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71 Literacy rate highest among the Chakmas

Chittagong Bureau

CHITTAGONG, July 2 : In about 20 years' time the Chakmas of Chittagong Hill Tracts districts have become the highest literate group of people in Bangladesh. Chakmas' present literacy level is said to be above 50 per cent, more than twice the national literacy level in Bangladesh.

While the administration officials told New Nation representative that literacy of the Chakmas is about 50 per cent, the Chakma leaders claimed that their literacy level has gone above 65 per cent.

A very senior authoritative source said that Chakmas can be divided in two groups : 1) The urbanised Chakmas living in towns and suburbs ; and 2) the rural Chakmas living in remote jungle areas. The literacy amongst the former is above 80 per cent while the literacy level amongst the latter is hardly 10 per cent, he said. The census of 1991 may give the correct picture.

It is said that Chakmas have achieved this spectacular progress in literacy by enjoying the lion's share of various facilities, grants and concession given by Government to the tribals for their progress in education, health and social utilities during the last one and a half decade. Government last month said that it had given Taka 52 lakh as scholarships for tribal students during last ten years. During

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Chakmas

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the same period Government gave Taka 82 lakhs for development of tribal cultural activities in the area.

According to administration sources the populations of the main three tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are as follows: Chakmas three lakh fifteen thousand, Marmas about one lakh and Tipras about 65 thousand. Non-tribals are about three lakhs. Though Tipras are the main tribe in Khagrachhari and the Marmas are more populous in Bandarban district, the Chakmas have become most influential in all the three hill districts because of their highest literacy rate.