

Five indigenous girls and women raped in a month in Khagrachari, law- enforcing agencies continue to offer impunity to perpetrators

Since the incident of killing of Sabita Chakma allegedly by some Bengali settlers on 15 February 2014, five indigenous women and girls were subjected to the sexual violence in different places of Khagrachari district. Except three rapists of a 19-year old Marma girl in Manikchari upazila on 7 March 2014, no perpetrator was arrested by the police. Even police did neither arrest, nor tried to arrest any perpetrators of Sabita Chakma killing.

Systematic production of negative results as always, this time two medical investigation reports — killing after rape of Sabita Chakma and rape of another 15-year old Marma girl also found negative. Another medical test report of gang rape of a 19-year old Marma girl in Manikchari upazila is yet to be published. As usual, authority of Khagrachari district hospital is trying to avoid providing the medical report of this incident in order to save the perpetrators, though perpetrators of this gang rape confessed their misdeed before police and public.

It is alleged that the killing case of Sabita Chakma was manipulated and made deliberately weak by the police to save the perpetrators, using ignorance of Sabita Chakma's husband, Deba Ratan Chakma, the complainant of the report. On 15 February in the evening, Deba Ratan Chakma, along with the name of suspected Bengali labourers and other necessary information went to the police station to file a case. But they failed due to power outage. However, they handed over they names of the suspected Bengali labourers to the police and then left police station for home. In the night, police composed statement/deposition excluding names of suspected labourers and took signature of Deba Ratan Chakma when he reached at police station on 16 February in the morning. As a result, the alleged killers are scot-free and concerned authorities are yet to take any action against them.

It is mentionable that the biggest concern in rape and other violence against indigenous women in Bangladesh is the lack of access to justice and absolute impunity that perpetrators enjoy. In rape cases, the victim ends up going through further harassment from the side of the administration and law enforcers. There have been instances where doctors at hospitals have refused to give indigenous women medical examination or delayed the medical treatments so that the evidences disappear. There is intimidation from the security forces. There have also been complaints about police delaying/refusing to take the case and many have been too fearful to file cases due to this. These and many other administration-led intimidation and harassment ultimately result in the perpetrator getting away with his crime.

A teenage indigenous girl gang raped in Manikchari

Right before the day of International Women's Day, on 7 March 2014 at around 12:30 pm, a 19-year old indigenous girl was gang raped by a group of three Bengali settlers of Pichlatala union under Manikchari upazila in Khagrachari district. Police arrested Shahidul Islam (25) son of Samsul Haque, Mahbub Alam (27) son of Sohrab Howlader, and Billal Hossain (24) son of Fazlur Farazi in this connection.

It is learnt that the victim, who work as a domestic worker in Chittagong district, went to

Khagrachari town for a visit in the morning on the day of the incident. After visiting for few hours in the town, she took a Feni bound bus and got off at a place named Jaliapara to catch a Chittagong bound bus to go to her home in Manikchari. Accordingly she managed to catch a Chittagong bound bus from Jaliapara. When the bus reached Gobamara areas, the supervisor of the bus asked for fair. In response, she offered him TK. 10 instead of regular fair of TK. 15 as she did not have any more money left in her purse. But the supervisor nagged her to pay Tk. 15 and forced her to get off the bus at some point.

Some Bengali settlers at a nearby tea stall noticed this incident and asked what had happened. She explained the incident to them and said that she did not have any money left with her to return home. Then they called a local motorcycle driver named Shahidul Islam belonging to Bengali settler community to send her home.

When Shahidul and the indigenous girl reached Pichlatola areas, Shahidul spoke to Sohrab and Billal over mobile phone, and told her that since he did not possess a driving license, they would have to take an alternate route through the jungles. After a little while along that jungle road, Shahidul and Billal appeared as planned over phone. Then all three of them raped her forcibly and left alone in the jungle.

Afterwards, she managed to walk all the way back to Gobamara and informed local Bengali settlers about the incident. The culprits were immediately captured by the locals, led by UP Chairman Abul Kalam, and handed over to the police. The girl was sent to the Khagrachari General Hospital for medical examination on the same day. Medical examination report is yet to be published. The doctors is refusing to provide report.

A case was filed with Manikchari police station by Mr. Chi Thoai Marma, son of Kajo Marma, a relative of the victim. The court sent the perpetrators to the jail.

An indigenous Marma girl raped in Matiranga

On 25 February 2014 at around 11:00 am, an indigenous Marma girl (15) was raped by two Bengali settlers at Kumar Para of Amtali union under Matiranga upazila in Khagrachari district.

It is learnt in the morning on the day of the incident, the victim went out to nearby bush areas to collect wild vegetables. On her way back home two persons named Abdul Khalek, 22, son of Rahim Mian and Mohammad Taru miya, 23, son of late Lal Mian, both from Ramshira Para under Matiranga upazila, belonging to Bengali settler community forcibly raped her. Later the victim was rescued by locals after she they heard her scream.

The victim is a resident of Amtali village and a student of class nine at Khagrachri Technical School and College.

An indigenous woman attempted to rape by security person in Sajek

On 18 February 2014, an indigenous Chakma woman, 28, was attempted to rape allegedly by security person in Laxmichari areas of Sajek union under Baghaichari upazila in Rangamati

district.

On the day at around 12:00 am, warrant officer named Md. Kader and one of his bodyguards from Laxmichari camp went to Laxmichari bazaar in order for buying firewood. Later they went to the house of victim near to the market. At that time, the victim was present there alone. Finding her alone, warrant officer Md. Kader took the advantage of the absence of her family members and embraced the victim from the back without her permission and accordingly attempted to rape her. Being suddenly the indigenous woman shouted and people from surrounding areas came to rescue her. Other military personnel immediately rushed to the spot when they got to know about the incident.

On 21 February 2014, Inter Service Public Relation Directorate, at a press briefing, denied the occurrence of this incident. The press release said that there was a misunderstanding in relation to the incident occurred on 18 February. Press release claimed that misunderstanding arose after a patrol of Laxmichari army camp arrived at victim's house, which was later terminated at the presence of local people; but a vested group was trying to use this issue by distorting and exaggerating the incident. It further stated that Bangladesh army ensued an investigation of the alleged incident soon after they had been notified. And commensurate disciplinary action would be taken against the alleged military personnel if allegation can be proved.

Attempt to rape of an indigenous minor girl in Panchari

On 14 March 2014, a 13-year old indigenous Chakma girl was attempted to rape by a Bengali settler named Mohammad Aitullah at her home in Logang Machchhochara under Panchari upazila in Khagrachari district.

It is learnt that at around 1:30 pm on the day of the incident, Md. Aitullah of Logang Cluster Village in Panchari went to collect bamboo from a forest next to victim's village. While he was passing by the house of Chokhkala Chakma, Md. Aitullah thought the victim was alone at home and tried to rape her forcefully. At that time the victim shouted out and her father Ranakkya Chakma got awake from his sleep. Soon after he came out of his room, Md. Aitullah managed to escape. It is notable that the victim is an intellectually disabled person.

The news of the incident spread immediately after of its occurrence. Later Mr. Jalatkar Chakma, Chairman of Logang Union Council; Md. Lokman, a Member of Logang Union Council and other important persons of Logang areas, along with police, went to visit Chokhkala Chakma's house. Since Chokhkala Chakma is a financially insolvent person, he did not wish to file a case with police. He rather preferred to receive justice from the society.

For this reason, on 17 March 2014, an arbitration was held at the presence of above-mentioned persons of Logang areas where following decisions were made to provide BDT 5000 by the Union Council and BDT 5000 by the perpetrator to the victim as compensation. It is also decided that Md. Aitullah would be produced to another arbitration within a week; otherwise Chairman of Logang Union Council would file a general diary with the police station.

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