

“We (indigenous peoples) can only live in Bangladesh if we convert to Islam and become Bengalis through marriage,” says Subroto Chakma (pseudonym), a victim of the Langadu arson attack in Rangamati, standing in front of the ruins of his village.

Shoikot Chakma (pseudonym), another victim, questions how it is possible to return to their day-to-day lives when the people responsible for such devastation have received no punishment for their crime: “How can you co-exist with them after this? You can feel everyone watching you when you go to the marketplace. There is this constant tension. You feel out of place in your birthplace, in your homeland where your forefathers have lived for generations.”

400 families lost their homes in three villages—Tintilla, Baittapara and Manikjorchhora—after local Bengali political settlers burnt down at least 224 houses and shops following the death of a Bengali man, Nayan. It is unfortunate that the Chakma community of Langadu have been victims of such violence; but what is more unfortunate is the lack of government support following the incident which took place on June 2, 2017.

After July 12, the victims have received no relief from either the



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when 40-50 Chakma youths gathered in Manikjorchhora for self-defence, at one point the security forces pointed their guns at the local Chakma people. However, at no point did the Chakma population of Langadu observe the security forces pointing their guns at the Bengali population or attempt to stop the arson. The Bengali settlers finally backed down when the local Chakma people united against the arsonists. Barrister Roy comments that if the Chakma youth did not take action that day, the attack could have spread to Langadu-Baradam and Mahajanpara.

Ushaton Talukdar MP states, “After incidents like this, we repeatedly fail to identify why these attacks have happened and those behind these happenings. We should assess the failures of the state and the society in these matters and address those. The reality is, despite the attack at Langadu, the indigenous peoples and the Bengali settlers have to co-exist there. We have to find a way in which peaceful coexistence is possible. If the people of CHT can live in a congenial environment, putting their differences aside, then prosperity is possible in terms of production, employment and education.”

The victims of Langadu approached the local police station with four cases, but the police accepted only one. Kishore Chakma filed a case with 98 identified



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PHOTOS: CHISTY KANON

and 300-400 unidentified individuals. Among the accused, Md Juyel, Md Saiful Islam, Md Khalilur Rahman Khan, Md Faruk Ahammod, Md Rasel and Md Chan Miya (Chandu) are roaming free without bail. Md Saiful Islam and Md Khalilur Rahman Khan have absconded.

Dr Mesbah Kamal, Professor of the Department of History at University of Dhaka, “So far the findings of the investigations conducted on communal attacks in the CHT area have not been made public. Nor have the people responsible for the attacks been brought to justice. Human Rights Commission (HRC) has conducted an investigation on the Langadu incident, but we can see no visible action taken based on the report. The full report of the HRC investigation

should be published as well.”

The indigenous peoples of CHT want to co-exist with the local Bengali people in peace, but incidents like Langadu make it difficult to do so. On May 4, 1989, Langadu was attacked in a similar fashion following the killing of the local Bengali chairperson; more than 30 people were victims of the mass murder. History repeated itself when Langadu burned once again last June, again followed by the death of a Bengali man. A procession of about 3,000-4,000 people carrying the dead body of Nayan turned into a communal attack. Whether the murder of Nayan was committed by a Chakma or not cannot determine the fate of hundreds of Chakma families. The death of Nayan or any individual cannot

be an excuse for anyone to take part in the ethnic cleansing process of the CHT.

Those displaced by the arson incident returned to rebuild their lives on the forsaken land of Langadu. Their basic needs of shelter, food, clothing, education and health are not being met. The victims are surviving on potatoes. The children do not have proper educational materials. The government has provided them with books, but they do not have stationery, school bags or other necessities. The people of Langadu are now living amidst ruins in the cold winter, and with the constant reminder that they have been abandoned by the state and society.

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LANGADU

A CASE OF ETHNIC CLEANSING IN BANGLADESH

MRITTIKA KAMAL

government or other sources. More than six months have passed, but the victims are still homeless.

Initially, about two-third of the affected families left Langadu; many of them expressed that they would not return. To them, returning to a pile of ashes did not seem like much of an option. The remaining victims took refuge in schools, temples and other people's houses in Langadu. Later on, the internally displaced families realised that they were not safe in any part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. So they have returned to the ashes where once their homesteads stood and are trying to find some means of survival.

Winter is here, but there are no walls to protect the families of Langadu from the wind and no roofs above their heads either. Some families have attempted to put something together by gathering scraps from the ruins with the two or three bundles of corrugated tin they received as aid.

The government has promised to

basis. Hence, a family of 23 members that lost a four-room house is receiving the same compensation as a family with three members that lost a two-room house. People who were living in the houses as tenants lost all their personal belongings, but are not receiving any compensation whatsoever. Besides, no compensation has been provided for rebuilding the three institutions that were affected—the regional office of the PCJSS, the Multi-purpose Community Centre and Para Kendra, an educational institution.

The victims do not have proper shelter or warm clothing to face the winter either. Each family (often consisting of three generations) has received two quilts from the government and one from Chittagong University. This is how we, the civil society and mass people, along with the government, are supporting the victims of arson attack in Langadu.

When what is lost cannot be quantified in numbers

The people of Langadu have lost Guno Mala Chakma in the fire of Langadu. She was burned alive in the fire, repeating the history of bloodshed of her people. It may never be possible to rebuild the local indigenous peoples' trust in the Bengali settlers, security forces and the government. The damage done in the incident is beyond repair.

Adreeta Chakma (pseudonym) says, “The man who often had tea at your house, or whose boat you used to cross the river on everyday, or from whom you bought your groceries—the man who was your friend, your colleague, your associate a few days ago, is suddenly burning your house down. How can you trust anyone anymore?”

Nipa Chakma (pseudonym) expresses

that they are feeling extremely insecure in the shelters they made from the ruins of Langadu. “If we hear any noise at night, we fear that we are going to be attacked at any moment,” she says.

It is difficult for most of us living outside the CHT region to understand the situation of the indigenous peoples, political Bengali settlers, security forces and the government. The history of internal conflict in the CHT region officially ended with the signing of the Peace Accord in 1996, but there has not been satisfactory progress in the implementation of the Peace Accord even after 20 years of its signing. In this context, incidents like Langadu are exceptionally dangerous as they tap into the core of the frustration and insecurity of the indigenous peoples in CHT.

According to Barrister Raja Devasish Roy, “If one-sided communal attacks like Langadu continue, it might lead to armed conflict in the long run.

Communal attacks like Langadu are not new incidents, but the government and people have failed to take any lessons from these experiences.”

Barrister Roy adds that it is evident that the security forces could not maintain impartiality. The day before the incident took place, they assured the indigenous people that no violence would occur; yet there is proof of members of the security forces participating in a public meeting and procession concerning the death of Nayan, where the indigenous peoples were referred to as “pahari santrashi” or “terrorist hill people”.

In fact, the local indigenous peoples have complained to Barrister Roy that men of the security forces were seen among the attackers in Tintilla and/or Baittapara villages. Also,

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ECONOMY

AFTER 2017... WHAT DEFINES OUR BANKING SECTOR?

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As the new year begins without us getting any closer to seeing an end to corruption, irregularities and mismanagement in the banking sector amidst an embarrassing lack of proper oversight, high-level bank employees continue to drop like flies.

The latest among them were the Managing Directors of The Farmers Bank, NRB Commercial Bank and Meghna Bank, AB Bank's Chairman, Vice-chairman and Director, seven Directors of Social Islami Bank, and too many others to bother listing.

And while some “clearly-not-big-enough banksters” (those who have been sacked) are sacrificed by the wolf (those who are too big to be sacked, hence does the sacking) to quieten the sheep (you and me), our Finance Minister has had a real revelation. He said... wait for it... that a party was borrowing heavily from the market and buying banks to benefit itself!

How come none of us figured that out over the last n-number of years and not constantly warned of these kinds of danger? Oh, wait...we did... and we did. So how come the warnings were ignored? Do we wait another eternity to find out?

On December 12, the Finance Minister also told journalists that “there is no cause for concern” in regards to the decision to allow three new banks to operate, although that is in complete refutation of what experts have said and contradicts the fact that “the



COLLAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

performance of the nine new banks” allowed to operate “since 2013 has not been any good.”

Our Finance Minister is almost reminiscent of Einstein when he said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” But, then again, experts also say that it is a quote often misattributed to Einstein, so I guess he could be only reminding me of insanity—not Einstein.

Speaking of insanity, total bad loans in the banking sector increased by 23 percent towards the end of September to more than BDT 80,307 crore from BDT 65,731 crore only 12 months ago—with the regulators pretending everything is lovely and without depositors tearing “their” (“whose”? *wink*) hair out. But not to worry, Bangladesh Bank (BB) Deputy Governor Shitangshu Kumar Sur Chowdhury said that the central bank had “strengthened monitoring on other banks and have directed them to make

sure there are no new default loans.”

Which begs these questions: first, why did the BB need to strengthen its monitoring; second, why was it lax before; and third and most importantly, why didn't the BB just “direct” them all these years if that was the problem all along—not the fact that its monitoring was lax and hence needed (and still needs) strengthening as experts have been saying, and not bailouts as the BB has been insisting (until this discovery now by the Deputy Governor)?

Speaking of problems, according to a report in *Dhaka Tribune*, “People involved in the sector say bad debts have increased as loans are sometimes approved on political consideration while directors of the banks take loans from each other's institutions.” Hmm... where have I read that before? Perhaps in almost every newspaper quoting experts from nearly every sector for the last gazillion years. Which points to another

problem—the regulators must never read newspapers. Otherwise, they would have done something about it, right?

Take this as an example; according to a report in *South Asia Monitor*, “There is a general perception that the central bank is unable to probe into these irregularities due to political intervention. According to sources, a certain business group well known for its powerful political standing, has about BDT 68,000 crore in loans. The group directly and indirectly controls about 10 banks and financial institutions in the country. A few months ago they quietly took over a major private bank of the country too. The directors of the bank are representatives or selected persons of this group... One year ago the group's total credit from... [a] bank was BDT 1,600 crore. In just a matter of months this has increased to BDT 4,500 crore” (Default loans deplete Bangladesh banking sector, March 29, 2017).