



# ASIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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## BANGLADESH: IPs MASSACRED FOR LAND GRAB



*Buddha statues burnt at Gangaram Doar on 19 February 2010*

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### I. Executive Summary

On 19-20 February 2010, the Bangladesh army personnel and the illegal Bengali settlers under the overall command of Lt Col. Wasim, Commander of the Baghailhat zone Army Camp, launched major communal attacks against the indigenous Jumma peoples in 14 Jumma villages in Baghailhat area of Sajek Union under Rangamati district in Chhittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) of Bangladesh. In these pre-planned attacks that began on the night of 19 February 2010, the illegal plain settlers backed by the Bangladesh army burnt down at least 200 to 300 houses<sup>1</sup> of the indigenous Jummas/Chakmas at Gangaram Doar, Retkaba, Hajachara, Guchchha Gram, Balughat, Simanachhara, Baipaichhara, Suranganala, Kerekkaba, Jarulchhari, Dane Bhaibachhara,

Bame Bhaibachhara, MSF Para and Purbapara villages under Sajek Upazila.<sup>2</sup> In addition, at least seven shops in Ladumani bazaar, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-sponsored village centre at Gangaram Doar village providing assistance to the indigenous villagers, one church and one Buddhist temple have been burnt to ashes in these attacks.<sup>3</sup>

During the entire attack, the illegal plain settlers had the full and direct support of the Bangladesh army. When the settlers torched the Jumma villages, the army opened fire at the Jummas killing at least six Jummas and injuring at least 25 others while many others have been reported missing.

To add insult to injuries, six injured Jumma villagers who got admitted at Baghaichari hospital were shown arrested in connection with the attacks on the Jummas since 19 February 2010.<sup>4</sup>

At least 1,500 indigenous peoples have been displaced so far.<sup>5</sup> The displaced Jummas whose houses have been burnt to ashes have not been provided any relief and rehabilitation. Majority of them are still living in jungles and under the open sky. Most of them have been starving as all their food grains have been destroyed in the fire.

In order to prevent the truth from coming out, curfew has been imposed in the Baghaihat area and remains in place as of 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2010. The Bangladesh army personnel have prevented any independent observer including journalists and human rights activists from visiting the affected areas to hide the truth. On 20 February 2010, two journalists from Bengali dailies - *Samakal* and *Prothom Alo* - who tried to visit the affected areas were attacked by the illegal settlers. The illegal plain settlers barred them from entering the area and burnt down the motorbike of “Samakal” correspondent.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Details of the attacks on the indigenous Jummas

On the afternoon of 19 February 2010, a group of illegal plain settlers went to the Gangaram Doar area and erected pillars on the land of indigenous Jumma villagers for construction of houses. The Jumma villagers protested and resisted the illegal settlers.

At around 8.30 pm hundreds of illegal plain settlers led by leaders of Sama Odhikar Andolon (an organization of the illegal plain settlers), under full protection of the Bangladesh

army from Baghaihat zone of the 8th Bir Bengal, returned to Gangaram Doar area and started to set fire to the houses of Jumma villagers. At least 35 houses including 7 shops, a church and a UNDP-run village centre, in three Jumma villages of Gangaram Doar, Siminachhara and Balughat were burnt down. As the Jumma villagers fled into the jungle to escape the attacks, the illegal plain settlers looted the belongings of the Jummas.<sup>7</sup>

The attacks continued on 20 February 2010. When the Jumma villagers gathered at Gangaram to protest the attack, the illegal plain settlers once again attacked them with sharp weapons, machetes and sticks.

Instead of providing adequate protection to the Jummas the army asked them to leave the area to safety. At around 10.00 am on 20 February 2010 the army started to beat the Jummas as they refused to leave their villages. When the Jummas protested and refused to leave, the army personnel fired indiscriminately at the villagers.

As the army began firing the Jummas began to flee. At this time, the illegal plain settlers set on fire to Jumma houses at Hajachara, Guchchha Gram, Balughat, Simanachhara, Baipaichhara, Suranganala, Kerekkaba, Retkaba, Jarulchhari, Dane Bhaibachhara, Bame Bhaibachhara, MSF Para and Purbapara villages. At least 160 houses were burnt down.



*Burnt Buddha statues at Banani Bana Vihar, Gangaram Doar*

The illegal plain settlers also burnt down Banani Bana Vihar, a Buddhist temple. The monk of the temple, Ven. Purnabas Bhikkhu, somehow managed to flee. Two Buddha statues, one of which was donated by the Thai government, were burnt down along with the temple structure.

### A. Number of indigenous Chakmas killed

The precise number of indigenous peoples killed by the security forces and illegal plain settlers are unknown.



*Laxmi Bijoy Chakma shot dead by Bangladesh Army*



*Laxmi Bijoy Chakma shot dead by Bangladesh Army*

Mr Sudarshan Chakma, Chairman of Baghaichhari Upazila (Sub-District) stated that 10 persons died in the attacks but the dead bodies could not be recovered as the area is under total control of the Bangladesh army. According to Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), eight indigenous persons were killed and 25 were injured in army firings.<sup>8</sup>

Asian Centre for Human Rights has been able to obtain the list of six indigenous Jummas killed in the attacks as given below:

- 1) Ms. Buddha Pudi Chakma (34 years), wife of Mr Uttam Chakma of Baghaihat Gucchagram
- 2) Mr. Laxmi Bijoy Chakma (30 years) of Golakmachara
- 3) Mr. Liton Chakma (35 years), son of Mr Karunamoy Chakma of Baibachara;
- 4) Mr. Bana Shanti Chakma (28 years) of Gangaram Duar and
- 5) Mr. Nutunjoy Chakma (28) of Golakmachara and
- 6) Mr Debendra Chakma (43 years)<sup>9</sup>

The police confirmed the death of two Jummas namely Buddha Pudi Chakma and Laxmi Bijoy Chakma.<sup>10</sup>

Since the afternoon of 20 February 2010, the army imposed curfew under Section 144 in the Baghaihat area to hide the truth from the outside world. Many of the dead bodies of other deceased could not be recovered.<sup>11</sup> It has been alleged that curfew has been imposed to enable the army personnel and illegal settlers to remove the dead bodies of several indigenous peoples killed in the attacks.

Many of the Jummas have also been reported missing. Some of the missing persons have been identified as:<sup>12</sup>



*Laxmi Bijoy Chakma being carried away for post mortem*



*Wife of deceased Laxmi Bijoy Chakma*

- (1) Rupen Chakma (18 years), son of Bindu Chakma,
- (2) Rupon Chakma (16 years), son of Sneha Kumar Chakma,
- (3) Battya Chakma (18 years)
- (4) Four persons from Gangaram Doar village; and
- (5) Dayal Chakma of Chamini Chara village.



*Children of deceased Ms Buddha Pudi Chakma (Left to right: Sunita Chakma, Jewel Chakma and Runa Chakma)*

### B. Arrest of injured indigenous peoples

A large number of indigenous Jumma peoples have been injured. However, when some of them went for treatment, they were arrested. The following indigenous Jummas who got admitted at Baghaichari hospital were shown arrested in connection with the attacks on indigenous Jumma peoples since 19 February 2010:

- (1) Mr Reben Chakma (17 years) of Gulongmachara village
- (2) Bharat Joti Chakma (22 years) of Hajachara village
- (3) Mr. Dhanasindhu Chakma (30 years), s/o Ranga Lal Chakma of Jagarabil;
- (4) Mr. Nagar Prasad Chakma(50 years), s/o Dharendra Chakma of Bedagichara;
- (5) Mr. Rupayan Chakma (16 years), s/o Pritibindu Chakma of Golakmachara; and
- (6) Mr. Batya Chakma (19) s/o Kanta Mohan Chakma of Tindwajari.

The above arrested persons are presently taking treatment at Baghaichari hospital under police custody. The arrests have been made with the aim to discourage the Jummas from coming to government hospitals, thereby hiding the truth about the actual number of injured or dead.

Several Jummas have been injured in the attacks. Some of them have been identified as<sup>13</sup>:

- 1) Mr Shanta Shil Chakma, Son of (s/o) Mr Dhanaram Chakma of Chaminichara;
- 2) Mr Mrittunjoy Chakma of Jarulchari;



*(Ms Sonali Chakma, wife of missing Mr Rup Shanti Chakma)*

- 3) Mr Amar Jiban Chakma (30 years), s/o Mr Majiban Chakma of B-Block of Bangaltali;
- 4) Nibesh Chakma (35 years) of Chaminichara;
- 5) Dari Chakma (40 years) of Nangalmara;
- 6) Jitendra Chakma (35 years) of Chaminichara;
- 7) Prem Lal Chakma (26 years) of Chaminichara; and
- 8) Mr Sushil Jibon Chakma (32 years), son of Mr Kina Moni Chakma of Chaminichara village.

### C. Destruction of properties

Between 200-300 houses of the Jummas, one Buddhist temple, one church and a UNDP-run centre have been completely burnt down.



*UNDP sponsored health centre burnt to ashes*

ACHR has been able to obtain the list of following persons whose houses and shops have been burnt down on the night of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2010:<sup>14</sup>

**At Gangaram Doar village:**

SI No.	Name	Father's name
1.	Indra Mohan Chakma	Dayal Kishta Chakma
2.	Nila Moy Chakma	Pradeep Chandra Chakma
3.	Lalu Chakma	Dayal Chand Chakma
4.	Tongala Chakma	Raj Mohan Chakma
5.	Suren Bikash Chakma	Unknown
6.	Kala Ketu Chakma	Unknown
7.	Sindu Ram Chakma	Unknown
8.	Nanda Kishor Chakma	Ramani Mohan Chakma
9.	Amar Chakma	Unknown
10.	Ananda Chakma	Unknown
11.	Mintu Chakma	Lalu Chakma
12.	Bilash Chakma	Sindu Ram Chakma
13.	Litol Chakma	Karuna Moy Chakma
14.	Bijoy Kanti Chakma	Subol Chandra Chakma
15.	Nibesh Chakma	Unknown
16.	Binimoy Chakma	Unknown
17.	Rupok Chakma	Baburokujya Chakma
18.	Kanti Chakma	Subol Chandra Chakma

**At Retkaba village**

SI No.	Name	Father's name
1.	Indra Chakma	Nilo Moni Chakma
2.	Mintu Chakma	Dhananjoy Chakma
3.	Rangachela Chakma	Kudukya Chakma
4.	Gurichandra Chakma	Dari Chakma

On the night of 19 February 2009, the Bangladesh army personnel also burnt down at least 7 shops in Ladumani bazaar. The list of owners whose shops have been burnt down is given below:<sup>15</sup>

SI No.	Name	Father's name
1.	Kina Dhan Chakma	Ugra Sen Chakma
2.	Rabindra Lal Chakma	Surendra Chakma
3.	Tantu Moni Chakma	Rabindra Chakma
4.	Prakash Joti Chakma	Shanti Mohan Chakma
5.	Polen Chakma	Gyanendu Chakma
6.	Bharatya Chakma	Samar Singh Chakma
7.	Rabi Joy Chakma	Unknown

**D. The status of the IDPs**

At least 1,500 indigenous Jumma peoples have been internally displaced in the attacks. So far, the authorities have failed to provide any relief and rehabilitation to the displaced Jummas. Most of the displaced Jumma villagers took shelter into the deep forest fearing further attacks. Most of the indigenous victims whose houses have been burnt down have been passing days without food and staying under the open sky in the absence of any help coming from the authorities.



*Internally displaced persons: Without any assistance*

**III. Official response: Hide the truth**

Though attacks have been pre-meditated and engineered by the Bangladesh army in order to help the illegal plain settlers to grab the lands of the indigenous Jummas, there has been attempt to portray the massacre of the indigenous Jumma peoples as a clash between two communities. Not a single illegal settler was either injured or killed – which once again

proves that there was no clash but a premeditated massacre of indigenous peoples.

The Bangladesh army personnel instead blamed indigenous Jumma people. On 20 February 2010, Khagrachari Regional Commander General M. M. Saleheen stated “The army fired three blank shots in self defense after the terrorists had fired on them. I do not know who fired the rest of the shots.”<sup>16</sup> The Bangladesh army has further ridiculously claimed that indigenous peoples set fire to their own houses.<sup>17</sup>

This is an absolute lie considering that the only armed persons present in the villages at the time of the attacks were the members of the military and the police. Jumma eyewitnesses have claimed that the Bangladesh army personnel entered the Jumma villages firing on the unarmed villagers while the illegal plain settlers set the Jumma peoples’ houses on fire.<sup>18</sup>



*Minister for CHTs Affairs, Dipankar Talukdar visiting the affected areas*

Since 20 February 2010, curfew has been imposed in the affected areas to prevent the truth from coming out. The Bangladesh army personnel have cordoned off the entire affected areas. They have erected barricades and prevented any independent observer including human rights activists and journalists from visiting the affected areas. On 20 February 2010, two journalists from *Samakal* and *Prothom Alo* who tried to visit the affected areas were attacked. The settlers barred them from entering the area and burnt down the motorbike of the *Samakal* correspondent.<sup>19</sup>

On 21 February 2010, State Minister of the Ministry of CHT Affairs Dipankar Talukdar while visiting Baghahat area assured the Jummas that action would be taken against those responsible for the attacks within the next seven days. However, interestingly he claimed that there were some

criminals in both the indigenous and Bengali communities who were responsible for the attacks.<sup>20</sup>

#### IV. Background of the attacks on indigenous peoples in Sajek

The attack is fallout of the conspiracy of the Bangladesh Army to settle illegal plain settlers on the lands of the indigenous Jumma people. Since 2005, Bangladesh army personnel have been trying to settle down the illegal Bengali settler families along the roadsides of Sajek road from Baghaichari to Gangaram Mukh. The indigenous Jumma villagers have been protesting against this illegal settlement programme.<sup>21</sup>

However, in 2008 the Bengali settlers with the direct support of the army illegally constructed some houses at Gangaram area on the land owned by Jumma villagers.

On 20 April 2008, hundreds of illegal Bengali settlers backed by Bangladesh army launched pre-planned attacks on seven indigenous Jumma villages namely Nursery Para, Baibachara, Purba Para, Nangal Mura, Retkaba, Simana para and Gangaram Mukh under Sajek Union under Baghaichari upazila (sub-district). Besides a church and two UNICEF-run schools, at least 77 houses of indigenous Jumma peoples were burnt while four indigenous villagers were wounded and hundreds of indigenous Jummas were internally displaced. And, no one has been held accountable for these atrocities.<sup>22</sup>

Since the beginning of January 2010, illegal plain settlers with the support of Bangladesh army personnel posted at Baghahat zone under Rangamati district resumed expansion of their illegal settlement into the villages of the Chakma people. A number of houses have already been erected by the illegal plain settlers by forcibly occupying Jumma villagers’ lands.

The Jumma villagers under the banner of *Sajek Bhumi Rakkha Committee* (Sajek Land Rights Protection Committee) submitted a memorandum to the Baghaichhari Upazila Nirbahi Officer on 10 January 2010 with an ultimatum of 16 January 2010 to return them their lands. As the deadline expired without any fruitful result on 16 January 2010, Jumma villagers started their agitation and started to boycott Baghahat market from 18 January 2010.

On the night of 19 February 2010, the Bangladesh Army personnel and the security forces started burning down the indigenous peoples villages to expand settlement of illegal plain settlers.

## V. Conclusion and recommendations

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who recently received Indira Gandhi Peace Prize, among others for promoting “peace by resolving a long standing insurgency (problem) in Bangladesh by concluding the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord”,<sup>23</sup> has maintained studied silence against the pre-meditated massacre of indigenous Jumma peoples in Sajek.

International community must note that on 20 April 2008 too hundreds of illegal plain settlers backed by Bangladesh army launched pre-planned attacks on seven indigenous Jumma villages namely Nursery Para, Baibachara, Purba Para, Nangal Mura, Retkaba, Simana para and Gangaram Mukh under Sajek Union under Baghaichari upazila (sub-district). Then Chief of Army Staff, General Moeen U Ahmed visited the affected areas on 29 April 2008. Both the settlers, who attacked the indigenous Jummas in order to capture their lands, and indigenous Jummas, who were made paupers overnight, were granted same amount of relief. No assessment of the damages was done to determine the compensation package.<sup>24</sup>

None of these attacks against indigenous peoples have been investigated. This has created an impression that indigenous Jumma peoples can be killed with impunity and this indeed encourages further violence against indigenous peoples. The communal policy of the government of Bangladesh and its officials down to the lowest level, is perpetuating gross human rights violations of indigenous Jumma peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

The massacre of indigenous Jumma peoples at Sajek area from 19 February 2010 once again shows that for indigenous Jumma peoples, the impending challenge is no longer ensuring the return of the appropriated lands that the Land Commission established under the CHTs Accord of 1997 is supposed to return from illegal plain settlers. The challenge before the Jummas is to protect their remaining lands which the illegal settlers under the patronage of the successive governments of Bangladesh have been hell-bent on forcibly occupying. That is the crux of the continued attacks on the indigenous Jumma peoples in Bangladesh even after signing of the CHTs Peace Accord of 1997.

### Recommendations

#### To the European Union:

- Send a team of the Ambassadors of the European Union countries based in Dhaka to the affected areas in Sajek

for on the spot inquiry and raise issues of human rights concern with the government of Bangladesh;

- Provide direct assistance to the victims to enable their resettlement and rehabilitation;
- Adopt a resolution in the EU Parliament condemning the systematic human rights violations of the indigenous Jumma peoples, non-implementation of the CHTs Accord, and call upon the government of Bangladesh to stop all programmes relating to the implantation of illegal plain settlers on the lands of indigenous Jumma peoples in the CHTs;
- Intervene with the government of Bangladesh to immediately release all the Jummas who have been arrested with the Sajek incident; and
- Urge the government of Bangladesh to fully implement the CHTs Accord of 1997.

#### To the United Nations Development Programme

- Condemn the killing of the indigenous Jumma peoples and burning down of the UNDP centre at Gangaram Doar village;
- Provide assistance for rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced Jummas;
- Urge the government of Bangladesh to order a judicial inquiry to be completed within 90 days for establishing accountability for violations of the rights of indigenous peoples at Sajek; and
- Urge the Department of the Peace Keeping Operations to start the process of vetting the Bangladesh army personnel before deployment under the UN Peace Keeping Operations and ensure that human rights violators such as Lt Col Wasim, presently serving as the commander of the Bagaihat Zone army camp, are not deployed for the UN Peace Keeping Operations.

#### To the United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operations

- Start the process of vetting the Bangladesh army personnel before deployment under the UN Peace Keeping Operations and ensure that human rights violators such as Lt Col Wasim, presently serving as the commander of the Bagaihat Zone army camp, are not deployed for the UN Peace Keeping Operations.

#### To the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

- Condemn the recent attacks on the indigenous Jummas by the Bangladesh army and the illegal plain settlers;

- Urge the Government of Bangladesh to extend an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples;
- Urge the government of Bangladesh to order a judicial inquiry to be completed within 90 days into the attacks at Sajek; and
- Urge the government of Bangladesh to fully implement the CHTs Accord.

#### To National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh

- Send a team of NHRC to investigate the attacks on the indigenous peoples in Sajek and take legal actions against the illegal Bengali settlers and army officials who are found guilty in the attacks;
- Direct the government of Bangladesh to immediately ensure proper resettlement and rehabilitation of the persons affected in attacks; and

- Direct the government of Bangladesh to protect the rights of the indigenous peoples.

#### To the Government of Bangladesh:

- Order a judicial inquiry to be completed within 90 days into the killings and destruction of properties at Sajek and prosecute the accused responsible;
- Conduct an assessment of the properties lost and provide proper resettlement and rehabilitation to the victims;
- Terminate “Operation Uttaran” that authorises the military presence and withdraw all the military personnel to the cantonments as provided in the CHTs Accord;
- Stop all programmes relating to the implantation of illegal plain settlers on the lands of indigenous Jumma peoples in the CHTs; and
- Fully implement the CHTs Accord of 1997 within specific time frame.

#### Endnotes:

1. Hills remain tense, The Daily Star, 22 February 2010 available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=127367>
2. Email communication from Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, 21 February 2010; also see “Trouble flares in hills again”, The Daily Star, Bangladesh, 21 February 2010, <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=127234>
3. Asian Centre for Human Rights, “Bangladesh army burns down UN sponsored Chakma villages”, Press Release dated 20 February 2010, available at <http://www.achrweb.org/press/2010/BD01-2010.html>
4. Email circular of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, 22 February 2010
5. Hills remain tense, The Daily Star, 22 February 2010 available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=127367>
6. UPDF rejects army version of Sajek incident, chtnews.com, News No. 37/2010, 21 February 2010
7. Email circular of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, 21 February 2010
8. Trouble flares in hills again, The Daily Star, Bangladesh, 21 February 2010, <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=127234>
9. Ibid
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11. Email communication from Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, 21 February 2010
12. UPDF rejects army version of Sajek incident, chtnews.com, News No. 37/2010, 21 February 2010
13. Email circular of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, 21 February 2010
14. Email circular of the United Peoples’ Democratic Front (UPDF), Bangladesh, 19 February 2010
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16. UPDF rejects army version of Sajek incident, chtnews.com, News No. 37/2010, 21 February 2010
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19. Ibid
20. Email circular of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, 21 February 2010
21. Ibid
22. SAJEK: BURNT TO ASHES by Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network, New Delhi, June 2008
23. Sheikh Hasina Gets Indira Gandhi Peace Prize, The Outlook, 19 November 2009, <http://news.outlookindia.com/item.aspx?669732>
24. SAJEK: BURNT TO ASHES by Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network, New Delhi, June 2008

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