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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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13 September 2004

Bangladesh: The Action Research Study on the Institutional Development of Human Rights in Bangladesh (IDHRB), including an evaluation report on its implementation, an audit or investigation of the project, any problems related to its implementation, whether the project ended prematurely in January 2003, and whether the government took negative measures that would have impacted the project (1996-September 2004)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Website of the Institutional Development of Human Rights in Bangladesh (IDHRB) reported that the Action Research Study on the Institutional Development of Human Rights in Bangladesh was established by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs to formulate policies and recommendations that would enable the Bangladesh government to set up a National Human Rights Commission (n.d.a). In *Hurights Osaka*, A.H. Monjurul Kabir, an executive member of ODHIKAR, a Bangladeshi coalition for human rights, reported that the study was initially to begin in July 1995, but due to political tensions in the country, it only commenced in March 1996 when the government signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the agency that was to fund the IDHRB project (Dec.1999). The institutional framework of the study is as follows:

The project will be implemented by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, with the assistance of other agencies and institutions, if required.

The overall responsibility of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs will be the monitoring and evaluation of the project. A Consultative Committee will be formed to provide substantive support to the project by the Ministry of Law. This consultative committee would be chaired by the Secretary Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and include members from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Home ERD, Planning Commission, LGRD, Environment and Forests, Women and Children Affairs and other remaining eight members would be selected from the NGOs and eminent personalities. Secretarial support to this consultative committee will be provided by the Human Rights Project Office.

The project will be executed by the Human Rights Project Office, Ministry of Law. A senior official will be designated by the Ministry of Law to be the National Project Director. The Project Coordinator will be the chief executive of the Human Rights Project Office (IDHRB n.d.b).

The IDHRB project organized a "Participatory Rural Appraisal Programme,"

seminars, study tours in six different countries, and consulted with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (*Human Rights Features* Oct.-Dec. 2002). It also produced a draft bill to create a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in 1999 (*ibid.*; *Hurights Osaka* Dec. 1999). *Human Rights Features* reports, however, that the bill did not make the NHRC "effective or independent," and that in April 2002, after three years of the proposed commission, the government announced that it would be replaced with the Protection of Human Rights Act (Oct.-Dec. 2002). Amnesty International reports that the draft bill would be placed on the parliamentary agenda on 3 February 2003 (16 May 2003), but as of 8 April 2004, there was still no legislation passed to enable the establishment of the NHRC (United Nations 8 Apr. 2004). Two sources state that the NHRC project was nothing more than a way for Bangladeshi officials to obtain United Nations funding (*ibid.*; *Human Rights Features* Oct.-Dec. 2002).

Attempts to obtain information from the UNDP in New York were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

Amnesty International. 16 May 2003. "Bangladesh: Urgent Need for Legal and Other Reforms to Protect Human Rights." <<http://www.web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA130122003?open&of=ENG-326>> [Accessed 10 Sept. 2004]

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United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). 8 April 2004. "Oral Intervention of Mr. Sanchay Chakma of United Peoples Democratic Forum at the Briefing Organised by Interfaith International on Human Rights Situation in South Asia." <<http://www.unpo.org/Downloads/Seminar%20Presentation.doc>> [Accessed 10 Sept. 2004]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sources, including:** *Asia Times*, BBC, Dialog, Human Rights Watch, South Asia Documentation Centre, United Nations Development Programme, US Department of State.

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