.

This initiative for a dialogue came in the backdrop of six earlier meetings between the PCJSS and a national committee headed by a senior cabinet member of the previous government all, however, ended without reaching any accord.

The PCJSS broke off the dialogue unilaterally in December 1988, following which, the national committee drew up a plan to provide a limited autonomy and a system of self-governance to the tribal people with the written consent of 48 prominent tribal leaders.

In March 1989, Parliament adopted the bills paving the way for establishing three district local government councils. Under the framework only a tribal can be elected a chairman, only 10 to the 30-member council can be elected from amongst the nearly 40 per cent non-tribal population and no one from the 'plane' districts can buy land in the region without the written permission of the council. Another major point is handing-over of the functions

of 22 departments of various ministries to the council. Elections were held in June 1989 and the elected representatives took office the following month and the three district local government councils, the first of its kind in the country, was launched.

But the situation in the 5093 square-mile-CHT region, with a population of 9,67,420, according to a preliminary report of the 1991 census, continues to remain tense as the Shantibahini refuses to give up arms and insurgency activities.

"There is no alternative to this system as the armed method cannot achieve anything," says Goutham Dewan, chairman of the Rangamati Hill District Local Government Council. "Because of our motivational work and our positive political activities, the attitude of the local people toward the Shantibahini has changed."

Shamiran Dewan, chairman of the Khagrachari Local Government Council, also echoes the view and adds that the insurgents are getting discouraged.

Being desperate the insurgents, according to the security forces official, began to attack 'soft targets' — raids on cluster villages inhabited by Bangalee settlers — designed to instigate fighting between the tribals and non-tribals. The Shantibahini also stepped up its intimidation efforts and threats towards the non-cooperating tribal people and also began to use high-powered explosive devices extensively.

In an incident in 1989, explosives blew up a military jeep

killing seven soldiers. This prompted the security forces to initiate daily route-check routines under which the Chittagong-Khagrachari and Chittagong-Rangamati roads are checked for explosives everyday and are only opened to traffic after the completion of the checks at around 9 am. Route protection posts have also been set up along the entire length of the roads.

The security forces, comprising members of the army, BDR, district police, armed police, Ansars and the village Defence Party, have been doing an uphill work in trying to fight the insurgents on the one hand and trying to gain support for the government's peace efforts among the local people, the official adds. The rough terrain in the region and the difficulty in identifying the insurgents also compounds the problem for them.

Another important factor which had a positive impact among the local population is the 'huge' developmental works undertaken by the government in recent years, according to a district administration official in Khagrachari.

More than Taka 356 crore have been spent for various developmental works undertaken by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) since its formation in 1976.

In addition, over Taka 280 crore was spent, under a special five-year plan initiated by the government in 1984-85, for various socio-economic de-

velopment projects.

A UNICEF financed project is also currently underway in the region to improve community facilities, installation of ring wells for water supply and installation of slab latrines, improvement of the educational facilities and an income generating project. Furthermore, a 27 million US dollar Asian Development Bank financed rubber plantation project has been undertaken to rehabilitate 2000 tribal families in the Khagrachari district.

But despite the progress made in recent years in various fields in promoting an atmosphere of better understanding, there is yet a good measure of distrust and lack of understanding among the people in the region.

Talking to this correspondent on condition of anonymity, a group of student members of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad at the Khagrachari College alleged of high-handedness and repressive measures undertaken by the security forces against the tribal people.

The group of five students also played down the role of the Local Government Council saying that the system neither could give the tribal people any sense of self-governance nor halted them out of the cycle of economic deprivation. They also expressed their displeasure about the fact that some tribals were being kept at the cluster villages.

The non-tribal population in the region are also getting impatient about the impasse in

finding a permanent solution to the problem.

"If it is for basic rights let us sit for talks but if it is for succession there is no scope for any discussion," declares Rafiqul Islam, president of the Khagrachari Jubo Kalyan Samity.

He also presents the fact that the non-tribals have been made 'second-class citizens' under the Local Government Council Act and the fact that nearly 90 per cent of the Bangalees have to live in the cluster villages due to security problems. Many other non-tribals also echoed similar sentiments while talking to this correspondent.

However, both tribals and non-tribals agree that a political solution to the problem needs to be found immediately.

"It is a political problem and the more the time passes the more critical it becomes," says Bir Bahadur, an Awami League MP from Bandarban. "In my opinion everybody has to sit together and find a lasting solution to the problem."

Many others, including the three chairmen of the local government councils and district administration officials, feel that a permanent solution can be found within the framework of the local government councils.

"If we work patiently and according to the agreed plan than I think the CHT problem can be solved within the framework of the Local Government Council," says Aung Saw Pru Chowdhury, chairman of the Bandarban Local Government Council.

The Midnight File

Israeli jets strike Shi'ite positions in S Lebanon

NABATTYEH (LEBANON), May 13: Israeli aircraft attacked positions of pro-Iranian Shi'ite Muslim guerrillas in South Lebanon at dawn today, security sources said.

They said the jets attacked from positions of the Islamic resistance in the Iqlim al-Toufiah area 40 km (25 miles) south of Beirut, reports Reuter.

Somalian plane hijackers surrender

NAIROBI, May 13: Six Somalis who hijacked a Red Cross plane with five foreigners from southern Somalia to Nairobi today surrendered peacefully to the authorities, the Red Cross said.

"Everyone's safe, everyone's okay," a Red Cross spokesman told Reuter.

200 arrested in Sind

KARACHI, May 13: More than 200 people have been arrested in Pakistan's troubled Sindh province, official sources said here today amid allegations of victimization from the party to opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, reports AFP.

Benazir's terms

From Page 1 Col 5 (with the people of Pakistan) should be evolved.

The Prime Minister said yesterday in Islamabad that the objective behind the invitation was to end the atmosphere of confrontation and to bring about political stability in the country.

He said that he had invited the opposition to come and talk with him about subjects which were agitating it, and it should come forward to sort out such problems.

Benazir too said that they had taken the PM's offer seriously as "we believe in keeping the doors of negotiations open," but she couldn't say whether the government was sincere and the offer was not a tactical move to wriggle out of a difficult situation. "I am not interested in baiting out the Prime Minister or any other person. I want to bail out the democratic system," she told journalists in the National Assembly cafeteria.

She said that the PM was facing difficult times. She painted a rather bleak picture of the situation: the coalition had fallen apart, the government was in trouble, its economic policies were not working, and the privatisation policy had not paid off.

She also confirmed that she had taken all opposition allies into confidence. They too wanted the doors to be kept open, but they were not sure if whether the talks offer was a ploy.

She forcefully denied that the Armed Forces were poised to take over power but said that the Army had a political role to play. "They are a political force and no government can run without their full support," she said.

She said that she did not intend to talk to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. She had received no invitation for talks.

In fact, she said, in the last three years since he dismissed her government, the President had not invited her even once, although he had met other opposition leaders.

Meanwhile, one development in Sindh is seen by some observers as an attempt to put a spanner in the possibility of talks between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The development is the reported encounter between a Naval force and some people who have been described as members of the Al Zulfiqar Organisation (AZO) and said to be led by late Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's only surviving son, Murtaza.

The encounter took place on the high seas near the Indian border.

The alleged terrorists were said to be going to India in a country boat when the Navy patrol boat intercepted it. In the encounter that followed, seven of the boat's passengers were killed and 14 others taken into custody. Several letters said to be written by Murtaza Bhutto were recovered from the arrested people.

The incident took place in the early hours of Saturday, but the news was released only on Monday.

But unlike his predecessor, the Sindh Chief Minister, Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah, has not linked the PPP or any other political party with the arrested people. The lawyer that he is, he said that he would not do so until he had proof.

Jam Sadiq Ali would not have missed this opportunity to malign the PPP.

Benazir has denied any link or involvement of the PPP with those arrested or killed. Her mother, Nusrat Bhutto, has said that the letters could not have been written by her son because he can not write Urdu.

1 killed, 50 hurt as activists of Jamaat, trial body clash

SIRAJGANJ, May 13: One person was killed and at least 50 others injured in a clash between processionists of Ekkattor Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee and Jamaat-e-Islami in the town today.

Jamaat claimed that the victim, Md Abul Kashem alias Shahjahan Ali (35) was an activist of the party.

Of the injured, seven have been admitted to the Sadar hospital. Of them, the condition of Jamaat activists Khokon and Abu Syed are critical.

The clash was sparked off when a procession of the Nirmul Committee confronted another one of Jamaat at Dargah Road near the Jamaat office.

US human rights

From Page 1 Col 7 from Bangladesh is scheduled to begin Friday.

UN officials said discussions about the problem were being held in Geneva involving UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata and UN Humanitarian Relief Coordinator Jan Eliasson.

In a letter sent Monday, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights said the massive repatriation must be voluntary, provide guarantees of safety and access by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to returned refugees.

UN reports obtained by the Associated Press document widespread abuses by the Myanmar military against Muslim refugees. One states: "Our conclusion is that without a fundamental change in Myanmar (Burma), these people will not go back."

On Tuesday in Geneva, UNHCR spokeswoman Syulvana Foa said the agency has strong reservations against going ahead with repatriation without information that it is safe for the refugees to return.

"Bangladesh is talking about a symbolic movement on the 15th," she said, "but we're really against even anything like that because we don't want to see any body treated like symbolic sacrificial lambs."

She said 2,000 Myanmar refugees continue to stream into Bangladesh daily. UNHCR, she said, should interview every individual to determine if they want to return. UNHCR also should be present in Myanmar to ensure that conditions are safe, but Myanmar has made no request for UN monitoring, she said.

The letter from Arthur C Helton, Director of the Lawyers Refugee Project, says the repatriation plan "omits basic assurances that the returns will be voluntary and to circumstances of safety. Absent such guarantees, the repatriation plan should be suspended."

NCL affairs

From Page 1 Col 4

fraudulence existed in the disbursement of the loans provided by the NCL, and if the loans were disbursed under the legal framework.

The non-banking investment companies were supposed to keep ten per cent of the borrowings as liquid asset in any banks or approved security under Securities Act, 1981. But according to the inquiry report of the central bank sent to the Ministry, NCL now has between three and four per cent deposited according to the Bank sources.

The inquiry report also found that NCL accepted less than Taka one thousand to open investors' account in the company. But, according to the existing rule, a client can open an investors' account with minimum one thousand taka.

Filipino polls

From Page 1 Col 7

overtake her and "never turn back."

Their predictions prompted the watchdog commission on elections (Comelec) to warn against premature celebrations. Counting of votes takes at least a week in the sprawling archipelago of 7,100 islands.

With Filipinos eager to know who is winning, television and radio stations have been conducting their own tallies.

To try to halt confusion, Comelec warned candidates and parties not to make premature victory statements and ordered broadcasters to stop their counts from noon tomorrow (Thursday).

After that only figures supplied by the legally mandated media Citizens' Quick Count may be published, it said.

Deoras dead

NEW DELHI, May 13: The acting head of India's militant Hindu Rashtriya Swyamsevakh Sangh (RSS) Movement, Bhaurao Deoras, died in New Delhi today, reports Reuter.

Ram temple plan

From Page 1 Col 7

people of India were disadvantaged, and they needed some "positive discrimination" like job quotas to move forward.

"Why should the upper caste enjoy all the benefits of progress?", he asked, adding that at present, government jobs such as in administration, police department etc. were overwhelmingly filled by upper caste people. As a result, he said, lower caste people were not getting a fair deal from the government machinery.

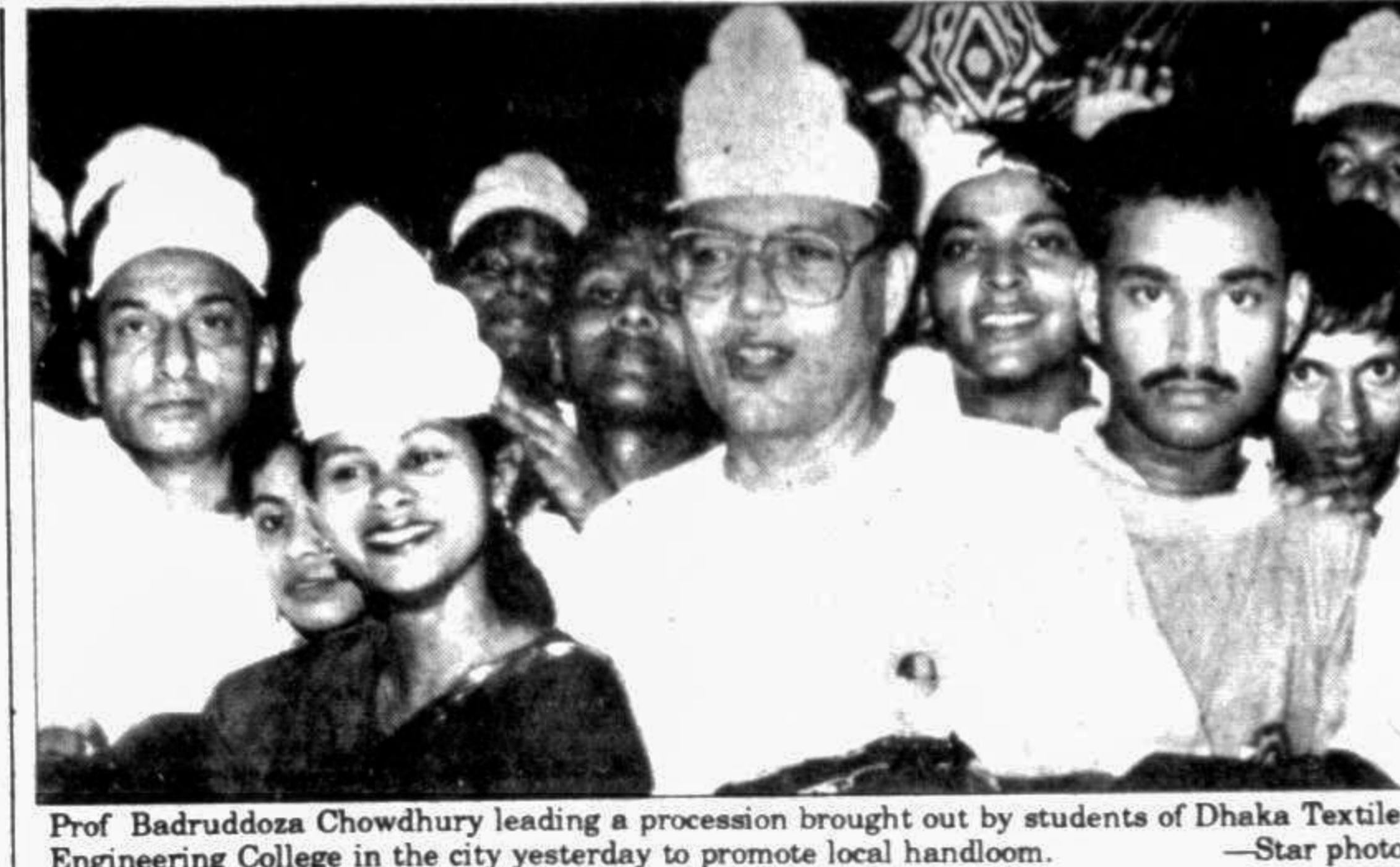
On another issue, the two AISF leaders said that the collapse of the Soviet Union and resurgence of the United States were putting sovereignty of Third World countries under great pressure. They said India was now being dictated to by the US to an unacceptable degree.

"If US interference and pressure on India continue, then the people of India will revolt. They will not stand it any longer, because they are anti-imperialists to the core of their hearts," Subhrangsu Bhattacharya concluded.

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Published by S. M. Ali on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000 and printed by him at Offset Printing Dialogue Publications Ltd., 19 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Dhaka-1000. Tel: PABX- 246023-4, 245061-2. Advertisement: 245063 & Ext. 20. Fax No. 88-02-863035. GPO Box No. 3257. GRAM: DAILY STAR, DHAKA.



Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury leading a procession brought out by students of Dhaka Textile Engineering College in the city yesterday to promote local handloom. —Star photo

Political solution

From Page 1 Col 4

of all people in society.

Begum Zia said violence and anarchy would never help in solving the existing problems in the hill district.

The Prime Minister told the gathering that some vested quarter was misguiding them for their selfish interest.

Begum Zia said those disrupting peace and stability in society through violence and terrorism were, in fact, destroying the future of the posterity.

Later the Prime Minister visited the Lougang village in Panchhari upazila of the district where 13 people were reported to be killed in clashes on April 10.

The Prime Minister was briefed on the damage caused by the clashes. She talked to the affected members of the families who had fled the village on the day of the clash.

Begum Zia was informed that the members of the armed forces were conducting relief operations in the areas.

UNHCR

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The refugees' refusal to return virtually nullifies the bilateral accord that enshrines voluntariness.

However, Soe Myint, the Myanmar ambassador in Dhaka, said that he was "very much convinced that the repatriation would go smoothly," when he was asked to comment on the current situation.

"We are doing it bilaterally and we're doing fine. We have conviction that our two peoples will get things done," the ambassador told The Daily Star last evening. He, however, said "We didn't deny the role of UNHCR."

Asked if his country would agree on the physical presence of the UN should the bilateral efforts fail, the ambassador said, "Wait and see what we're doing."

He alleged that "there are some people who are hindering the repatriation." He did not elaborate.

According to sources, both sides are trying to start the process 'symbolically' tomorrow by repatriating "a few hundred" refugees to 'honour' the agreement.

But that seems to be impossible under the circumstances.

Bangladesh is trying to ascertain the causes of influx even after signing the agreement on repatriation, said a Foreign Ministry official.

The refugees who are coming in say they have fled persecution. Myanmar denies the allegation.

Asked whether the repatriation would start as scheduled under the circumstances, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman said, "They're scared to go back ... and they'll not be pushed back."

"A series of actions have to be taken ... to assure them that they'll be safe on their return home ... and to conduct such a large scale operation."

He said that "there is no do-or-die date" because it was a 'humanitarian problem.'

According to a Foreign Office source, Myanmar is yet to set up the reception centres and complete other physical arrangements.

Both Bangladesh and Myanmar have selected the possible sites for exit and reception camps and conveyed to each other.

(N. Qadir is a guest correspondent).

PM: Memo

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The demonstrators submitted a five-point memorandum to the Prime Minister. The five points are: real political solution of the political problems prevailing in the greater Chittagong Hill Tracts, dissolution of the district councils, rehabilitation of 60,000 people who fled the country, creation of safer environment for the hill people and formation of a judicial commission to investigate into the incident of Lougang.

The demonstrator became noisy when Shamiran Dewan, Chairman of the Khagrachari District Council went to the microphone to address the public meeting. Some of them even waived sandals they were wearing.

The demonstrators left the meeting place before the Prime Minister addressed the meeting.

After the meeting was over, one of the entourage members said the Prime Minister did not object as she believed in democracy and added that Begum Zia wanted to make them understand that time had changed and it was no more the regime when their (the CHT problems) elected representative was not even allowed to speak in the Jatiya Sangsad.

প্রবাসে সুখবরটি

বন্ধুরাও উপভোগ করছে!

এমন সুখবরটি বন্ধুদের না দেখিয়ে পারলনা বঙ্গক। সুখবরটি ছিল—পাঠানো টাকা দিয়ে তার স্ত্রী ওয়েজ আর্গার ডেভেলপমেন্ট বণ্ড কিনেছে এবং তাকেও প্রবাসে থেকে ঐ বণ্ড কেনার জন্য বিশেষভাবে অনুরোধ করেছে— যাতে আছে ভবিষ্যতের স্বাস্থ্য সুখ আর স্বাদ্ন্দ।

ওয়েজ আর্গার ডেভেলপমেন্ট বণ্ড

সরকার বিদেশে কর্মরত বাংলাদেশি ওয়েজ আর্গারদের কল্যাণের জন্য ৫-বছর মেয়াদি ঐ ওয়েজ আর্গার ডেভেলপমেন্ট বণ্ড বাজারে ছেড়েছেন। ১,০০০, ৫,০০০, ১০,০০০, ২৫,০০০, ৫০,০০০ ও ১,০০,০০০ টাকা মূল্যমানের ঐ বণ্ড বিদেশে অবস্থিত সকল বাংলাদেশি ব্যাংক এবং দেশে যে সব ব্যাংক এফ, সি, একসিট খোলার ব্যবস্থা আছে সেই সব ব্যাংকে কিনতে পাওয়া যায়। এই বণ্ড লাভ চক্রবৃদ্ধিহারে ১৬%। ৬ মাস অন্তর লাভ উঠানো যায়। না উঠলে চক্রবৃদ্ধি হারে লাভ পাওয়া যায়— সরল হারে বার পরিসংখ্যান দাঁড়ায় প্রায় ২০%। এ ছাড়া এক সপ্তে ২৫,০০০ টাকা ও তার অধিক বিনিয়োগের জন্য রয়েছে ৩০% থেকে ৫০% পর্যন্ত মুদ্রা-সুকির সুবিধা (Death risk benefit)।

কেবলমাত্র বিদেশে কর্মরত বাংলাদেশি ওয়েজ আর্গার ও বাংলাদেশে তার বেনিফিসিয়ারী বৈদেশিক মুদ্রায় সমপরিমাণ অর্থ প্রধান করে যত খুশী ঐ বণ্ড কিনতে পারেন।

বিনিয়োগকৃত অর্থ ও অর্জিত লাভ সম্পূর্ণ আয়করমুক্ত।



জাতীয় সঞ্চয় পরিদপ্তর

অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়, গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

কি এফ সি (স) ১৯৮২-১৯৭১