

Human Rights Situation on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh (14 August-3 September 2014)

An indigenous Tripura girl raped by a Bengali settler in Matiranga

On 3 September 2014 a 13-year old and seven grade Tripura girl of Kadamtoli High School was raped by a Bengali settler at Lal Kumar Para under Tabalchari Union of Matiranga Upzila in Khagrachari district.

The incident took place at 8:00 am on that day when the victim went to a river stream nearby their house to take bath. As she was alone, one Md. Salam, son of Md. Ali of Adarshagram, grabbed and raped her. When the incident became known, local Bengali elders met in an arbitration meeting in the evening and settled the issue by ordering Salam, the offender, to pay a sum of Taka 20,000 as compensation to the victim. No case has been filed with the police station in connection with the incident.

Civic Groups Demand Justice for Indigenous Khasi People

On 29 August 2014, civic groups demanded immediate arrest of the attackers of Indigenous Khasis of Nahar-1 (Aslom) Punji in a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity Auditorium in Segunbagicha, Dhaka. The speakers in the press conference organized by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) also demanded for withdrawal of all the false cases against the victim Khasis, return of 400 acres of forest land belonging to them, and demarcation of the area of the tea estates in the country.

The press conference was organized to address the ongoing harassment, fear and insecurity facing Indigenous Khasi villagers of Alsom (Nahar-1) Punji in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar district for last few months. On 30 May 2014, the Bengali land grabbers, led by the Manager of Nahar Tea Estate, attacked on 79 Khasi families of Nahar Punji-1, a hilltop village of the indigenous Khasi people, with an aim to grab the land belonging to Khasi people. In the attack, 20 Indigenous Khasi people including women were severely injured. However, instead of taking charges against the perpetrators of the attack, police accepted a fabricated case filed by the perpetrators and arrested some of the Khasi villagers over last few months. The arrested Indigenous persons are still under police custody.

In the press conference, eminent writer and researcher Sayed Abul Maksud said, incidents of this kind are taking place in every nook and corner of the country. The Khasis, being a minor Indigenous group, are very vulnerable to such incidents. So, it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure their safety and security. Attempt to eviction and oppression against them are clear violations of human rights and the constitution of the country. Cultural activist Mamunur Rashid mentioned, land grabbing has turned into natural habit of people these days. If it cannot be stopped immediately, general public will face even more serious problem in the future.

General Secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council Advocate Rana Dasgupta said, this crisis is not only of the Khasis but also a problem of the whole country. It needs to be resolved immediately.

Sharif Jamil, Joint General Secretary of BAPA presented the keynote of the press conference. General Secretary of BAPA Abdul Matin, General Secretary of Bangladesh

Indigenous Peoples Forum Mr. Sanjeeb Drong also addressed the press conference.

Another fresh false case filed against Khasi villagers in Sreemangal

The authority of Nahar Tea Estate filed another false case with Sreemangal police station against Khasi villagers of Aslom (Nahar-1) Punji under Sreemangal Upazila of Moulvibazar district on 2 September 2014 while the Khasi villagers had already been harassed by another false case filed by the same complainants. The fresh case accused 28 Khasi villagers including names of a deceased person and another in police custody.

On 30 May 2014, the a group of miscreants led by Pijush Kanti Bhattacharya, Manager of Nahar Tea Estate, made a brutal attack on indigenous Khasi villagers after they resisted an attempt of land grabbing by the tea estate authority. In the attack at least 20 Khasi villagers including women were seriously injured. However, instead of taking charges against the perpetrators of the attack, police accepted a false case filed by the perpetrators themselves and arrested some of the Khasi villagers over last few months. The arrested Indigenous persons are still under police custody. And all the rests are still on run.

Further worsening the situation, Nahar Tea Estate authority filed another false case against the victims on 2 September 2014. The case was filed by Assistant Manager of Nahar Tea Estate, Mijanur Rahaman, 23, son of Masum Ahmed, accusing 28 villagers of thievery, use of illegal firearms and destruction of tea estate properties on 30 August 2014. The case mentions about following persons of Aslom (Nahar-1) Punji:

1. Dibarmin Khasia, 37, son of Lodramin Khasia;
2. Lutmon Polong Khasia, 57, son of Litan Khasia;
3. Sel Tolong, 32, son of late Thakur Khasia;
4. Aktadhar Khasia, 40, son of Lob Khasia;
5. Bhu Khasia, 35, son of Jaindia Khasia;
6. Balet Khong Khasia, 40, son of Lahm Khasia;
7. Asrin Porsa, 30, wife of Dibarmin Khasia;
8. Emly Khasia (Enbabu), 55, son of late Kellau Khasia;
9. Satlak Khasia, 50, wife of Lobin Khasia;
10. Larmon Khasia, 32 son of Rit Khasia;
11. Rilum Khasia, 20, son of Longtam Khasia;
12. Babu Khasia, 40, son of late Cloren Khsia;
13. Jony Khsia, 45, late Lau Khasia;
14. Daniel Khasia, 40, son of Doblew Khasia;
15. Riky Khasia, 20, son of Sik Khasia;
16. Asik Khasia, 18, son of Lulum Khsia;
17. Biplab Khasia, 18, son of Basket Kostia Khasia;
18. Paul Khasia, 30, son of Audin Khasia.

The case also mentions about 10 person anonymous persons of the same village. However, it is alleged by the Khasi villagers that this case is baseless and nothing but to harass them. The alleged false case includes the name of deceased person Paul Khasia (Amsey) who passed away on 10 August 2008 and the name of Rilum Khasia who was in police custody when the alleged incident happened.

Moreover, while most of the accused indigenous Khasi villagers were on run due to previous false cases filed by Nahar Tea Estate authority, present accusation of thievery, use of illegal arms and destruction of tea estate properties against the villagers, terming

the villagers “extremists, armed terrorists, thief and killer in nature,” in the case seems impracticable.

Khasi villagers suspect that this attempt to harass them through filing false cases is rooted in the intention of the Tea Estate Authority to grab their lands.

Update: Bichitra Tirki fights back

Bichitra Tirki, 36, an indigenous female leader of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad (JAP) from Jinarpur village under Parbotipur Union of Gomostapur upazila in Chapainawabganj district, who was tortured and sexually abused by a group of land grabbers earlier in August, has returned home and started fighting back against the perpetrators.

On 4 August 2014, while Bichitra was working in her rice field along with her fellow workers, a group of miscreants numbering 30-35 people, led by Afzal Hossain, made an attack on her using sticks and sharp weapons in connection with grabbing the land which she inherited from her husband. Also, three of the perpetrators namely Rezaul Karim, 30, Akbar Ali, 25, and Akhter Hossain, 35, sexually harassed her. As a result of this attack, Bichitra survived serious physical injury. Shortly after, she was taken to a local hospital and later transferred to Chapainawabganj General Hospital for better treatment.

She filed a case with Gomstapur Police Station on the same day the incident occurred accusing 18 persons. Police has arrested 10 out of 18 persons as of now. However, Afzal Hossain, the mastermind of the attack, and some of the main perpetrators still remain scot-free. Unlike most other victims of sexual abuse, Bichitra, however, remained strong in spirit. Before some journalists Bichitra said, the journalist can publish her name and photograph on media. She is not ashamed of social stigma because all her family members, relatives and her indigenous sisters and brothers from entire North Bengal are always beside her.

After about four weeks of her stay in the hospital, on 31 August 2014, Bichitra returned home. A group of prominent people of the country including few members of parliament (MP), JAP leaders, and members of civil society organizations escorted her home. Soon after her return, Bichitra called on her community people, organized them together to fight back against the land grabbers. Together with her indigenous sisters and brothers, Bichitra planted rice seedlings on her rightful land, which the land grabbers want to take over. Now Bichitra is waiting for the green rice seedlings to grow and turn golden.

On 3 September 2014 Mr. Fazle Hossain Badsha, MP and convener of the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples, raised issue of attack on Bichitra Tirki in the Parliament. He said that Bichitra is an elected member of Union Council (lowest local government unit in Bangladesh) and was awarded for commendable social work earlier by the government. However, such women activist was attacked by the land grabbers. Though three alleged attackers were arrested, but the masterminds of the attack are yet to be held, Badsha express his concern. Following statement of Fazle Hossain Badsha, on 4 September evening the State Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, has, subsequently, made an statement in the parliament upon article 300 informing the Parliament that the incidence of torture on Ms. Bichitra Tirki as reported in the House has been found to be true though the accusation of rape has not been proved. He also promised to take all necessary actions. The Superintendent of Police (SP) of Chapainawabganj district has visited Ms. Bichitra Tirki at her home on 6 September. So far 11 of the accused (3 of the named in FIR and 8 unnamed) have been arrested. It is expected to immediate arrest of some more culprits, State Minister for Home Affairs

added.

Earlier on 31 August at a rally held on the premises of Parbatipur Union Parishad office at noon, five lawmakers demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of those who beat up and sexually harassed her. The lawmakers, Fazle Hossain Badsha from Rajshahi, AKM Fazlul Haque from Sherpur, Nazmul Hoque Prodhan from Panchagarh, Yasin Ali from Thakurgaon and Hajera Sultana also assured the locals that they would raise the issue in the parliament, demanding punishment of the culprits.

On 27 August Jatiya Adivasi Parishad organised a road march from Adda intersection in Gomostapur upazila to Chapainawabganj town, demanding exemplary punishment to those who beat up and sexually harassed Buchitra. Lawmaker Fazle Hossain Badsha of Rajshahi, Ushatan Talukdar MP from Rangamati; Pankaj Bahattachariya, NAP leader; Kzai Sufia Akhtar, central leader of Jatiya Mohila Parishad; Sabin Chandra Munda, Adivasi Parishad general secretary, Bimol Chandra Rajoar, its organising secretary, Sushen Kumar, general secretary of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, Rajshahi district unit, indigenous leaders Bina Munda, Bishut Muni Toppo, Bashanti Murmu and Bazlur Rashid Firoz, central leader of Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal spoke at the rally.

Handing over the local Tourism to the three Hill District Council

As per CHT Accord, the subject of local tourism was handed over to the three Hill district Councils on 28 August 2014 Thursday morning. A signing ceremony was taken place at a hotel in Dhaka for the same. It is alleged that the only mere authority of tourism initiated by the Hill District Councils was bestowed upon the Hill District Councils. The main powers and functions of the tourism were retained with national authorities. The responsibility of financial management and establishments in the three hill districts were not handed over to the Hill District Councils.

It is reported that a draft of the contract was sent earlier to the three Hill District Councils, but the Hill District Councils had objected to sign the contract as the substantial authorities were excluded in the contract. Even after finalising the date of the handing over event, there had also been a written objection from the Hill District Councils, which the government overlooked.

However, all the three Hill District Council Chairmen have signed the contract paper, all of are selected by the ruling Awami League Party. Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon has mentioned that handing over the contract is a part of implementation of the CHT Accord. He also expressed his gratitude as he always spoke about implementation of the CHT Accord and for the indigenous people's rights. As the chief guest, Dr. Gauhar Rizvi, advisor on international affairs to the prime minister, has also indicated that very soon CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act will be amended for settlement of land disputes in CHT.

The government claimed that by handing over of tourism department, a total of 29 departments/subjects out of 33 subjects have been handed over to the Hill District Councils for far. However, the PCJSS, a signatory of the CHT Accord, said that government's claiming for handing over of 29 departments/subjects was misleading and also untrue. It is alleged that transfers of some offices/works of earlier transferred subjects/departments were counted as a separate subject or department. For example, transfer of Ramgarh Hatchery Farm under Fisheries and Livestock Department and Child Home (Shishu Sadan) under Social Welfare Department in 12 November 2012 were

counted as separate department.

On the other hand, the Government does not take any initiative in transferring the most crucial subjects, such as, Law & Order of the districts, Land & Land Management, Police (local), Forest, Environment, Preservation of Statistics on Birth & Death, etc. In contrast to the question of transferring the major important subjects, the recent defective transfer of powers and functions in a pompous manner spells to have been nothing but an eye-wash on the part of the government.

Coordinator of International CHT Commission attacked in Bandarban

On 25 August 2014, Hana Shams Ahmed, coordinator of International CHT Commission, was attacked by a group of miscreants in Bandarban district of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. The incident took place in the evening near Sakura Resort located beside Chimbuk-Bandarban Road.

It is learnt that Ms. Hana and her friend Nasrin Sultana, a teacher of Jahangirnagar University, were returning from 'Shoilopropat' (a local picnic spot) while the attack took place. They were on vocation in Bandarban. On the day of incident, Hana together with her friend visited to a number of tourist spots in the town before going to 'Shoilopropat' with one of their local friends.

It is reported that a group of 8-10 people stopped their taxi on their way back from Shoilopropat to Bandarban town and physically assaulted both Hana and her friend. The perpetrators fled away as soon as the locals sensed the attack.

The miscreants are said to be activists of Bengali settlers' organisations, namely, Bangalee Chatra Parishad (Bengali Student Council) and Sama Odhikar Andolon (CHT Equal Rights Movement). One of the attackers was identified as H M Samrat, general secretary of Bangalee Chatra Porishad, Bandarban district unit. No case has been filed yet since the attack was made.

It is notable that Bangalee Chatra Porishad and Sama Odhikar Andolon called for a 4-day strike on 5-8 July 2014, while the CHT Commission was on an official visit in the CHT. The Commission's convoy was attacked by a group of miscreants during their visit in Rangamati. Consequently, in the face of violent protest, the Commission cancelled their planned visit to Bandarban.

Dead body of an indigenous woman recovered in Rangamati

On 20 August 2014, dead body of an Indigenous woman named Bishakha Chakma was found in Kaptai Lake adjacent to a government tourist motel in Rangamati Sadar. Police and locals suspected that Bishakha Chakma was died allegedly from a pre-planned killing after rape. Police, however, are yet to trace and take actions against the alleged killer(s) of Bishakha.

It is learnt that on 20 August locals got putrid smell of a corpse from the lake water at Dewan adjacent to a government tourist motel named Parjatan Holiday Complex. After hours of searching, they found a corpse floating on the lake. Then they informed the police. Later, a group of police from Kotwali police station led by Officer-in-Charge (OC) Sohel Imtiaz reached the spot and rescued the corpse.

After the corpse was rescued, local people and relatives identified the dead body of

Bishakha Chakma alias Bideshi, 30, daughter of Sushil Chakma, also mother of a young child. She was an inhabitant of Dewan Para in Rangamati town. Deceased used to work as a salesperson for a local textile store named 'Tantuj Textile' in Rangamati town. Bishakha's father Sushil Chakma & brother Intu Chakma informed that Bishakha disappeared on 14 August at midnight and remained missing up until her dead body was recovered.

Sohel Imtiaz, OC of Kotwali police station said, miscreants killed Bishakha Chakma in a planned way and then thrown her dead body into the lake using plastic sacks with stones so that it doesn't float on water. She might have been raped before she was killed.

Police has not been able to uncover the mystery of Bishakha Chakma's killing and take action against the perpetrators. No case has been filed in this regard.

Update on case of Gulshakhali-Bogachatar communal attack: CID submit investigation report to the court

After investigation for one year, On 26 August 2014, Md. Enamul Haque Khan, CID police inspector of Rangamati district, submitted its investigation report on Gulshakhali-Bogachatar communal attack to the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Rangamati district. In its investigation, CID found 13 persons involved with this attack, and recommended acquittal for five alleged persons who were not involvement with this crime.

On the same day, 26 August 2014, Milan Chakma accepted the report. In the investigation report, among the alleged persons mentioned in the deposition of the case lodged by Milan Chakma, following 13 persons were proved to be involved with this incident:

1. Rafique Uddin member, son of late Ahmad Khalek, Rahmatpur;
2. Md. Kamal Hossain, son of late Adam Ali, Rangipara;
3. Md. Solayoman, son of Md. Samsuddin, Thekapara;
4. Mohan Mian, son of late Edan Lian. Rangipara;
5. Md. Kamal, son of late Samshul Haque, Thekapara;
6. Jasim Uddin, son of Ahmad Malek, Rangipara;
7. Mr. Marfat Ali, son of Atab Uddin, Mohammadpur;
8. Md. Ramzan Ali, son of late Nabi Hossain, Rahmatpur;
9. Md. Liyakat Ali, son of late Saheb Ali, Rangipara.
10. Abu Taher, son of late Noor Mohammad, Rangipara;
11. Md. Noor Hossain, son of Abu Taher, Rangipara;
12. Md. Salauddin, son of late Nurul Islam Soudagor, Thekapara;
13. Md. Abdul Wadud, son of Mohan Mian Jamidar, Rangipara.

The CID police inspector of Rangamati district urged the Chief Judicial Magistrate to issue warrant order against above-mentioned persons for arrest and accordingly the court issued warrant order against them. However, arrest of any accused person is yet to be made so far.

It is mentionable that as the court ordered for inquiry, CID started working on the case earlier this year. On 20 March 2013, CID took statements of the complainant and other 6 witnesses about the Gulshakhali-Bogachatar communal attack. The statements of the complainant and witnesses were taken by police inspector of CID office, Md. Enamul Hoque Khan, at Chiitagong office, which is situated about 90 km away from complainant's residence. Earlier, on 3 March 2014, Md. Enamul Hoque Khan issued a notice to the complainant and witnesses to be present at CID office in Chittagong for their statement. Accordingly, Milan Chakma, along with six witnesses, went to the Chittagong CID office.

Md. Enamul Hoque Khan took statement from the complainant and each of the witnesses separately for 4 hours. The police inspector wanted to know from complainant and witnesses about how the incident had happened, whose houses were burnt, who conducted the attack, names of the attackers, etc.

It is also mentionable that on 16 February 2011, police and BGB recovered the dead body of Saber Ali from Rangji Para area who was suffering from epilepsy. Following the incident, Bengali settlers intentionally started to accuse local indigenous Jumma people for the death of Md. Saber, and eventually to spread communal tension against Indigenous peoples. Consequently, on 17 February 2011 at around 5.30 pm, Bengali settlers numbering 200-250 from settler inhabited areas of Gulshakhali union under Longadu upazila of Rangamati district, allegedly in collaboration with Border Guard of Bangladesh (BGB, formerly Bangladesh Rifles- BDR) made a massive communal attack on Jumma villages of Gulshakhali and Rangji Para areas. At least 23 houses of Jumma villagers including one BRAC school and 3 tobacco ovens were reportedly burnt to ashes in the attack while two Jumma students were seriously injured in another attack made at Tintilya Launchghat in Longadu at noon. Huge valuables were looted by Bengali settlers before setting fire on the houses. The names of the villages affected in this incident are Ranjit Para, Rangji Para and Shanti Nagar under Gulshakhali Union and Bogachatar Union in Longadu Upazila.

Following the incident, Mr. Milan Chakma filed a case with Longadu police station on behalf of the victim Jumma villagers on 28 February 2011 accusing Md. Jasim Uddin, the mastermind of the incident, and 17 other Bengali settlers.

After inquiry, police submitted 'Final Report' twice before the court on 6 March 2012 and on 29 January 2013. In both reports, police stated that the commitment of the communal incident had been found to be true, but involvement of any person of the 18 accused, specifically identified in the written complaint, or any other person had not been found to be true. In that circumstance, rejecting the Final Report of the police and filing a disagreement petition, Milan Chakma, appealed to the court for CID inquiry of the incident of the case twice. Eventually, hearing the petition of the complainant in last time on 21 August 2013, Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Tahmina Afroz Chowdhury ordered for CID inquiry of the incident of the case.

Indigenous Tripura villagers attacked again at Mirsarai in Chittagong district

Three Indigenous Tripura villagers including a woman were seriously injured in an attack committed by land grabbers in three separate incidents on 14, 16 and 17 August 2014 at Koila Barapara of Kerethat Union in Mirsarai Upazila of Chittagong district. The attacks were made allegedly to evict Indigenous people from their land.

It is learnt that on 14 August 2014, Md. Zakir Hossain, 50, son of Mohammad Bojler Rahman, of Koila Barapara, seriously assaulted Hiran Kuman Tripura, 28, son of Samacharan Tripura, of the same village in his shop with a bamboo club. The incident occurred because of a minor argument between Hiran Kumar and Zakir Hossain regarding football-playing tricks.

After that on 16 August 2014 at 4:00 pm, as Paklati Tripura, 50, went to Md. Zakir Hossain's shop, Md. Zakir Hossain randomly beat her with one of his shoes and pushed her down from the top of a hill. Two days earlier Paklati Tripura borrowed a sum of BDT 1,000 from Zakir Hossain for the treatment of her daughter who had been suffering from

epilepsy. On 16 August, the incident was occurred, Zakir detained Paklati's son Monoram Tripura at his shop and demanded for BDT 5,000 instead of the borrowed amount of BDT 1,000. Monoram Tripura somehow managed to escape from there and informed his mother about the incident. Paklati then rushed to Zakir and requested to borrow for some more days to repay the money. After that Zakir rebuked her with coarse language, pulled her out of the shop, beat with one of his shoes and pushed her from the hilltop. Paklati survived serious injury in different parts of her body. Even though some other Indigenous villagers eyewitnesses the incident, they remained silent being fearful about getting victimized similarly by the same miscreant. Paklati was then taken to the hospital.

On 17 August 2014, Md. Zakir Hossain's son Md. Shipan, 30, assaulted Ratan Kumar Tripura, 35, son of Hederam Tripura, in quite a similar way. On that day Ratan went to Md. Shipan's shop to collect his daily work wages from Shipan. Instead of paying his daily wages, Shipan asked Ratan to pay for the goods Ratan bought from Shipan's shop on credit. Then they involved into some minor arguments and at some point Md. Shipan assaulted Ratan with a stick and broke his left arm.

It is alleged by the locals that the all the attacks made upon Indigenous villagers of Koila Boropara were connected to land grabbing. Proper remedy was sought from the Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Md. Ashraf Hossain, through a written complaint by Indigenous peoples. But no action was undertaken by the upazila administration up to this writing. Instead the land grabbers have continuously been threatening the Tripura villagers. As a result, the local Indigenous peoples have been passing their days in constant fear and insecurity.

It is learnt that Md. Zakir Hossain is backed by influential Awami League leader, Md. Mohiuddin, who is a member of Ward No. 6 of Karethat union of Mirsarai Upazila, and also the president of the same ward unit of Awami League. He has been the member of that union for 25 years. No one even dares to contest against him in the elections. It is alleged that Md. Mohiuddin remains always behind the scene, and get all the mischiefs done by his brother in law Md. Zakir Hossain and fellows. Md. Zakir Hossain and his fellows have been oppressing local Indigenous Tripura people for quite a while. There are also allegations of land grabbing against the same miscreants. Nevertheless, they have always enjoyed impunity for their misdeeds.

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