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Sexual Violence against Indigenous Women

245 cases in last seven years saw no justice

Claims Kapaeeng Foundation

Staff Correspondent

At least 245 indigenous women have been either raped or sexually harassed in different parts of the country in the last seven years since early 2007 but none of the perpetrators were punished, reveals a report of rights organisation Kapaeeng Foundation.

As the culprits are enjoying absolute impunity, violence against indigenous women is continuing, speakers said at a discussion in the capital's The Daily Star Centre where the findings were shared. The report was based on newspaper reports till April 2014.

In her keynote speech, Kapaeeng's research coordinator Bipasha Chakma said that out of the reported 245 cases of violence, 211 occurred in the Chittagong Hill Tracts alone.

As many as 96 percent of the accused perpetrators were Bangalee settlers, while law enforcers allegedly constituted the remaining four percent, the findings suggest.

Initially, women repression in the hills was used as a "weapon of war" against the indigenous people but it has now turned into a tool for land grabbing, said Bipasha.

She pointed out that in most cases, medical tests gave a negative report denying any sign of rape, as police and other government officials were Bangalee, and they tried to save the perpetrators.

In the last four months, 19 indigenous women suffered sexual violence and 12 of them including children were raped in the CHT. Of the victims, two were killed after rape in Khagrachhari.

Addressing the programme, lawmaker Hajera Sultana said indigenous people should have been given constitutional recognition, which would help them realise their rights.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), highlighted that the repression of indigenous women had a different dynamic as the vested quarters targeted them to grab land of the minorities. But the government does not take any proper measure to stop that despite civil society's repeated call for action, she said.

Information Commissioner Prof Sadeka Halim said violence against indigenous women was remaining sidelined as the issue was hardly included in the mainstream women's rights movement.

Barrister Sara Hossain, director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), said it had been almost two decades since the abduction of indigenous women's leader Kalpana Chakma in 1996 but a full investigation report never came up.

If the abductors of Kalpana are tried, it would be possible to try such other crimes since the root causes of the denial of justice in these cases are the same, she said.

Abu Sayeed Khan, managing director of the daily Samakal, said the real situation of indigenous women was far worse than what was reported.

Sanjeeb Drong, secretary general of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said Bangladesh as a state was not friendly for women and for ethnic and religious minorities.

Rights activist Roslin D Costa, Executive Director of Kapaeeng Foundation Pallam Chakma, Tandra Chankma of Manusher Jonno Foundation, and Joint Convener of Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Network Chanchana Chakma also spoke on the occasion.

Chaitali Tripura, vice chairperson of Kapaeeng Foundation, chaired the programme.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/city/245-cases-in-last-seven-years-saw-no-justice-22632>

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