

Tapping the resources of CHT

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HISTORICALLY Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) districts are discriminated. Discrimination among men takes place in practice though it is not expected. Discrimination prevails between castes, religions, classes, region and sexes. People suffer from discrimination. Discrimination puts negative impact on education, profession, economy and way of life and living. As a result people of the discriminated region fail to improve their lot which ultimately affects the development of the country. In Bangladesh, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a practical example of regional discrimination. People of this region are being affected because of mal-treatment towards them.

Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) is a region for a small community of people. The geographical area of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is relatively large compared to other areas in Bangladesh. This region abounds with natural resources. For example, hilly places like Khagrachhari abound with oil, gas and mineral resources. Most of our forest resources lie in CHT. As a tourism center the position of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

is the third after Cox's Bazar and Sunderbans. There are a number of rivers with strong current and highways here. Even if there are sufficient natural resources including tourism, forest and communication facilities, hill tract has been deprived of development because of regional discrimination.

Because of the deprivation in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the whole country is affected. CHT is the composition of the hilly districts namely Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Banderban. To the North of CHT lies Treepura of India, to the East Mizoram, on the West Chittagong. The total area of this part is 13,184 square kilometers, which is about 9% of the total area of Bangladesh. According to Census of 1991, the population of this area was 1.042 million or 10 lacs and 42 thousand, which is 0.74% of the population in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh 953 people live in every square kilometre whereas in CHT the figure is only 79.04. The people of CHT are Mongolian by race. Mongolians may be divided into several tribes; such as Chakma, Tipra, Murong, Mag etc. Historically CHT used to be a part

of Bengal. Then it became a part of Arakan, then Treepura and then again under Arakan kingdom. It was under Mughal regime from 1666 to 1760. CHT was governed by the East India Company from 1760 to 1860. Since 1947 it became a part of Pakistan and after Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 as a part of Chittagong has been named as Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

It has already been said the physical infrastructure of CHT is a wide spread hilly landscape which is high and low. Because of limited plain, this is not suitable for cultivation. But it is afforested naturally. On both sides of the hills and on slopes people grow rice, cotton, oilseeds, tea, banana, pineapple etc, which is named as 'joom'. The hilly people make clothes, wooden mats and baskets as profession. Wooden goods of this area are familiar to us as Burmese clothes. It has already been mentioned that CHT covers 9% of the total area of Bangladesh, yet less than 1% of total people in Bangladesh live in CHT. It cannot be said that natural resources are less here in consideration of area and population. Usually there is probability of existence of

gas, oil and fuel in hilly areas. In 1969 National Oil Company of Pakistan discovered Simularg gas and oil field in CHT. Among other mineral resources in this area common ones are sand, stone and coal. The rivers that flow across CHT are Karnaphuly, Sangu and Matamuhuri. There is great prospect of setting up industries both small and big on both the banks of these rivers if gas, electricity and regional security are ensured. Since CHT is free from drought and desertation, it is suitable for industrialisation, which is unlike other areas. Chandraghona Paper Mill was set-up because of high current river path, electricity, bamboo, wood, cane and other elements at cheaper price. Though artificially, a hydro-power station was set up on Kaptai Lake with financial support of America. Through it we are benefited in two ways - flood control and hydro-electric facility at cheap price. This electricity is transmitted through National Grid to different parts of the country. Besides, growing fishery we can fulfill the local requirement as well as earn foreign currency by exporting fish. As there is facility both land and

river in CHT small industries can be set up, fisheries can grow and dairy farms can be established for the development of the concerned area. Timber can be supplied to different parts of the country for furniture and housing by growing Teakchambul, Gozary, Segun and Canes. Expenditure in housing can also be reduced by this way.

Even if the people in hilly areas are more industrious than those in plains, the productivity is low here because of low investment. The main reason for low investment is lack of security. Because of regional discrimination these people are deprived of education and other basic rights. This deprivation has made them rebellious. The previous governments spent a lot of money in removing rebellion but they have not spend the required amount of money for the development of the concerned areas.

What we need now is to turn the prospects of CHT into productive one. For this more streets and riverways should be made as infrastructural development. Dredging of important rivers is essential so that river transportation could be possible. At the same time

natural resources should be utilised through a forestation. The local people and the tribal people should be taught Bengali, English, Computer and Technology in order to make them productive. This can be done by setting up small and big industries and expansion of education in both government and private sectors.

The hilly people are as meritorious as other Mongolians of Asia. The sense of discrimination from the tribal people should be removed by utilising their merit and at the same time providing them with education, jobs, business and other facilities. The hilly people will be able to remove insecurity when they will have firm belief that CHT is an inseparable part of Bangladesh and they will devote themselves to development activities. And that the investors will be inspired to utilise the prospects in this area when they find the place peaceful. Then CHT will be enriched in industrialisation and the whole country will prosper.

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