



Indigenous Issues

[The occasional briefing papers of the Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN)]
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EMERGENCY IN BANGLADESH: Mayhem in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

On 11 January 2007, state of emergency was declared in Bangladesh.^[1] Initially, there had been euphoria among the masses as the Caretaker government began to crack its whip on corrupt politicians and curb crimes. But the army-backed Caretaker Government went too far and has become the law unto itself. It has taken over the powers and functions of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. According to a human rights group, Odhikar, 50 persons were killed by the security forces and 95,825 persons were arrested under the Bangladesh Emergency Power Rules of 2007 between 12 January and 12 March 2007.^[2]

The indigenous Jumma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs), who have already been victims of the government's "ethnic cleansing policy", are the worst victims of the state of emergency. The emergency has been used as an excuse to increase military operations and oppressions against the indigenous of Jumma peoples. The security forces have let loose a reign of terror.

i. Political repression

On 9 March 2007, Home Ministry of the Caretaker government banned "indoor politics". In effect, this means that holding discussion on legal aid to the arrested persons in the bedrooms may tantamount to "indoor politics". In CHTs, the joint forces^[3] have been conducting massive military operations on a war footing, arresting, torturing and intimidating indigenous political activists, especially under Section 54 of Bangladesh Criminal Procedure Code which gives unrestricted power to the police to arrest any one without a warrant. Several indigenous political activists have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured, and sent to jails on false charges. The Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), a political organization of the indigenous peoples, in its website has stated that it has not been able to update its website "due to state of emergency". The stamp of emergency on enjoyment of political rights by the indigenous peoples is evident!

The activists of both the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) - two indigenous Jumma political organisations - have been targeted.

The security forces arbitrarily arrested the following activists of PCJSS:-

1. Bikram Marma, President of Kaptai upazila branch of PCJSS arrested from his house at Chandraghona Christian Missionary Hospital area under Rangunia upazila in Chittagong district at the midnight of 4 February 2007;
2. Sai Mong Marma, Organising Secretary of Kaptai upazila branch of PCJSS arrested from his house at Raikhali under Kaptai upazila in Rangamati district at the midnight of 11 February 2007;
3. Balabhadra Chakma alias Pranjal, Vice President of Dighinala upazila branch of PCJSS arrested at Mahajan Para in Khagrachari on 5 March 2007;
4. Manubha Ranjan Chakma, President of Baghaichari upazila branch of PCJSS arrested by the Bangladesh Rifles in Baghaichari upazila in Rangamati district on 5 March 2007;
5. Satyabir Dewan arrested under Kotowali police station of Rangamati District on 18 February 2007;
6. Bimal Kanti Chakma arrested under Kotowali police station of Rangamati District on 18 February 2007;
7. Ranjit Kumar Dewan arrested under Kotowali police station of Rangamati District on 18 February 2007;
8. Udayjoy Chakma arrested under Kotowali police station of Rangamati District on 18 February 2007; and
9. Mayachan Chakma arrested under Kotowali police station of Rangamati District on 18 February 2007.

The following activists of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) were arrested by the army and sent to jail on false charges: -

1. Dotang Chakma alias Dogong of village Uttor Bongol Toli under Baghaichari of Rangamati district was arrested from Machalong Bazaar on 9 February 2007 and sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of Taka 1,000 by a local court;
2. Bipulaksh Chakma was arrested from Padachari village in Rangamati district on 10 February 2007;
3. Kalo Priya Chakma was arrested from Gurgujyachari village in Khagrachari district on the night of 10 March 2006;
4. Milon Kanti Chakma, son of Biddut Kanti Chakma of Borpara village under Panchari Thana in Khagrachari district arrested from Gurgujyachari village under Khagrachari district on the night of the night of 10 March 2007 and was sent to Khagrachari district jail under the Arms Act;
5. Arpan Chakma was arrested in Naniachar under Rangamati district on 21 March 2007 and sent to Rangamati district jail under Arms Act
6. Dixton Chakma was arrested in Naniachar under Rangamati district on 21 March 2007 and sent to Rangamati district jail under Arms Act
7. Shokta Chakma was arrested in Naniachar under Rangamati district on 21 March 2007 and sent to Rangamati district jail under Arms Act;
8. Biddut Chakma was arrested from Bermachari under Lakshnichari Upazilla (sub-district) in Khagrachari district on 28 March 2007; and
9. Bipin Bihari Chakma was arrested from his house at Korollyachari village under Massyochara in Khagrachari district on the night of 31 March 2007 and was sent to Khagrachari jail on false charges.

ii. Killings, torture and destruction of properties of Jummas

The poor and helpless Jumma villagers have been easy prey of the Bangladesh army personnel.

a. Killings and torture

At least two Jumma villagers have been arrested and subsequently killed by the army personnel from Ghilachari camp under Naniachar zone in Rangamati district. The victims were: -

1. Suresh Chakma, aged 45 years, S/o Phedera Chakma, arrested from his house at Choichari village in Rangamati district on 28 February 2007 and died due to torture on 29 February 2007; and
2. Suresh Mohan Chakma, S/o Phedera Chakma of Choichari village, arrested illegally on 3 March 2007 and died due to torture on 7 March 2007

The following innocent Jumma peoples were tortured during military operations: -

1. Jatna Chakma, aged 25 years, S/o Kalingkor Chakma at Moantola village, Rangamati on 2 February 2007;
2. Jibolal Chakma, aged 26 years, S/o Nanda Mohan Chakma at Moantola village on 2 February 2007;
3. Prassanna Kumar Chakma, aged 20 years, S/o Kalachula Chakma at Moantola village on 2 February 2007;
4. Chikkannya Chakma, aged 45 years at Moantola village on 2 February 2007;
5. Rabinoy Chakma, aged 20 years, S/o Chikkannya Chakma at Moantola village on 2 February 2007;
6. Sobinoy Chakma, aged 17 years, S/o Chikkannya Chakma at Moantola village on 2 February 2007

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7. Banshi Mohan Chakma, aged 45 years, S/o Brigu Lal Chakma at Moantala village on 2 February 2007
 8. Ms Milabo Chakma, aged 35 years, W/o Kana Mohan Chakma at Choichari village in Rangamati district on 2 February 2007;
 9. Battya Moni Chakma, aged 45 years, S/o Mon Kumar Chakma at Ghilachari Moddyo Para village in Rangamati district on 4 February 2007;
 10. Badhi Dhan Chakma, aged 45 years, S/o Egannya Chakma of Ghilachari village who was tortured in custody on 8 February 2007;
 11. Bhugulukya Chakma, aged 11 years, S/o Sumati Kumar Chakma at Ghilachari Upor Para village in Rangamati district on 23 February 2007;
 12. Abullya Chakma, aged 25 years, S/o Banshi Mohan Chakma at Baamay village, Rangamati district on 23 February 2007;
 13. Toronesh Chakma, aged 27 years, S/o Jotish Chakma at Baamay Bogachari village in Rangamati district on 23 February 2007;
 14. Gulakana Chakma, aged 18 years, S/o Gopal Chakma of Larma Para village in Naniachar on 27 February 2007; and
 15. Kedera Chakma, aged 25 years, S/o Gopal Chakma of Larma Para village in Naniachar on 27 February 2007;

b. Destruction of properties

Properties of many Jummas were destroyed but no compensation has been paid to the victims. During a military operation at Ghilachari para village in Rangamati district on 2 February 2007, army personnel from Ghilachari camp under Naniachar zone in Rangamati district burnt down seven Jhum huts belonging to the following Jummas: -

1. Shoilendu Chakma, aged 27 years, S/o Gyana Bikash Chakma,

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2. Mongol Buddha Chakma, 28 years, S/o Karuna Mohan Chakma,
 3. Hulu Chakma, 26 years, S/o Lakshmi Dhar Chakma,
 4. Moni Chakma, 23 years, S/o Lakshmi Dhar Chakma;
 5. Medela Chakma, 38 years, S/o Soyo Mohan Chakma,
 6. Joy Dhan Chakma, 68, S/o late Basanta Chakma;
 7. Lakshmi Dhar Chakma, 45 years, S/o Kiron Dhan Chakma

c. Imprisonment on false charges

A large number of innocent Jumma civilians have been sent to jails on false charges. The victims included: -

1. Balaram Chakma, aged 60 years, S/o Bokkya Chakma, arrested from his house at Hazachari village Khagrachari district on 21 February 2007 and sent to Khagrachari jail;
2. Bijoy Mohan Chakma, aged 25 years, S/o Kina Ram Chakma, arrested from his house at Hazachari village Khagrachari district on 21 February 2007 and sent to Khagrachari jail
3. Bimal Chakma, aged 25 years, S/o Kala Dhan Chakma, arrested from his house at Hazachari village Khagrachari district on 21 February 2007 and sent to Khagrachari jail;
4. Ono Bikash Chakma, aged 28 years, S/o Karuna Mohan Chakma, arrested from his house at Ghilachari Para village in Rangamati district on 23 February 2007 and sent to Rangamati jail;
5. Panchanon Chakma, aged 52 years, chairman of Naniachar Union Parishad, who was arrested on 3 March 2007 and sent to Rangamati jail;
6. Bimal Kanti Chakma, aged 35 years, member of No. 7 Ward of Dullytoli Union Parishad, arrested on 22 March 2007 and sent to Khagrachari jail.

7. Roti Mohan Chakma, aged 36 years, member of No.6 Ward of Dullyatoli Union Parishad, arrested on 22 March 2007 and sent to Khagrachari jail.

8. Ram Krishna Chakma, 34 years, resident of Kajamachara village, arrested on 22 March 2007 and sent to Khagrachari jail.

9. Anil Karbari, S/o Dhamajjya Chakma of Kajamachara village in Dullyatoli, arrested on 22 March 2007 and sent to Khagrachari jail.

iii. Repression against indigenous peoples' NGOs

Even the indigenous people's civil society organizations have not been spared. On 27 February 2007, District Social Welfare Department of Khagrachari district issued a notice to Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha (TUS), a non-governmental organisation run by indigenous peoples to stop all its activities on the charges that it is involved in "anti-state and anti-people's interest activities". The notice was issued under sub-section 2 (Ma) of the Emergency Power Rules 2007. Sub-section 2 (Ma) says that it may be applicable for "political party, trade union, club or samity (society)". The authorities did not specify what "anti-state and anti-people's interest activities" have been committed by the TUS. Nor has the TUS representatives were called for any explanation before the notice was issued.

iv. Continued forcible evictions

Forcible evictions of the indigenous Jumma peoples continue unabated. In a latest case of forcible eviction of indigenous peoples from their land, the Bangladesh army has asked the villagers of more than 62 villages under Sualok and Tangkabati Unions in Bandarban Hill District, predominantly inhabited by Mro indigenous communities, to vacate the villages. The Bangladesh army had earlier filed an eviction suit in the court of Deputy Commissioner of Bandarban for eviction of the villagers of these 62 villages on 16 November 2006 but the Deputy Commissioner's Court is yet to pass any eviction order. Before the Deputy Commissioner could decide on the issue, in order to force the Mros, Mr Ranglai Mro, a prominent leader of the Mros, was arrested from his residence in Bandarban on 23 February 2007 on the false charges of possessing illegal arms and grabbing of land. He had to be

admitted in the Chittagong Medical College hospital with injuries. No one was given access to Mr Ranglai Mro and the NGOs are being denied access to the villages which were facing imminent threat of forcible eviction.

v. No religious freedom

Religious freedom is severely restricted in the CHTs. On 10 January 2007 at around 10 pm, a group of army personnel from Lakshimichari zone in Khagrachari district reportedly harassed a Buddhist monk, Rev. Sharadhatissyo Bhikkhu, the chief priest of Aryo Mitra Bouddha Vihara in Lakshmirchari. The soldiers surrounded the temple and interrogated the monk about another Buddhist monk, Rev. Nanda Bhikku, who had earlier in the day delivered a sermon during a religious ceremony conducted at the temple.^[4]

Sadly, international community has so far remained a mute witness to the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh. This only strengthens military interventions in South Asia or elsewhere. If international community fails to make strong interventions, the situation will further deteriorate.

ENDNOTES:

[1]. Emergency declared; Iajuddin quits as chief adviser, The Daily Star, Bangladesh, 12 January 2007

[2]. '50 killed by law enforcers during emergency', The Daily Star, 14 March 2007, <http://www.thedailystar.net/2007/03/14/d703140629103.htm>

[3]. Joint forces consist of Bangladesh army, police and other para-military forces

[4]. Army harass Buddhist monk in Lakshmirchari, CHT NEWS NO. 12/2007, Human Rights Monitoring Cell of United Peoples' Democratic Front, 18 January 2007