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**Symposium calls for  
REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIONS ON LABOUR MIGRATION OF  
WOMEN FROM BANGLADESH**

A daylong symposium was organised by RMMRU on 15 November that called for removal of restriction on migration of certain categories of female workers of Bangladesh and ensuring their protection. Based on the findings of a 1999 INSTRAW/IOM study titled *Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh* conducted by Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, the symposium was organised to share and discuss the context, scale, contributing factors and socio-economic consequences of migration of female labour. Researchers, legal experts, returnee migrants, migrant workers' association and association of recruiting agencies were invited to three working sessions to solicit further inputs. At the beginning of each session, Dr. Siddiqui presented her research findings on specific issues. This was followed by discussion by a designated panel. Each session was rounded up with an open discussion.

**Working Session I**

The first session dealt with the *Context, Scale and Scope of Female Migration*. Lack of gender-segregated data and information was identified by Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui as the major obstacles for conducting research and survey in this field. She said that although female migration is quite high from Bangladesh it does not get reflected in the government data.

While providing his views Mr. Saiful Haque of Welfare Association of Returnee Bangladeshi Employees (WARBE) said that it is the migrant workers themselves who should assert their rights. He pointed out that government intervention should focus on undocumented migration. He emphasised the issue of women empowerment and developing a sense of confidence to take up challenges. Haque called on civil society, recruiting agencies' association BAIRA, NGOs, Nurses Union to put pressure on the government for lifting ban on migration of unskilled women labour and also lobby for standard wage.

Advocate Rizwana Hassan of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association argued that the ban on female labour migration is contradictory to the rights enshrined in the Constitution of Bangladesh. The Constitution declared the right to work as a fundamental right of every citizen. In this context the right to livelihood and right to profession is fundamental to every citizen. Taking into account the contributions that female labour migrants are making in the national economy, one must challenge government's irrational decision of putting a ban on women migration, she argued.

Mr. Ghulam Mustafa of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies, focused on the need for dissemination of information for aspirant migrants about the legal channels available, recruitment procedure and expenditure. He accused unauthorised middlemen, *dalals* or sub-agents and travel agents for resorting to illegal means and bringing bad name to the sector.

Prof. Ishrat Shamim of the Dept. of Sociology of Dhaka University suggested that the study should include on trafficking in a distinct manner. The practical experience of fraudulent activities of a non-licensed recruiting agency was shared by a victim, Purnima Shaha. She narrated her experience of losing Tk. 40,000 that was misappropriated by an agency. The session was chaired by Dr. Shahdeen Malik.

### **Working Session II**

The second session dealt with *Factors Contributing to Female Migration and Conditions of Employment in the Host Country*. The study identified a number of causes for female labour migration. Among these, economic causes dominated over social and political factors. Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui emphasised on institutional scaling up, change in social and family relationships, income diversification within the society and rupture of social relationships such as divorce, destitution, separation, as well as death of male head of the household as motivating factors of female migration from Bangladesh. She saw economic upliftment prevailing over poverty driven factors for migration. Despite long working hours, irregular pay, and in some cases abuse and exploitation the women migrants had reported empowerment out of the migration experience.

Sheikh Romana, a female returnee migrant narrated her personal experience of harassment that she faced in terms of wages and on arrival at the airport in Bangladesh. She recommended opening up a training centre, appointment of returnees as trainers and establishment of a migrant centre for the welfare of migrant workers. The issue of violence against an unfortunate section of women migrants in the form of sexual abuse in the receiving countries was sketched by her.

Advocate Rokhsana Khandoker of Khan Foundation spelled out the need for a national regulatory framework. She also highlighted the dissemination of relevant international instrument with regard to migrant workers and emphasised the importance of media coverage on the problems of women migrant workers.

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman of Bangladesh Institute of Developmental Studies discussed the underlying causes of lack of NGO and civil society involvement with the migrant worker issue. He viewed that NGO paradigm is mostly related to poverty and therefore they are less interested about the better off among the poor. He made a point that NGOs must shift its focus from victim dimension to success stories of labour migration for the greater interest of the nation.

Various reasons behind the increase in migration flow of women from Bangladesh were underscored by Farida Akhter of UBINIG. She drew a line between migration and trafficking and reckoned that for all good reasons migration should be promoted. Dr. Anwara Begum of BIDS mainly focused on the theoretical aspects of the research, while another panelist Advocate Zebunnessa Rahman put utmost importance on the dissemination of information through a centre for the migrant workers.

A returnee female migrant worker, Zarina shared her own unfortunate experience. Her employer sacked her from the job she was originally assigned as that was prohibited by the Oman government. Subsequently she managed another job. During her repatriation, she brought a good amount of money with her, but on her arrival at the airport in Dhaka, she found her suitcase broken and money and valuables stolen. With the intervention of WARBE, she managed to recover the money through a long process of negotiation and bargaining with the airlines authorities. Meanwhile she had to go through tremendous stress. She demanded that steps be taken to stop such kind of incidents and harassment.

Serious objection on the migration of female labour from Bangladesh was raised in this session by the owner of a recruiting agency during the open discussion. But immediately he had to incur criticism for his conservative position from the panel discussants and other participants. Ghulam Mustafa of BAIRA emphasised that labour attaché and diplomats must perform their duties properly to ensure protection of the women migrant workers. The session was chaired by Dr. Hameeda Hossain of *Ain-O-Shalish Kendra*.

### **Working Session III**

The third session focused on *Socio-economic Consequences of Migration on Women and Their Families*. In this regard, Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui gave utmost importance to the mindset of the people that exaggerate victimization aspect. Her findings suggest that society in many ways impose guilt feelings among the women migrant workers about their failing to fulfil day to day responsibility toward the family and particularly the children. At the same time there are also ample evidences of sacrifice of the male members of the families for their coping mechanisms. Dr. Siddiqui stressed that asset accumulation is necessary for building awareness gradually through institutionalization. She felt, it is possible to make a cooperational relationship between clients and service providers if BAIRA and other private agencies become careful and interested to do so.

Panel discussion began with the comment of Dr. Debapriya Bhattachariya of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, that policy making is very important in relation to the female migration. He said that contribution of women at the macro level must be acknowledged. He analysed the report from an economist's point of view and offered a number of suggestions about the methodology and presentation of statistical data. According to him in this age of globalization, development excluding women is unthinkable. His advice to the government for the withdrawal of the ban from women labour migration was supported by the statistical data that every year 40 lac people come to the job market and only 10 lac are absorbed within the country. He recommended that State must take up comprehensive research on the demand and supply of women labour. The responsibility should be vested on the private sector providing training to the women migrants according to the skill needed by them. As the government generally takes a defensive position regarding the issue he urged the civil society to uphold the interest of women migrant workers.

Ferdous Jahan Nasreen of the Directorate of the Nurses mentioned that so far 4,000 nurses have been recruited through government channel as migrant workers abroad. She called for continuation of such process by the government. Yasmeen Ahmed of *Odhikar* saw women labour migration as a positive process. These women are supporting their families as the principal earning members. According to her besides the issues of exploitation such as ill treatment, discriminatory attitude, the study must incorporate the aspect of the quality of life, stress etc. As far as the training is concerned she suggested to imitate the training provided in Sri Lanka. Also a number of new areas such as baby-sitting, IT, physiotherapy etc were identified by her where government facilitation is necessary. In this connection, arranging job fair, maintaining liaison among the NGOs of the host and home country, gender nondiscrimination during negotiation, health insurance, compensation, allowance etc are important. At the societal level, campaign for burden sharing by the male members of the household was suggested by her.

Adilur Rahman Khan of *Odhikar* criticised the expansion of multinational corporations as negative factor for the free movement of labour and also the world capitalist system that restricted movements of labour from South to North. Najma Akhter, a leader of the garment factory labour union expressed her mind saying that problems are asserted and remain confined in the seminar tables but the recommendations are hardly taken up for implementation. She also identified the absence of government representation in these talks and recommended civil society, research organisation and donors' involvement in awareness campaign about migration procedure, health education and pre-departure training.

The need for modernising Technical Training Centres' received priority in Dr. C R Abrar's presentation. According to him, the ban on unskilled women labour was not a result of a coordinated effort of the ministries concern. He appreciated the role of WARBE in conducting various programmes. He also stated the RMMRU is engaged in preparing a *Draft Act for the Welfare and Protection of Migrant Workers*.

A number of suggestions such as pre-departure and post-departure orientation in the receiving countries and host country respectively, establishing a migrant centre, verification of the distribution of UN compensation since 1990, lifting of ban on women migrant workers, celebration of

international migrant's day were made by a WARBE representative. Nina Gupta of *Naripokkha* recommended official hand over of the research findings to the Labour Secretary and use IOM as platform to place the recommendations. Mahbubur Rahman, a student of Political Science suggested that loan can be sanctioned from the banks for migration. A suggestion for establishing a Trust Bank from the money of Wage Earner's Welfare Fund was also placed by Saiful Haque of WARBE. Shilpi Chowdhury of *Ain-O-Shalish Kendra* said that WARBE could take the responsibility to help the migrant workers at the grassroots.

In her concluding statement, Chair of the session, Professor Raunaq Jahan said that policy research should not be the sole preserve of the economists. She spelled out the need of such kind of study to understand the socio-economic dimension of the issue. Prof. Jahan termed the study as the first step, based on which further research can be conducted on subjects like flow of remittance through various channels, job market, impact of migration on individual and family, contribution of women for themselves.

### **Concluding Session**

This session focused on *Ensuring Protection of Female Migrants*. The first panel discussant of the session Dr. Q K Ahmad of *Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad* said that globalisation does not include movements of human beings. Dr. Ahmad stressed the need for networking between and among the civil society organisations of sending and receiving countries. According to him, political commitment, administrative effectiveness and proper implementation processes are important factors in analysing the problem of women migrants. Having very low sustainability of micro enterprises in the given situation of globalisation, he sought for strong cooperation between and among the private sectors. They should cooperate in order to improve the quality of life of the people.

Dr. Refaat Ahmed, in his discussion stated that by signing the Convention without any ratification would ensure nothing. He laid much emphasis on standard employment contracts within bilateral agreements. The contract should be given to the emigrant prior to his/her departure or on his/her arrival in the employer country. At the same time emphasis was made for migrant workers' access to the administration of the recipient country to redress their grievances. He also put a number of recommendations such as keeping the record of written contract and appointment letter, right to retain passport and documents, and appointment letter until leaving the foreign country, access to consular office of the recipient country and forming of monitoring body to monitor the employment contract, the status and remuneration that were committed with the migrant.

Claudia Coenjearts, Director of the International Labour Office, Bangladesh reiterated the need for harnessing the underemployment problem by promoting the flow of labour migration. She said that at the home front officials must be geared to stop the fraudulent activities and on part of the receiving countries it is necessary to give them access to what they need. The ILO representative stated that promotion and protection should go hand in hand and protection should be captured within adequate legal framework where ILO Conventions can act as examples. Too much protection in spite of increase in women's participation in this sector is termed by her as discrimination leading to ramification like trafficking. Ms. Coenjearts suggested that a productive role and family responsibility must be borne in the mind and everyone should perform his/her own role regarding migrant worker.

Armand Rousselot of IOM stated that migrant workers couldn't enjoy the rights in the absence of economic relations. He urged for recognition of migrant worker as person, and to recognise his rights. He said that revision of the ban and providing information to public about what is migration is important for formulation of policy. He identified language and health as very important factors for migrant workers. He also stressed on the management of remittance and its flow through proper channel. He suggested NGOs' involvement in using returnees as trainer and counselor and in order to do that network can be established slowly through regional cooperation among the formal and informal institutions. According to him exchange of information can work as a factor of motivation for rational interaction. Finally Rousselot espoused the need for national consensus on rescinding the ban on women migration.

The session was concluded formally with the speech of Professor A K Azad Chowdhury, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dhaka. He felt a multilateral and UN level declaration as well as intervention was necessary for the promotion and protection of migrant workers. Academic and civil society at large must advance their understanding of the issue. As the coming days are likely to take more migrant workers moving around the world, it is high time to take up bilateral and multilateral efforts to export manpower from our country, he emphasised.

Reporter: *Syeda Rozana Rashid*

### **CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS: THREE YEARS AFTER THE PEACE ACCORD**

*Arifur Rahman*  
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The third anniversary of the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord was observed on the 2 December of 2000 amidst confusion and controversy. It was perhaps not realistic to hope that the peace accord would set everything right overnight, though it was widely seen as a major breakthrough that paved the way for a negotiated settlement of the dispute.

#### **Diverse Perceptions on the Implementation of the Accord**

Both the government and the *Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity* (PCJSS) accused each other for the failure of full implementation of the peace accord. The third anniversary of the Accord was observed amid cacophony with government leaders calling upon the people living in the hills to help peaceful implementation of remaining part of the historic agreement while the PCJSS chief venting resentment (*Independent*, 3 December 2000). Moreover, the leaders of the PCJSS stayed away from programmes organised by the government and arranged a separate programme on the occasion demanding withdrawal of army camps. They also stated that the indigenous people had sacrificed blood to ensure their right over land and this right had not been ensured even after three years of signing the accord. Shantu Larma, Chairman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC), expressed deep concern, and said that the government had been reluctant to implement the Accord, which was aimed at permanent peace for both the settlers and tribals of the CHT. He also threatened that failure of implementing the Accord would compel him to go back to the hills and “do whatever is necessary in the changed context”. At the same time he warned those who had been involved in terrorism and extortion as well as creating unrest in the hills to desist from such action (*Independent*, 9 November 2000).

On the other hand, Kalparanjan Chakma, the CHT Affairs Minister, stated that many of the terms, conditions, laws, rules and regulations of the Peace Accord had been implemented and necessary changes had been made. He also stated that a large section of the Shanti Bahini members had been rehabilitated. He further admitted that the land issue had remained the root problem and assured that it would be resolved (*Sangbad*, 17 November 2000). He observed that the dispute over land was related to problems of demarcation, not to ownership. Referring to the claim of Shantu Larma that the treaty had empowered the Regional Council to make voters’ list of these hill districts, the Minister said that there could not be two types of voters’ list in a country. He said that the treaty did not lay responsibility for making the voters’ list to the government or the Regional Council. The Election Commission was given the responsibility. He said that Regional Council might make the voters’ list for local government polls, not for national elections (*Independent*, 17 November 2000). Later, the EC turned down a request for a separate voters’ list for the permanent residents of the region, after a meeting with a five-member delegation of the Regional Council. The Chief EC referred that it was not possible under the existing laws and regulations and it was an imperative to amend the Constitution to prepare a separate list for a portion of the country (*Independent*, 16 March 2001).

A report of the Ministry for CHT Affairs stated that 98% clauses of the peace accord had been implemented (*Independent*, 5 November 2000). According to the report, a separate ministry for

overseeing CHT affairs was created and a person from the indigenous groups (Member of Parliament from Khagrachari) was appointed as the CHT Affairs Minister in compliance with the Accord. It said that a committee led by the Chief Whip of Jatiya Sangshad, Abul Hasnat Abdullah, was formed to look after the implementation process. Other members of the committee are Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Chakma alias Shantu Larma, Chairman of the Regional Council, and Dipankar Talukader, Chairman of the taskforce on internal migration. The report said that a 22-member Regional Council led by Shantu Larma was formed with the approval of *Parbattaya Zilla Parishad Act* that was amended on 22 November 1999. Bir Bahadur, MP, was appointed as Chairman of CHT Development Board (CHTDB).

The report also stated that a number of 56,256 ethnic people belonging to 10,427 families were provided with different benefits in 20 installments between 28 March 1997 and 27 February 1998 under official package programme. On this issue, the PCJSS put objections and said that according to the agreement, land and houses were not given back to the refugee leaders and their lands have been still illegally occupied by the Bengali settlers. In this regard the government initiative was not sufficient. The report stated that the Land Commission had started working in order to settle disputes relating to land. A retired judge was supervising activities of the commission. But the PCJSS leaders alleged that though the land commission had been established, its operation could not be started due to the government's unwillingness.

The report stated that Tk. 240.4 crore were allocated in last three years for development work in the CHT region. The PCJSS leaders said that the allocation of money for development were not sufficient and the infrastructure of tourism industry was not developed. All the government offices maintained tribal quota in jobs, the report claimed. But the PCJSS said that this maintenance system had been regulated by the GOC army administration and they demanded that the Chairman of the Regional Council should regulate this.

So far, 19 PCJSS activists were released from jail while 66 cases were withdrawn and the accused persons in 20 cases were exempted punishment. More than 38 cases are in the queue of the withdrawal process while name of one person was dropped from a case at Bandarban, the report stated. In this regard the PCJSS termed the process as very slow.

The report stated that in total 70 camps of the security forces have been withdrawn while efforts are underway for dislodging more camps. The Establishment Ministry has been directed to ensure priority for the local tribal people in jobs in the government, non-government and autonomous bodies. The report also illustrated that a recommendation on credit exemption of the tribal people was sent to the Finance Ministry while steps were taken to give two acres of land to landless tribal people.

Bir Bahadur, MP disclosed in a meeting that different development projects at a cost of Tk 123 crore have been implemented and another programme worth Tk 102 crore is on progress in Bandarban. He further informed that projects worth Tk 5,000 crore from the donor countries have been taken up (*Independent*, 7 April 2001).

### **Law and Order Situation**

The peace accord failed to bring about major changes in the law and order situation in the hill region. Suspicion, hatred, and vested interest paved the way to physical abuse, killing, and abduction. 60 people have been killed and more than 100 people have been abducted in different incidents during the last three years in the CHT. Both the pro- and the anti-peace accord groups were responsible for these incidents. 4 persons were killed and 10 were injured in a fierce gunfight between armed cadres opposing and supporting the peace agreement in a hill forest at Kutukchhari and 3 members of the party supporting the peace accord were also kidnapped by the anti-treaty force. On 14 December 2000, the Executive Engineer of the CHTDB was murdered and the police arrested 4 people. The police also arrested 8 tribal leaders on 12 January 2001, on the charge of holding a secret meeting (*Sangbad*, 1 December 2000).

The Babuchara Bazar restarted functioning on 1 April after a long boycott by the ethnic people since 16 October 1999. The boycott began following an incident of physical abuse of an ethnic girl by a member of armed forces and later a conflict between the Bengali settlers and the hill tribe. This resulted in death of one Bengali and three hill persons and injury of more than 50 (*Prothom Alo*, 1 April 2001). The situation calmed down through an amicable settlement reached between the tribal and Bengali people with an intervention of a monitoring committee comprising of local Bengali and tribal representatives. A good amount of money was donated as compensation by the timber traders to the victims (*Independent*, 7 April 2001).

Meanwhile, Paresh Barura, Chief of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), categorically denied that there was a gun-battle between his guerrilla organisation's two factions in the CHT. In an interview with BBC at Agartala, Barura accused the Indian army of launching a propaganda campaign to put pressure on Bangladesh and he also said that they did not have any camp in Bangladesh. Picking up the report, the BBC also said that Paresh Barura was injured and he was taken to Dhaka for treatment.

### **The Hostage Crisis**

The most prominent and significant incident was the abduction of 3 expatriates working in the CHT. On 17 February 2001, 3 foreign engineers of KAMPSAX company, one British and two Danish, were abducted by armed thugs and were taken into deep forest in Rangamati. Immediately an area of 30 square kilometre around the area of abduction was cordoned by the Army. The kidnappers demanded Tk. 9 crore as ransom (*Bangladesh Observer*, 18 February 2001). According to the newspaper reports, the abductors also demanded total withdrawal of armed forces. Attempts were made to continue the negotiation with them. On 22 February the British and Danish ambassadors requested the government not to go for armed rescue operations, instead they pleaded for negotiations. On 25 February two experts from the Scotland Yard joined in the rescue mission. Kalparanjan Chakma, Minister for the CHT Affairs was given the responsibility to monitor the rescue mission. Meanwhile, security forces launched a manhunt for the hostages as the government refused to bow to the demand of the kidnappers, along with efforts of leaflet distribution, poster and public awareness campaign. On 3 March, Kalparanjan Chakma declared at a press briefing that the hostages would be released by 5 March without any ransom. But the abductors informed that they would not release the hostages without any ransom. On 11 March Kalparanjan was withdrawn and Dipankar Talukdar, MP, was given the responsibility to look after the issue. Indirect contact was restored again on 12 March. On 17 March, after 29 days the three foreigners were freed. The government claimed that release was secured following an army operation and without paying any ransom.

The hostage drama was marked by confusing information. During this period, the abductors changed shelters several times within the cordon. It has been alleged that the armed forces, government delegates and local administration were engaged in an unhealthy competition for rescuing the hostages. There were stories of unofficial arrangement on the payment of ransom. There were questions whether the army really rescued the hostages by a combat operation or not (*Independent*, 19 March 2001). Moreover, cooperation from the PCJSS was not sought at an early stage though PCJSS was believed to be best informed about the terrain of that area, and therefore they could be of great help in rescuing the hostages. There was also an allegation on not disclosing the identity of the abductors (*Saptahik 2000*, 6 April 2001, Vol. 3, No. 46).

Adverse impacts of the hostage crisis became visible when the ongoing project of the Khagrachari-Rangamati – Bandarban Link Road was stopped, which was being undertaken by KAMPSAX. The amount of Tk 471.8 crore allotted for the project was also halted. A possible project of US\$ 55 million to be commissioned by the European Union was also put under question, along with another Tk 17.5 crore sanitation project allotted for the development of CHT (*Saptahik 2000*, 6 April 2001, Vol. 3, No. 46).

### **Environmental Degradation**

According to a report, most of the reserved forests in the CHT are now on the verge of extinction. The report said that over 70 percent of 6 reserved forests out of 8 in the CHT had already been damaged by a group of dishonest wood traders. The most affected forests are Matamuhuri, Sangu, Kachalong, Maini, Thega, and Rainongkhong. The other two reserved forests, namely Khedachari and Sindukchhari have also been affected. According to the environmentalists, there should be about 25 percent reserved forests of the total land area. But Bangladesh has only 11 percent reserved forests, of which 9 percent remained in the CHT, and the rest in the Sunderbans (*Independent*, 13 December 2000).

In the same report, the Bangladesh Army sources said that the Army *Jawans* (soldiers) seized 30,000 cubic feet of teak timber in 7 months from May 1999 to December 1999 which was cut illegally. The security forces seized over 72,000 cubic feet of teak timber till 5 December in 2000. They also seized 7,000 cubic feet of teak on 7 December at Bilaichari, Khagrachari. It was estimated that over 30 times the quantity seized was sold in the local market illegally.

A forest committee comprising of the representatives of the Forest Department, district administration, Bangladesh Army, press club and the local MP was constituted in 1998 to issue permits for the timber merchants. They said that the committee could grant permission to cut about 20,000 cubic feet of timber annually. But it was alleged that about 400,000 cubic feet of timber was illegally cut annually by dishonest persons. In the meantime, the government banned felling of all types of trees in the forest areas in order to preserve the forest resources of the country. For this reason, the issuance of permit had been cancelled since June last.

### **Development Initiatives**

A number of development initiatives have been undertaken following the Accord. Bir Bahadur, MP, informed at a consultative meeting held on 22 March 2001 that the government has spent Tk 131.39 crore on development work of the CHT region over the last four years. He further informed that Tk 7 crore has been allocated during the current fiscal year (*Independent*, 23 March 2001). Norway showed keen interest to cooperate with Bangladesh in socio-economic development of the CHT. However, China was invited to invest in various fields, including agro-industries, fruit processing, fisheries, tourism and poultry farming, in the CHT (*Independent*, 25 November 2000).

On the other hand, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) declared to lend US\$ 30 million for income generation and human resource development in the CHT under a major donor-sponsored project. The project will upgrade existing rural communication infrastructure, primarily feeder roads, bridges and culverts. Micro finance, training and other services will be provided to improve the income generating capacity of the poor. The project is the first major donor-sponsored effort to help the hill people since the peace agreement. The ADB loan will finance half the project cost of US 60.3 million dollars. The project aims to underpin the 1997 peace accord by empowering local communities to decide what they want and to take part in projects. A community investment fund will be created to finance small scale development activities. In addition, the project will strengthen the capacity of local government institutions, non-government organisations (NGOs) and beneficiaries to plan and implement local activities. The project will encourage women to be more involved in decision-making and enterprise development (*Daily Star*, 28 October 2000).

A project for the development of agriculture using modern technology in the CHT was undertaken to bring 28,000 acres of arable land under cultivation. The implementation of the four-year project has already been initiated from the current fiscal 2000-2001, said an official source. The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) has been authorised by the Ministry of Agriculture to implement the project which will cost Tk 10 crore (*Independent*, 1 November 2000).

The CHTDB has taken up a project at a cost of Tk 30 crore for socio-economic development of poor traditional *jhum* (slash and burn) cultivators of three hill districts under seven-year plan from 2000-2001 fiscal year to 2006-2007 fiscal year. A total of 1,500 tribal *jhum* cultivator families of Bandarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati have been brought under the project, where each family will

be provided with 5 acres of land, along with fruit saplings, paddy seeds and agriculture inputs. Community centres will be set up at the remote villages to impart training to the unemployed youths to increase their skill in producing crops. Besides, loan will be sanctioned for pisciculture, poultry farming and cattle rearing (*Independent*, 26 January 2001). But another report stated that tension was created in Bandarban as tribal Mro families cut down 12-acre hill forest of the Forest Department. The Deputy Range Officer of the local Forest Department office was detained in his office for three hours, as he tried to resist the *jhum* cultivators, while the Mro leaders informed that previously they were never barred by the forest officers from *jhum* cultivation (*Independent*, 12 March 2001). However, such agricultural procedure has turned out to be a menace to the economy of the hill districts, as this method is no more cost effective in terms of preparation, necessary time and total production (*Independent*, 31 March 2001). Another report informed that administrative complications, and false propaganda have been responsible of failure of a project on rehabilitation of 500 tribal families at three Upzillas in Bandarban. The project period of two years have already been elapsed. The Forest Department, the concerned authority to implement the project informed that this happened due to failure of acquiring necessary land, improper land administration, and spreading of the rumour that the tribal families would not get the benefit and they would lose the ancestral right of *jhum* cultivation (*Independent*, 7 April 2001).

On 7 January 2001, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated a 3000-line digital telephone exchange in Rangamati and said that this modern telephone communication facility in the remote area was the outcome of the CHT peace accord. She hoped that the installation of modern telephone system would help flourish tourism in the region as well as boost trade and commerce and industries (*Independent*, 8 January 2001).

About 5,000 tribal children from the remote villages of the CHT are being imparted primary education under friendship programme conducted by the Bangladesh Army. A source in Army regional office informed that the programme started in 1998 with a view to improving the life style of the tribal people. Under the programme 50 primary schools have been set up in the remote areas. It includes facilities among others, giving education, health service and rehabilitation of distressed tribal families (*Independent*, 9 January 2001). Another report stated that three water control structures have been constructed at a cost of Tk 31.71 lac in last three years for augmenting agricultural production providing with irrigation facilities to the farmers (*Independent*, 25 March 2001).

### **Conclusion**

Peace has so far proved to be elusive in the region of CHT. The success of achieving peace has been blurred by conflicts between the pro- and anti-peace forces, in which general people suffer the most. This situation can only be overcome through continuous effort by both the parties to bring about changes through proper implementation of the Accord.

### **UPDATE**

#### **Condition of ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES OF BANGLADESH**

*Shahzada M Akram*  
RMMRU

The year 2000 was marked by a number of excesses committed by the majority Bengalis against the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh. This included torture, physical abuse, rape, destruction of property, illegal appropriation of homestead and agricultural land, forced eviction, and violation of religious rights of this group of people.

## Illegal Occupation and Eviction

Incidents of forced eviction of indigenous people from their homes were reported several times. In most cases it was the locally influential elite who planned to grab land, and were responsible for the eviction of the indigenous families.

At Birol, Dinajpur, illegal appropriation of 105 acres land by the local influential and powerful persons resulted to eviction of ethnic families (*Sangbad*, 2 September 2000). More than 200 persons including of the landless ethnic community along with a few Hindu and Muslim families were forced to flee. Their houses were destroyed, and valuable possessions looted. Some female members of the ethnic community were reported to have been molested and stripped, and others were injured by knives and axes. Many were taken to hospitals, some took shelter in local NGO offices. But the Thana Executive Officer (TNO) and Union Parishad chairman, Bulu Chowdhury, claimed that no such incident took place. A victim alleged that the terrorists threatened them that they would be killed if they did not move out. One informed that in 1994 similar terrorist act by the same person compelled more than 200 people to flee. They are still living in atrocious conditions. It was reported that a vested interest group comprising of local political elite of both ruling and opposition parties occupies 95% of the *khas* land of that area (*Sangbad*, 7 September 2000). Activities of CDA, an NGO, were reported to be crucial in creating awareness of the rights among the landless indigenous people of the area. The local elite, therefore, banned all activities of the NGO, and later burnt its office. A Shantal leader was arrested by the police (*Saptahik 2000*, 8 September 2000, Vol. 3 No. 18).

Eviction at the Chailtachara *Punjee*, Kulaura, Moulvibazar, occurred following a clash between two rival groups for establishing their dominance and gaining profit. 15 to 16 ethnic families were evicted from their houses. At the *punjee* 60-70 km away from the district town, people from one group attacked the community and forcibly evicted the families and hurt 10-12 persons including children. Most of these families are from Garo community and a few are Khasias. After the attack they fled into deep forests and some took shelter in another *punjee*. It was alleged that Asadar Ali, the chairman of Karmadha Union, filed a case against Gregory Nokrek, former Minister (community leader) of the *punjee* on 1 June 2000. The evicted families alleged that they suffered eviction, as they did not agree to Asadar Ali's wishes to be witnesses in a lawsuit in his favour (*Sangbad*, 14 June 2000). According to the report the total 300 acres land belongs to government, which was under the control of Norsamlu Rajvar who gave a lease of 168 acres for betel leaf cultivation for 16 years to Gregory. From last year, Asadar Ali, on behalf of *Bahumukhi Samiti*, had been claiming that the land was given to the co-operative on lease. On 18 December 1999, the terrorists attacked the community, created panic, and abducted Gregory along with his son, daughter-in-law, niece and grandson. It was alleged that his niece was gang-raped and the family was untraceable. The attack for the second time came when the remaining families elected a tribal as their headman in the absence of Gregory and rejected the domination of Asadar Ali (*Independent*, 1 July 2000).

Properties of some Oraon and Munda families were illegally grabbed by locally powerful elite at Ullapara, Sirajgonj. Many families already fled to other places. Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947 this vested interest group grabbed 452 acres of land beside the Oraon temple which was endowed to the gods. Three years ago 55 acres of land beside the temple were grabbed by the chairman of the Union, Aftab Hossain, allegedly in collaboration with government officials (*Sangbad*, 16 November 2000). The indigenous people tried to seek redress from higher level but failed. In another case, 16 Oraon families of Jotpukur, Chapainawabgonj were threatened to leave the area by one Tota Mia. Hired goons damaged their houses on the *khas* land on 4 November at night. The ethnic families had been living there for ten months. There is a case against Tota Mia who is under trial for usurping 14 acres of *khas* land (*Independent*, 3 December 2000).

Hajongs at Dharmapasha and Bishamvarpur, Sunamgonj, organised a procession alleging that a number of miscreants had illegally occupied a section of land belonging to their temple and cut down trees of that area (*Sangbad*, 1 August 2000).

The indigenous people of Lalpur, Dinajpur, have also faced repression. Due to social discrimination and feeling of insecurity, they often converted to Christianity; almost 300 of them have already become Christians. Since they are mostly uneducated, local frauds have been successful in grabbing their homestead land (*Sangbad*, 5 October 2000).

### **Physical Abuse**

Indigenous people were also subjected to physical torture, abduction, killing and rape. At Lalpur, Natore, a 13 year old ethnic girl was raped by 5 persons on 12 August. Later, they forced the girl's family not to divulge the incident (*Sangbad*, 25 August 2000). In another instance, at Peergonj, Rangpur, on 2 September 2000 an ethnic girl was abducted in front of her father and raped by three miscreants. When her father went to the police station, the officer in charge refused to accept the case (*Sangbad*, 24 September 2000).

On 20 March, 2001 an indigenous woman, Gidita Rema of the Madhupur forest area, was killed as she tried to protect her younger sister from the local abductors. According to the newspaper report, on 2 February, Mafizuddin of the same village abducted Namrata Rema. It was alleged that the police did not take any step to rescue her and arrest the accused persons. Namrata escaped from her abductors on 17 March. They tried to abduct her again, but this time Gidita tried to resist them. The abductors killed her with sharp weapons. Her father alleged that while he went to the police station he found the killers there. But the police did not arrest them (*Sangbad*, 24 March 2001). Failure of arresting the accused killers even after ten days from the incident resulted in mass protest in the indigenous people's villages at Madhupur (*Sangbad*, 31 March 2001). The alleged killers were reported to be enjoying free movement in the area. At a gathering of indigenous communities held at Madhupur on 30 March, Shantu Larma alleged that oppression has been continuing by the ruling powers for ages, and the killing of Gidita is a continuation of that process. Even the present ruling party is no exception, he stated (*Prothom Alo*, 31 March 2001).

### **The Killing of Alfred Soren**

The most serious violation of the rights of the ethnic minorities was manifested in the killing of Alfred Soren that took place on 18 August 2000 at Mahadevpur, Naogaon. A group of over 100 miscreants launched an attack on the Shantal community in the morning, which continued up to two o'clock. They tortured women and children, torched the houses and murdered Alfred openly (*Sangbad*, 22 August 2000). The suspects, Shitesh Gadai and Hatem Ali, former UP chairman, the two most influential persons of the area, were not arrested. It was also reported that the nearest police camp was located only 2 kilometres away. The police were informed of the attack but they did not take steps to resist the miscreants. The reason for the murder was appropriation of 66 acres *khas* land, which was protested by Alfred Soren (*Sangbad*, 23 August 2000). It has been alleged that the police was to be paid Tk 1.5 lac by the criminals with the understanding that the force would not go to the spot during the incident (*Saptahik 2000*, 8 September 2000, Vol. 3 No. 18). The Superintendent of Police of Naogaon denied the allegation of maintaining connection with the criminals (*Sangbad*, 2 September 2000).

According to the newspaper reports, the 19 families had been living in the abandoned vested property for last 15 years. As Shitesh Gadai had a conflict with Hatem Ali over the land, he brought these families from Rajshahi and settled them there in order to secure his control over the land. He made a commitment that he would give 150 decimals of land to each family if they could recover the land for him. But last year, Shitesh came to an agreement with Hatem Ali and decided to grab entire plot of land and told the families that there were problems with the documentation of the land. But Alfred Soren, the only educated person of his community, checked with the land office and came to know that Shitesh Gadai did not own the land. Then Alfred convinced his community not to give away part of the harvest they used to give to Shitesh, and he decided to go through legal procedure to arrange transfer of the land for the landless indigenous community (*Sangbad*, 2 September 2000). Moreover, Alfred organised his community and launched a movement for arrest of the suspects who wanted to

grab the land (*Sangbad*, 23 August 2000). This infuriated Shitesh Gadai and Hatem Ali and made them to launch the attack.

Local leaders belonging to the ruling party, accused the newspapers of exaggerated reporting. They also tried to project Alfred as one of the workers of the party's peasant wing (*Sangbad*, 22 September 2000). An amount of Tk 50,000 was announced by the Prime Minister as donation to the family of Alfred. She stated that the homeless families would be provided with shelter at Ashrayan project in the district (*Independent*, 3 September 2000). The Home Minister, Md. Nasim, ordered arrest of the culprits and assured that the affected families would stay in that place (*Sangbad*, 8 September 2000). The Sub-Inspector and the Officer in charge of the police station were suspended (*Sangbad*, 3 September 2000).

It was further alleged that the role of the NGOs was not satisfactory. A number of NGOs provided help but nothing more than food items. On 26 August on the occasion of the visit of Home Minister, every household was given corrugated tin-roof on behalf of the DC, Naogaon (*Saptahik 2000*, 8 September 2000, Vol. 3 No. 18).

The incident was condemned widely. People demanded arrest and trial of the criminals, adequate compensation and security to the affected families (*Sangbad*, 22 August 2000). Death penalty for the criminals and rehabilitation of the evicted group was demanded by 50,000 ethnic people at a rally on 28 August at Naogaon (*Sangbad*, 29 August 2000). A judicial probe into the incident, compensation for the affected families and their rehabilitation and safety of the minority indigenous people were demanded at a gathering at Shahid Minar, Dhaka (*Independent*, 18 September 2000). According to one report, only the left parties provided with moral and logistical support to the indigenous people (*Saptahik 2000*, 8 September 2000, Vol. 3 No. 18).

### **Environmental Projects Affecting Ethnic Minorities**

Environmental projects undertaken by Bangladesh government have become a source of threat to the existence of ethnic minorities. With ADB loan at the Garo Hills in Sribardi, government launched social forestry in the mid-1990s in 5,387.47 hectares of land with 448 shareholders among which most of them were Garos. Eucalyptus and Acacia trees were planted for firewood production. According to the terms and conditions, 40% of the harvest should go the shareholders and the rest to the government. But the project seemed unsuccessful to most of the shareholders due to untimely logging. There are also allegations of theft of trees in collaboration with forest guards and non-return of agreement deeds as they were taken by the authority in the name of renewal (*Sangbad*, 8 January 2000).

The government has undertaken projects to set up eco-parks with the aim to preserve biological diversity in some of the forest reserve areas, and enhance green tourism. The first eco-park at Baroiadhala, Sitakunda, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 17 January. This was built at a cost of Tk 357.60 lac (*Sangbad*, 24 January 2001). Two similar projects were declared by the Prime Minister, and later this was confirmed by the Minister of Forest and Environment, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury. One is to be set up at Madhabkunda, Baralekha, and the other at Muraichara, Kulaura, both located in Moulvibazar. The projects started in 1999-2000 with the target of completion by 2003-2004, with an estimated budget of Tk 11 crore (*Sangbad*, 25 November 2000). For feasibility study, Tk 400,000 has been allocated (*Independent*, 7 December 2000).

The problem with these projects is that when they will be completed, a number of ethnic Khasia and Garo families are likely to be evicted from their homes. 654.42 acres of land have been selected for the eco-park at Madhabkunda, of which 500 acres come from reserve forest, 127 acres from Keramatnagar Tea Estate, and 27 acres from Elan *Punjee*. According to newspaper reports, it was claimed that 10 acres of the land selected for the park belongs to Madhabeshwar Temple of the Garos. For the Muraichara eco-park, 830 acres of land come from acquired forest where there are a number of Khasia and Garo *punjees* with 120-130 families. The local people of both places do not know

anything about the projects and they have not yet received any notice of eviction, but they are living in fear of the possible eviction (*Sangbad*, 25 November 2000). When contacted, the officials of Baralekha and Kulaura forest range told that they had been directed to conduct survey on lands and install demarcation pillars around the lands fixed for the parks and that they knew nothing about eviction (*Independent*, 12 January 2001). Earlier, the Forest Department claimed that there was no *punjee* for betel-leaf cultivation at Muraichara with the department's authorisation (*Sangbad*, 2 December 2000), but representatives from the ethnic groups claimed that they had been living in those places for decades.

Pediton Pradhan Suchiang of the Indigenous People's Forum, on 2 December, demanded that the eco-park be shifted to a *khas* land or unproductive forest areas. He further claimed that they were not given any notice for acquisition of land, evacuation, compensation, or resettlement by government. He also claimed that this would lead to the extinction of Khasias and Garos (*Sangbad*, 3 December 2000). At a meeting organised by different ethnic groups' associations at Dhaka, on 10 February 2001, the speakers stated that it would not be right to create another problem of displacement before addressing the problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In this meeting Prof. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury stated that oppression over the ethnic minority should not occur in a country which emerged from fighting against such oppression. He further claimed that the original aim of such project is to grab land instead of development, which cannot be supported. The meeting vowed to resist the project at any cost (*Prothom Alo*, 11 February 2001).

A token hunger strike was organised as part of the movement at Shahid Minar, Dhaka on 22 February. In this programme, a permanent land settlement was demanded for the Khasia and Garo communities (*Prothom Alo*, 23 February 2001). Later, in another report, it was also alleged by the indigenous people's representatives that in a meeting, Mosharraf Hossain, Joint Secretary and the Convenor of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Eco-park, tried impose the government decision upon them without considering their demands (*Prothom Alo*, 16 March 2001). Sanjib Drong, the writer from Garo community, stated that the forcible establishment of the eco-park on the ancestral land of the indigenous people would be an extreme violation of human rights (*Prothom Alo*, 18 March 2001).

A newspaper report stated that the work of the projects had already started with indiscriminate felling of trees. The families have been alleged to be put into pressure from the project authorities to abandon their homes (*Independent*, 15 December 2000), and around 500 families are likely to be evicted, another report added (*Sangbad*, 25 November 2000). Later it was reported that a six member committee would assess whether any family would be evicted due to the project (editorial of *Sangbad*, 24 January 2001). In another report, the Forest and Environment Minister assured that the tribal people would not be evicted from the area and provisions would be made to create income-generating activities for the Khasias (*Independent*, 10 March 2001).

### **Oppression on Religious Minorities**

Oppression on religious minorities also took place. Three villages of Ahmadia community were attacked by miscreants led by a group of zealots at Brahmanbaria on 12 April 2000. The inhabitants of these villages were threatened that they should not follow their beliefs. They were also denied of their harvest. This led to wastage of all crops in 100 acres of land. 20 houses of 8 families were looted and gutted by fire. The miscreants seized the mosque at Kodda village (*Sangbad*, 13 April 2000).

A widow named Kusum Bala along with her four children in Boda, Panchagarh, was continuously harassed by the influential musclemen. She had 4 bigha land surrounded by the lands owned by the alleged persons. They were reported to be pressing her to sell the property. They also threatened her that they would forcibly evict her from the land (*Sangbad*, 28 October 2000).

Arnab, a child of 8, was mercilessly killed by some miscreants on 18 June 2000 at Satkhira. The killing was reported to be committed to create panic among the minority community so that they leave the area (*Sangbad*, 1 July 2000).

According to a newspaper report, at Bagha, Rajshahi, some miscreants demanded money from a rich businessman named Binod Chandra Sarker. But he refused to give the money. Then they gave him a letter and said that he must pay taxes for living in this country. On 26 August 2000, those people cut down 5,000 plants from his nursery. This group also demanded money from other Hindu families of the area. Harassment also included ransacking and looting of shops belonging to Hindu owners, physical abuse on a local college teacher who was a Hindu, torching and looting of houses, and raping of a housewife. All these made the Hindu community feel insecure. The report claimed that in this way 70-80% people of this community have become penniless (*Sangbad*, 19 November 2000).

The businessmen from the minority community at Narshingdi were reported to be targeted by the miscreants for extortion of money. It was alleged that local political elite belonging to the ruling party had link with such harassment and illegal appropriation of property. The victims, out of fear, did not dare to file cases, and had to relocate their business (*Prothom Alo*, 14 March 2001). On 18 March 2000, more than 100 terrorists led by local Union Parishad Chairpersons launched an attack on village of majority Hindu residents at Boalkhali, Chittagong. They also tortured household heads and looted property worth Tk 10 lac. But it was alleged that the police did not take any measure in this regard (*Sangbad*, 23 March 2000). Another report stated that a minority family at Abhaynagar, Jessore, fell victim to a terrorist attack and physical assault on 1 February 2001. The alleged persons had been trying to illegally occupy the homestead land of the family for a long time. The oppressed family filed a case but the police was alleged not to arrest the criminals (*Prothom Alo*, 4 February 2001).

Another report along with a photograph stated that a pond located at Chittagong was banned only for the Hindus. Some locally influential persons were alleged that they put up a signboard, which illustrated the declaration. This created adverse reaction among the local minority groups (*Sangbad*, 15 November 2000).

### **Ethnic Communities and the Civil Society of Bangladesh**

The Shantal Peasant Rebellion Day was celebrated on 30 June by a number of organisations in Dinajpur. On this day the British Government killed 25,000 Shantal farmers in 1855 during the Shantal Rebellion (*Sangbad*, 2 July 2000).

International Ethnic Minority Day was observed on 9 August 2000 by representatives of different ethnic groups of Bangladesh (*Prothom Alo*, 10 August 2000). Shantu Larma stated that 2 million people of ethnic communities have been pushed away from the mainstream politics and culture (*Sangbad*, 10 August 2000). At a discussion forum of the 11 party coalition, the discussants urged all segments of the society and the State to recognise the rights of ethnic minorities and observe 9 August as the International Ethnic Minority Day at national level (*Sangbad*, 23 September 2000). The demand for constitutional rights for the ethnic minority was also expressed at a seminar on the *Hindrances for the Socio-economic Development of the Ethnic Groups and Way to Overcome the Problem* held at Jaipurhat in March (*Sangbad*, 11 March 2001).

Rakhines of Patuakhali district declared to launch a movement with the demands of constitutional recognition of ethnic minorities, employment opportunity of the educated youth from these sections, and proper application of the Bangladesh State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1997 (*Sangbad*, 31 March 2001).

At a meeting held on 31 March, Shantu Larma informed that a decision had been taken to form a political party at the national level. Representatives from more than 20 ethnic minority groups participated at the meeting where 12-point demand were declared as the party manifesto. Some of the main demands included constitutional recognition of rights of the indigenous people, establishment of political, economic, socio-cultural and land rights, implementation of the CHT accord, withdrawal of the Forest Revision Act 2000 along with the decision to establish eco-parks and eco-tourism projects on the ancestral lands and forests of the indigenous groups, abolition of all forms of discrimination,

harassment and oppression, arrest and exemplary punishment of the accused killers of Alfred Soren and Gidita Rema, reservation of seats for representatives from ethnic groups in the national parliament, establishment of a separate ministry for the ethnic minorities, and increasing of the quota for employment and education for the indigenous people (*Prothom Alo*, 1 April 2001).

### **Government Support for the Indigenous People**

A loan disbursement programme was undertaken by the government under the Socio-Economic Development and Rehabilitation Project for the indigenous people of Lalpur, Natore. An amount of Tk 38.60 lac was allocated to be disbursed among 203 out of 500 families in the area. These families have been residing in this place and were displaced through illegal land grabbing by vested quarters. The loan disbursement programme aimed to improve the condition of the families through installing latrines and tube-wells, investing in pisciculture, cottage industries, cattle rearing and poultry farming. According to the report, no interest was imposed against the loan but 8% service charge must be repayable in a year, if desired, in monthly installments (*Independent*, 20 January 2001).

### **Conclusion**

In spite of the long history of relatively peaceful co-existence and communal harmony, the ethnic minorities are going through difficult times. It is evident that the state machinery has not been able to provide necessary support and security to these marginalised sections. In most cases, the locally powerful persons, with the support of mainstream political parties have been responsible for the hardships of the minorities. It is also disappointing that in some cases the government policies, purportedly aimed at development, are responsible for their plight and sufferings. In some cases where government provided help they were either not adequate, or lacked proper planning. This grim picture may be responsible for provoking this group of people to silently relocate themselves.

### **Experts Demand**

#### **A PEACEFUL AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS-FREE SOUTH ASIA**

Speakers at a discussion session urged for taking initiatives to declare South Asia as a nuclear weapons free zone. The discussants also highlighted the need to build up awareness among the people to protest against nuclearisation of the region, and thus create pressure on the concerned authorities and states. These views were expressed at a panel discussion on *Nuclear Disarmament and Peace in South Asia* organised by RMMRU at the University of Dhaka on 30 January 2001.

Admiral L Ramdas, former Chief of Naval Staff, India, stated that the nuclear tests done by India and Pakistan in 1998 were shocks to the rest of the world given the fact that this region produced peace activists like Buddha and Gandhi. In his speech, Adm. Ramdas highlighted the common political and economic history and culture of the states, and explained how decisions from political and military leadership paved the way to frequent wars between the two powerful countries. He urged that general people of this region should speak out against nuclearisation.

Referring to the Kargil war, Dr. Zia Mian, an eminent nuclear physicist from Pakistan, now researching at Princeton University, explained how nuclearisation of these states did not help the process of deterrence. He stated that the leadership in this region has the habit of war. He expressed his deep concern over any unwanted but not unlikely nuclear accident, as similar accidents regularly occur world-wide. He also described the possible scenario after a nuclear attack on Karachi and Mumbai.

Dr. A H Nayyar stressed that the civil society of this region should take it on itself to create a movement against nuclearisation programmes. In this regard, he urged Bangladesh to take the initiative to declare South Asia as a nuclear weapons-free zone, in alliance with other four South Asian states. He further emphasised that Bangladesh can create a moral pressure on the powerful

states as it has already acceded to both the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

A lively discussion took place after the presentation. Among others, Professor Akmal Hossain and Professor Ramjul Huq of the Department of International Relations, Professor Dalem Chandra Barman, Chair of Peace and Conflict Studies Department, and Dr. Borhanuddin Khan of Law Department participated in the discussion. The programme was chaired by Dr. C R Abrar, Coordinator, RMMRU. More than a hundred teachers and students of Dhaka University took part in the programme.

### **Call for Setting up**

#### **A MULTILATERAL ARRANGEMENT FOR MOVEMENT OF SERVICE PROVIDERS IS SOUGHT**

Speakers at a seminar observed that restrictive migration policies adopted by some countries, against global economic rationale, have discouraged movement of people across borders. They regretted that migration processes in the past three decades have not witnessed the same level of growth as trade, services and capital have. These views were expressed at a seminar titled *In Quest of a Multilateral Arrangement for Movement of Service Providers*. Mr. Shahidul Huq of Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN, Geneva, was the principal speaker. The seminar, organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) was held on 22 March 2001 at the University of Dhaka.

According to Huq, the concept of 'service providers' is a relatively new one emerged in the WTO treaty. Three important indicators of service providers are (a) duration of stay, (b) special task to perform and (c) definite terms of employment. Within WTO a major breakthrough was brought when India started putting pressure for free movement of people. But the problem faced by the developing countries towards establishing a free movement regime is peculiar economic need tested, peculiar visa regime, qualification license certificate, and so on. The speaker argued that development of knowledge and technology based economies, low fertility rates and growing influence of diasporas in Western countries have created conditions for increased migration. He also advocated for an orderly movement of people at the international level, which he termed as 'regulated openness', that must also be a politically saleable concept. He emphasised the need for transparency and predictability of movements, distinct policies for different kinds of migrants, protection of their rights and abolition of the root causes of illegal migration. He further stated that management of such complex phenomena needs comprehensive, orderly and institutionalised system. He referred that the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as a mandated international organisation, should give intellectual leadership in establishing such regime.

During the open discussion Dr. C R Abrar questioned about the reasons pertaining to the lack of initiative on part of the South Asian countries and about the role of the civil society. In response, Mr. Huq said that it is the lack of expertise and commitment, and interaction of government functionaries with NGO, general people and academics that act as a barrier towards a concerted effort to earn openness. Being members of the developing South, India, Egypt and Brazil have overcome the problem, and thereby were able to raise their voices in forums like the WTO and GATT to achieve maximum advantages in trade with the developed states. Shahzada Akram of RMMRU commented that an orderly migration may contribute to further brain-drain and increase the gap between rich and poor countries in terms of human resources. The session was presided over by Professor M Shahadat Ali, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University. Prof. Ali in his summing up statement emphasised the need for close cooperation between academia and policy planners. A number of teachers and students of the University and NGO representatives attended the programme.

## **Seminar Urges Institutions to Address THE PROBLEMS OF TRAUMATISED CHILDREN IN THE CHT**

Participants at a seminar on *Children in Conflict Situation: The CHT Case* observed that although the Peace Accord has undoubtedly gone some way in bringing about greater stability and freedom of movement to Chittagong Hill Tracts, there still remain numerous unresolved issues that continue to cause problems, all of which impact negatively on children. The seminar, organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) was held on 28 March 2001 at the University of Dhaka. Mr. Thomas Feeny of the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, was the main speaker.

Feeny argued that despite the Government's insistence that peace reigns supreme in CHT, the vast majority of reports on the region since the Peace Accord have presented a different picture and the future of the tribal children of the region does not therefore look as prosperous as it should. He stated that from their earliest memories, these children have been forced to associate their identity with oppression and discrimination, and this has heavily influenced not only their adult personalities but also their careers, social attitudes and interactions. Prolonged conflict obstructed, disrupted and disadvantaged the development of children in their most formative important years, leaving them with severely reduced opportunities to participate successfully and to the best of their ability in the adult world. He concluded that without proper respect and provision for their ethnic identity and a move towards their greater involvement in the development of the region, the CHT may be the unwelcome location of further conflict putting children even more vulnerable position.

During open discussion participants viewed that the Bengali settlers were used as pawns, and their problems also merit further research and policy intervention. Among others, Professor Perween Hassan, Chairperson of the Department of Islamic History, and the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University participated in the discussion. Prof. M. Shahadat Ali emphasised the need for proper resolution of the land issue in the CHT. The session, moderated by Dr. C R Abrar, was attended by a good number of social science and law faculty members, and students of Dhaka University, UN officials and NGO representatives.

## **PUBLICATION**

*Bangladeshi Migrants in Saudi Labour Market: An Empirical Analysis* by Mohammad Abdul Mannan, published by RMMRU, Occasional Paper Series 5, March 2001, 52 pp. Tk 20.00 (in Bengali)

RMMRU has so far published two Occasional Papers on different aspects of international labour migration from Bangladesh. The future of Bangladeshi labour in receiving countries like Saudi Arabia becomes important area of inquiry. The author, through his experiences at the grassroots while working as a representative from his bank in Saudi Arabia for four years, has presented policies of Saudi government regarding the import of labour. Opposing the common perception of the declining demands for labour import, the author argues that Saudi Arabia will continue to depend on foreign labour for different sectors in that country. He presented a number of recommendations at the policy level in order to make the best use of the opportunity of labour export from Bangladesh.

Mohammad Abdul Mannan has been working as the Senior Vice President of Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd.

## **ACTIVITIES OF THE UNIT January – March 2001**

**Panel Discussion:** A Panel Discussion on *Nuclear Disarmament and Peace in South Asia* was held at the Conference Hall of the Faculty of Business Studies, Dhaka University on 30 January 2001. The panel comprised of Admiral L Ramdas, former Chief of Naval Staff, India, Dr. A H Nayyar, and Dr.

Zia Mian, nuclear physicists. More than 100 students and faculty members of different departments of the university attended the programme. Dr. C R Abrar moderated the session.

**Talk:** A talk on *Nari Jiban: Tracing Women's Migration and Work Lives* by Dr. Kathryn B Ward, Professor in Sociology, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, was organised at the Seminar Room, Centre for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, University of Dhaka, on 25 January 2001. Over 70 students and faculty members of Social Sciences participated at the programme.

Mr. Shahidul Huq, Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN, Geneva, made a presentation on *In Quest of a Multilateral Arrangement for Movements of Service Providers*, organised at the Seminar Room, Dean's Office, Faculty of Arts, University of Dhaka, on 22 March 2001.

A Seminar on *Children in Conflict Situation: Preliminary Findings from the Chittagong Hill Tracts* was held at the Seminar Room, Dean's Office, Faculty of Arts, University of Dhaka on 28 March 2001. Mr. Thomas Feeny, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University, was the principal speaker.

**Publications:** Occasional Paper 5 titled *Bangladeshi Migrants in Saudi Labour Market: An Empirical Analysis* (in Bengali) by Md. Abdul Mannan was published in March 2001.

Issue 15, January – March 2001 of the Unit newsletter, *Udbastu* (the Uprooted) was published in March 2001.

**Monthly Meeting:** In the monthly meeting held in March, a paper on *Migration and Displacement: Comparative Experience of Animals and Human Beings* was presented by Shahzada M Akram, Research Associate, RMMRU.

**Visitor:** Mr. Thomas Feeny, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University, came on an exchange visit under the Higher Education Link with RSC, Oxford. Mr. Feeny spent four weeks in Bangladesh and visited Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, and Khagrachari with regard to his study on *Children in Conflict Situation*.

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