
Bangladesh: The Mro resist eviction from eco-park

The Mro (also Mru) are one of the indigenous peoples inhabiting since long Chittagong Hills. They are totally dependent on the forest, where they not only hunt but also engage in local varieties cultivation, collective farming and gardening.

The dimension of their dependency on their forest reflect their ethno-botanical knowledge. According to a study from the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, University of Chittagong, "conservation of the indigenous knowledge of the Mro tribe can conserve the forests as well, which may be a forest conservation tool" in Bangladesh.

However, official policies prefer to engage in projects --allegedly for economic development as well as preserving the environment-- that replace forests and their people for tourist gardens --so called 'Eco-parks'. Indigenous peoples know well that they will involve their eviction and clearing thousands of acres of forest by cutting off trees and levelling hills to construct roads meandering through the hills for passage of motor vehicles.

Some time ago, the Madhabkunda-Muraichhari Eco-park had also implied the eviction of hundreds of Khasia and Garo families living in the hills. On that occasion, the leader of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Reserved Forestry Protection and Land Rights Committee, Rang Lai Mro, had claimed: "In Bandarban alone, hundreds of hill families have been uprooted from their ancestral homes after 20,000 acres of land were acquired by the forest department in the name of Social Forestry."

Now, the government is proposing another eco-park on land of the Mro community, in Chimbuk Range in Bandarban hill district. The Mro, whose essential role as guardians of the forest has been acknowledge even by academic research, are threatened of being thrown out from their home.

Rang Lai Mro, president of the Mro Social Council, said as many as 700 Mro families would be evicted if the government implements its plan to build an eco-park on a 5500-acre tract of land in Sadar, Roangchhari, Ruma and Lama "upazilas" (rural administrative subdivisions of a district).

As a result, local indigenous people have declared that they will resist any move to set up an Eco Park by displacing them. The call for resistance came from a rally held at Empu Para, 36 kilometres off the Bandarban district headquarters. The Committee to Protect Land and Forest Preservation organised the rally of 500 family heads of the Mro community. The next step will be to hold a meeting with all Headmen and Karbaries (grassroots level leaders) in the areas soon to chalk out a programme to resist the move.

Article based on information from: "Indigenous people to resist eco-park in Bangladesh", PraxisNews, sent by Zakir Kibria, E-mail: banglapraxis@yahoo.com ; "Foundation of 'controversial' Eco-park to be laid today", Rajat Kanti Goswami, Moulvibazar, <http://www.sdnbd.org/sdi/news/pages/eco-park/eco-park.htm> ; "Bangladesh Hills Rumble With Discontent", Sharier Khan, <http://www.banglarights.net/marginalised/marzialized-8.htm> ; "Traditional forest utilization practice by the Mro tribe in Bandarban region, Bangladesh",

<http://www.bnp2004.com/p/p219.pdf> , “Planned Eco Park: Unrest brewing in Bandarban: Indigenous leaders held meetings, decide to resist”, Monirul Islam Monu,
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