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ECO PARK PROJECT THREATENS TRIBAL EXISTENCE



(Photo courtesy: Daily Star)

The real objectives of misnamed “eco-parks” are to evict minority ethnic groups from Bangladesh – BLA.

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The issues

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In April, 2001, amidst strong protests, the government has decided to go ahead with the Tk 11-crore 'Eco-park' project in Moulvibazar allegedly evicting hundreds of tribal families in the process. This was just the beginning of a well planned indigenous people eviction schema drawn by government of Bangladesh.

According to TWN Third World Network at least 1,000 families lost their homes and an even larger numbers are being deprived of their land upon which they depend for their livelihood. Moreover, this eco-park plan seriously threatens the cultural integrity of the indigenous communities by calling for their "social improvement", which includes the creation of a "cultural village", where the "tribals" will be on display for tourist consumption. There are allegations that Forest Department, the implementing authority of the project, has not taken any steps yet to rehabilitate the affected families.

Even worse, the decision to go ahead with the project was taken without any discussion with the tribals living in the hills, threatening the very existence of the resident Khasia and Garo tribes that depend mostly on betel leaf plantations in the area for their livelihood.

The Forest Department however does not acknowledge that Khasia tribals own any land in the forest. The decision came as a cruel surprise to many as some of the tribal leaders who had recently met high officials in the Prime Minister's office were assured that the project would not be implemented without prior discussion with the 'residents' in the hills.

A statement released by the Bangladesh Landless Association (BLA), says, "The real objectives of the misnamed 'eco-parks' are to evict minority ethnic groups - which goes hand in hand with environmental destruction - and to transfer public funds into the coffers of the construction industry. In the future, we can expect the privatization of land and the bargain price sale of tourism infrastructure to the private sector."

A Further details on ECO Park and response from tribal community is available at http://www.omioibcom.org/homenews/eco_park.htm .



Photo (courtesy Bhorerakagaj): ECO-Park wall that surrounding the forest.

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The Plights of Ahmadiyya

Constitutional assertion on the rights of religious practice is violated

The hatred that spilled on the streets of Dhaka and heinous attacks that followed allegedly orchestrated by hardliner is now have spiraled out of control. Bangladesh constitution that asserts the guarantee of religious freedom in article 41 now assumed "assertion of the past" as the governments issue order to ban religious books of Ahmadiyya or otherwise known as Qadiyani community.

The order further strengthens the earlier claim by hardliner to declare Ahmadiyya as non Muslim.

Murder of Ahmadiyya community members and vandalism of their mosque was nothing new in Bangladesh yet community member hoped that violence may died down in near future paving the way for peace.

But Today's move by the government of Bangladesh paved the way for yet another nightmare for country's 100000 Ahmadiyya community members.

It may bring to a complete extinction of the community some fears.

The atrocity against fellow community members has disturbed peaceful Ahmadiyya community worldwide as HRCBM started to receive hundreds of letter from all over the world to stand guard against evil design and protect Ahmadiyya in Bangladesh.



Ahmadiyya - Genfer Str. 11 - 60437 Frankfurt am Main

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HRCBM
Dhaka Santa Clara

AK/117/03
Nov. 21, 2003

Gentlemen,

I avail myself of this opportunity to enclose hereto copy of a letter written to the Prime Minister of People's Republic of Bangladesh about the persecution of members of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Bangladesh.

I am confident that HRCBM will make meaningful contributions in the efforts to protect the lives and fundamental rights of the Ahmadi in Bangladesh.

With thanks and regards,

humbly yours,

Abdullah Uwe Wagishauser
Chairman Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Germany

Encl: a.a.

With recent trends of violence against minorities, government's disregards about the safety and security of country's minority community and today's announcement, one can easily predict grim situation in Bangladesh

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[ECO-Park continued..]



Photo (courtesy Bhorerkagoj): Garo tribals protest the murder of Piren (25) by ruling party cadres who were protesting for the cancellation of eco-park project.



Photo (Courtsey Daily Star): No where to go, landless women and children of Garo community at Madavpur.



Photo (Courtesy OMIUSA.ORG): World Indigenous Day Protest Rally in Dhaka for the Traditional Land Rights of Indigenous People, August 9, 2002.

According to Omiusa.org, Bangladesh Army had rounded up more than a dozens of Garo indigenous people in 2001 without any apparent reason. Some alleged that such activities of Police, BDR and Army against the indigenous people is apt of eviction planned drawn by government of Bangladesh for which Eco-Park is just one of the legalized mechanism of minority annihilation schema.

In the last few months the Bangladesh Forest Department has made plans to take over more than 1,500 acres of tribal land in Kulaura and establish “eco-parks.” Kulaura, an ecologically sound and biologically diverse region, comprises approximately three square miles and is home to 2,000 Khasi and Garo people.

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[Ahmadiyya continued..]

which world community have constantly ignored.



Photo (Courtesy Daily Star): Anti-Ahmadiyya agitation in Dhaka: Left, a violent mob of 30000 people runs down the streets of Dhaka setting up road blocks in a demonstration to declare Ahmadiyya as non-muslim, right police is on riot gear.



Photo (Courtesy BBC): Protesters issued a deadline for branding Ahmadiyya non-Muslim

Although the decision of the government to ban books of Ahmadiyya sect has raised political condemnation as well as protest from country’s intellectual community, it failed to restraint hardliner who along with elements of the ruling party even more aggressively now pursuing to enact a bill in the Parliament.

The intention of the bill as some newspaper reported could bring the end for Ahmadiyya practice in Bangladesh. Unless UN and International community lives upto its promises to uphold religious rights under UNHR & International Bill of Rights in Bangladesh such intolerance would continue to brew in the country.

6 Minority women beaten up: Ruling party leader tries to confiscate land, Fisheries looted

Translated from the Daily Janakantha dated 12th December, 2003.

Shafiqul Haque, on return from char baniari:

The entire minority community of Char Baniari under Najirpur of Firujpur is terrified due to constant threats and attacks from miscreants in a bid to evict the entire community and forcing them to leave the country.

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[ECO-Park continued..]

It also includes two beautiful waterfalls, which is the likely reason for locating the project on tribal land, rather than in the larger, uninhabited, and environmentally endangered neighboring areas, which seem to be more suitable for the project.

Several human rights organizations working in Bangladesh wrote a petition to the Prime Minister's office, requesting that the Forest and Environment Ministry work to ensure the rights and interests of the tribals. The petition states: "As tribal populations throughout the world are suffering from the usurpation of their ancestral lands, we take this opportunity to outline the following ramifications of the construction of the eco-park on the tribals and the environment and to set forth the principles that should inform any such discussions." The petition notes that not only were none of the indigenous groups currently residing on the land consulted about the ecopark, but no mention about their existence was made in the government's report about the park.

Additionally, the Bangladesh government ignored deeds held by Khasis and Garos to the lands appropriated for reforestation, failed to meet with the tribals in the specific planning of the ecopark, and continue to deny the tribals' request to negotiate the terms of the eco-park and loss of their land.

The petition also states that the tribal people are not against an eco-park, *per se*, but, because there is much idle land still available, they want it developed on land not presently occupied by the tribals. They also want the government to ensure their permanent land rights, fundamental human rights and rights to education, health and culture.



Photo (courtesy BBC): In May 2003, a petition was put forward on behalf of one million people in Bangladesh, who the government describes as 'tribals', is deeply critical of their treatment - report BBC.

The 2003 US state department report alleged that government of Bangladesh is evicting tribals from their natural habitat heavy handedly. The report asserts, "in 2001 the Forestry Department inaugurated an eco-park on the lands inhabited by the predominantly Christian Khasi tribals in Mouluvibazar. Although indigenous Khasis had lived on these lands for generations, the Government did not recognize their ownership. The Government claimed ownership and stated that the Khasis were occupying the land illegally.

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[women tortured...continued..]

A notorious local ruling party leader namely Mujibur Mollha and his brigands of 60 thugs are terrifying the community in a bid to confiscate the minority land of about 85 acres.



Picture (Courtesy: The Daily Janakantha): Tortured and browbeaten minority women of Char Baniari.

As a part of the evil design, the notorious brigand of more than one hundred thugs went on rampage last Sunday morning looting the fisheries and crops of local minorities.

Annoyed by the protest of local minorities, thugs stormed to the house of Biswas family charging on the women of the family.

In the attacks more than 15 people were wounded among whom 10 are women. Seriously wounded six women have been admitted to Najirpur hospital.

Police has yet to take any action against the miscreants. The brigands is still roaming the area freely and issuing threats to the community warning them for further attacks.

A minority girl gang raped in Faridpur: 7 rapists held

Translated from Daily Janakantha dated 12/16/03.

Faridpur: A minority girl namely Shafali Das (15) has been gang raped at the Gualchamat area of the town. Police have detained 7 miscreants on the spot and the detainees are Jahid Husain Labu (27), Milon Husain Rashid (25), Jakaria (27), Sujan Datta (24), Mintu (25), Ashikur Rahman (28) and Subrata Ghosh (27).

In the raid, police has also rescued the girl alongwith Taka 8200.00 which has been looted from the nearby Progoti Petrol pump. The incident occurred around 10 o'clock at night in the abandon brick field of Gaulchamat. According to report, the miscreants kidnapped the girl (daughter of one Mr. Shubal Debnath) from her house at Khudabaksh road of the Gaulchamat area and took her to the brick field. On their way, the miscreants also looted the aforementioned amount from the petrol pump. The girl was gang raped the girl multiple times at the brick field.

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[ECO-Park continued..]

The Government did not undertake any activities to implement the eco-park project during the reporting period, but the project has not been officially cancelled. In July 2002, Forest Department guards killed a Khasi member, Abinash, and injured 10 others in an attempt to evict the Khasis. Police had not arrested anyone in connection with the killing by the end of the reporting period.”



Photo (courtesy BBC): Hundreds of men and women from Bangladesh's many indigenous groups have marched through Dhaka demanding an end to what they describe as willful discrimination.

The News Excerpt

2 Garos shot dead for construction protest at Madhupur eco-park

<http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/01/04/d40104011212.htm>

Source Daily Star News: At least two Garo youths were shot dead and 25 others, including women and children, injured in the Madhupur forest, 50 km north of Tangail town yesterday noon. The incident occurred when a large number of agitated ethnic Garos carrying sharp weapons obstructed construction of a patch of wall in the forest. The forest department undertook a project, 'Forest Conservation and Eco-tourism' for construction of fence around 3,000 acres of forestland at the end 2000. The agitating people were from Shadhurpara of Shulakuri union, Kakraghuni, Joynagasa, Sataria and Bijoypur Gathe at Gaina village.....

Garos issue ultimatum to cancel Modhupur eco-park scheme

<http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/01/06/d4010601044.htm>

Source Daily Star News: The Garos of Modhupur yesterday gave a seven-day ultimatum to the prime

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[Minority Girl.....contd..]

On report, police raided the brick field surrounding it from all sides around 10 o'clock at night and arrested 7 miscreants on the spot. Two cases have been registered in the local police station.

The destitute girl has been sent to the Faridpur Medical College Hospital for necessary medical examination.

Women Torture:

The grim situation in northern districts including Barishal

Translated from the Daily Jugantor dated January 9th, 2004.

Pulok Chatterjee, Barishal office: In 2003, more than 477 cases of women tortures have been reported at the 6 districts of Barishal alone.

To average, it was more than one cases of women torture everyday.

Last year, rape was the top crime and killing of women was second in the crime list.

It is reported that number of rape was higher in 2003 than 2002.

The killing of women has broken all records in the last five years.

More than 68 women are being killed in 2003. The grim situation of Barshal district was depicted clearly in the reports of NGOs namely SDS and APANJAN as well in the collective reports of all national dailies.

According to the reports more than 144 women being gang raped and 68 women were killed in the six districts of Barishal. More than 12 women have become the victim of acid throwing. At least 55 women were subject to brutal kidnap and 29 women became the victim of dowry. 40 women have committed suicide and 62 women were subject to family torture.

More than 65 women were subjected other form of brutal tortures, including molestation, tormented by neighbors, lynched and publicly gang raped.

Murder of Amor Das:

The mystery surrounds

Translated from Bhorerkagoj dated January 10th 2004.

Samaresh Baidya: Even though a month passed by, the murder mystery of detainee Amor Das during the custodial torture by detective branch of CMP is yet to be solved.

Why Amor Das was murdered and by which of those officers is yet to be reported by the 3 member investigative commission.

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[ECO-Park continued..]

minister to implement a five-point charter of demands, including cancellation of a forest conservation and eco-tourism plan that they fear would threaten their traditional lifestyle.

The removal of Environment and Forest Minister Shajahan Siraj and transfer of Tangail's deputy commissioner, superintendent of police and divisional forest officer also took centre stage in the charter of demands.

The demands came from a demonstration of several thousand incensed indigenous people who blocked Tangail-Mymensingh Highway, flew black flags and carried the body of Piren Slan, killed in fire from forest guards on Saturday.....

Fear stalks Garos in forest homes

<http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/01/09/d4010901033.htm>

Source Daily Start News: Insecurity stalks the indigenous people in their Modhupur forest homes after ruling BNP activists allegedly threatened them in the wake of violence that locals say is aimed at upsetting their movement against an eco-park.

Locals claimed Bangalee Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists, armed with firearms and machetes, barged into the forest village of Jalchatra-Pachish Mile on Wednesday night and threatened the indigenous people not to raise their voice again the park.

The Rights & Indigenous People**Economic and Social Council**

<http://www.cwis.org/draft9329.html>

Article 1: Indigenous peoples have the right to the full and effective enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law.

Article 2: Indigenous individuals and peoples are free and equal to all other individuals and peoples in dignity and rights, and have the right to be free from any kind of adverse discrimination, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.

Article 3: Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

[Amor Das...Contd..]

Photo (Courtesy Bhorerkagoj): The body of deceased Amor Das who was murdered in custody by the officers of CMP.

DB police remanded Amor Das in the kidnap case of Jamaluddin in last 10th December, 03.

But Amor was deceased that night in the custody. The custodial death of Amor Das has been the talk around the country. The murder mystery of Amor Das may be raised before the parliament as a question by the opposition in the next gathering.

It is alleged that government is delaying the investigative report on the murder of Amor Das to protect its image. A report asserted that Police head quarter has requested CMP to furnish information regarding Amor murder case in a bid to tackle any question that can be raised before Home Ministry in the next parliament meeting. Next day after the murder of Amor Das, CMP commissioner directed the asst. commissioner to form a 3 member committee and report before him within four days, yet the report not being submitted although a month passed by.

It is reported that right after the murder of Amor Das, the CMP authority created pressure on the family member to perform the immediate funeral and cremate the deceased. With holding his name, a CMP officer alleged that the delay of furnishing the report is quite absurd and he is doubtful about the proper investigation. According to family member, Amor Das was killed by police through well planned well planned electric shock. Other report supposes that the third degree water therapy by police could be the cause of the murder as well.

Some alleged that government is trying to show case it as a heart attack by dismissing the custodial murder charge.

Life and Struggle of Indigenous People in Bangladesh



Photo (courtesy BBC): The Garo community has their own language and distinct cultural traditions.



Photo (Courtesy BBC): Omilla Nicola: angry about disruption to indigenous life



Photo (Courtesy Meghbarta): Indigenous Khasia village at Madhobkunda, Bangladesh



Photo (Courtesy BBC): Indigenous Day demonstration: Protesters say the government is doing nothing for them – report BBC

Minority Girl gang raped and sold to Brothel in Nandaile

Translated from Daily Sangbad dated 11th January 2004.

Nandaile (Maimonshing) Staff Reporter:

A destitute minority girl has been gang raped at a local hotel and latter sold by the miscreants at a local brothel. The orphan was taken from her aunt's house through the help of her aunt who staged a preparation of false marriage with one of the miscreant namely Panja. The group of 5 miscreants took the girl to a hotel telling the orphan that she will be married with Panja there.

The destitute girl was gang raped in the hotel by five of the miscreants and latter in the morning sold her to a local brothel subjugator namely Jurna at a value of taka 6000. The Borthel owner Jurna latter sold her to another gang of miscreants at an amount of Taka 15000.

She was then taken to an unknown place by the miscreants in the morning of 4th, January 04. It is being reported that she is now being gang raped every night by a group of miscreants.

When our disguise reporter contacted the girl for a moment at a house of one Khurshed in Chandipara, the destitute reported her ordeal.

Since then our reporter is unable to track her whereabouts during writing of this report. Police is reluctant to authenticate this case.

নান্দাইলে বিয়ের প্রলোভনে তরুণীকে গণধর্ষণ করে পতিতালয়ে বিক্রি

নান্দাইল (ময়মনসিংহ) থেকে নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা- ৪ নান্দাইল উপজেলার এক অভিভাবকহীন তরুণীকে বিয়ের প্রলোভন দিয়ে ময়মনসিংহের একটি হোটেলে নিয়ে রাতভর উপর্যুপরি ধর্ষণ করে পরদিন পতিতালয়ে বিক্রি করে দেয়ার এক গুরুতর অভিযোগ পাওয়া গেছে। ধর্ষিতা ৪ দিন পর পালিয়ে এসেও ওই ধর্ষণের হাত থেকে রেহাই পায়নি। জিম্মি অবস্থায় নান্দাইল পৌর সদরে অজ্ঞাত স্থানে রয়েছে।

বুধবার গোপনে ধর্ষিতার সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করে জানা যায়, ২৪শে ডিসেম্বর পৌর এলাকা চণ্ডিপাশার কাজল ও পাঞ্জুসহ ৪/৫ জনের একটি দল ধর্ষিতার মামি জ্যোৎস্নার সহায়তায় পাঞ্জুর সঙ্গে বিয়ে দেয়ার প্রলোভনে ময়মনসিংহ রাতে একটি হোটেলে গঠে। সেখানেই কাজল, পাঞ্জুসহ ৪/৫ জন মিলে রাতভর পালাক্রমে তাকে ধর্ষণ করে। পরদিন ধর্ষিতাকে জোরপূর্বক

শহরের পতিতালয়ে সর্দারনি ঝরনার কাছে ৬ হাজার টাকায় বিক্রি করে দিয়ে চলে আসে। ঝরনা ৫০ টাকার স্ট্যাম্পে দস্তখত রেখে ধর্ষিতাকে দেহ ব্যবসায় নিয়োজিত করে। ধর্ষিতা আরও জানায়, তার ইচ্ছার বিরুদ্ধে গত ৪ দিন ধরে তাকে ভোগ করে বিভিন্ন খন্দের। তাদের মধ্যে একজনের বাড়ি নান্দাইলে হওয়ায় ঘটনাটি নান্দাইলের অন্য একটি চক্র জেনে যায়। ভূয়া অভিভাবক সেজে পতিতালয়ে গিয়ে ওই সর্দারনি ঝরনার কাছে তরুণীকে ফেরত চায়। ঝরনা তখন ক্রয়ের টাকার দ্বিগুণ মূল্য দিতে শর্ত দেয়। রাজি হয়ে ওই অভিভাবকরা ঝরনাকে ১৫ হাজার টাকা দিয়ে উজ্জার করে নান্দাইলে নিয়ে আসে ৪ঠা জানুয়ারি। কিন্তু পতিতালয় থেকে এসেও সে রক্ষা পায়নি। ধর্ষিত তরুণীটি প্রতিদিনই আশ্রয়কারীদের কাছে ধর্ষিত হচ্ছে বলে জানা গেছে। বুধবার চণ্ডিপাশা পৌর এলাকার খোরশেদের বাসায় তরুণীটির সঙ্গে ক্ষণিকের যোগাযোগ হলেও কিছুক্ষণ পর থেকে এ রিপোর্ট লেখা পর্যন্ত আর যোগাযোগ করা সম্ভব হয়নি। থানা পুলিশ ঘটনাটি জানলেও আমলে দিচ্ছে না। তারা জানায়, যাকে নিয়ে ঘটনা সে না এলে আমাদের কী করণীয় আছে। বর্তমানে ঘটনাটি নান্দাইলে ব্যাপক চাঞ্চল্যের সৃষ্টি করেছে।



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Photo (Courtesy The Daily Sangbad): The pain stiffen indigenous people protesting government's injustice through hunger strike: Report Sangbad dated 16th December, 2003