

Report on Massive communal attack on Jumma villages by military forces and Bengali settlers in Baghahat and Khagrachari

1. Date and location of the incident

On 19-20 February 2010 massive communal attack on Jumma indigenous villages was made by military forces and Bengali settlers at Baghahat area of Sajek union under Baghaichari upazila in Rangamati district.

The affected villages are Hajachara, Guchchha Gram, Balughat, Simanachhara, Baipaichhara, Suranganala, Kerekka Retkaba, Jarulchhari, Dane Bhaibachhara, Bame Bhaibachhara, MSF Para and Purbapara villages. It is learnt that around 450 houses of Jumma villagers including Buddhist temple and church were completely burnt into ashes.

On 23 February 2010, fresh communal attack was made on Jumma indigenous -inhabited localities in Khagrachari municipality under Khagrachari district by Bengali settlers with the direct help of Bangladesh army and other security forces.

The affected villages are: Mahajan Para, Madhupur, Govt High School Staff Quarter area, Satbaiya Para and Golabari area.

2. Victims

On 19-24 February 2010 massive communal attack on indigenous Jumma peoples was made by Bengali settlers with the direct support of security forces at Baghahat area of Sajek union of Baghaichari upazila (sub-district) under Rangamati district and Khagrachari municipality under Khagrachari district in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region, south-eastern part of Bangladesh. More than five hundred houses of indigenous Jumma villagers were completely burnt to ashes.

Two indigenous Jumma villagers were shot death by military forces. They were identified as-

- 1) Ms. Buddhabati Chakma (34) w/o Uttam Chakma of Baghahat Gucchagram;
- 2) Mr. Laxmi Bijoy Chakma (30) s/o unknown of Golakmachara;

Indigenous Jumma villagers claimed that two villagers remain still missing.

- 1) Mr. Rupam Chakma (22) s/o Sneha Kumar Chakma of Golakmachara;
- 2) Mr. Takkula Chakma (17) s/o Chandra Kumar Chakma of Nangalmara village and
- 3) Mr. Rupshanti Chakma s/o Briddha Dan Chakma of Gangaram Duar.

At least 5000 indigenous Jumma villagers belonging to the Chakma, the Marma and the Tripura ethnic groups (major groups out of 11 indigenous Jumma ethnic communities in CHT) were victimised and affected.

3. What happened

Bangladesh military forces undertook plan to settle down the infiltrated 10,000 Bengali families along the roadsides of Sajek road from Baghaichari to Gangaram Mukh in 2005. It is also mentionable that thousands of indigenous Jumma families have been living in this area for decades long. Hence, Jumma villagers of these areas have been protesting against this illegal settlement programme. Despite the protesting, in 2008 Bengali settlers illegally constructed some houses at Gangaram area on the land owned by Jumma indigenous villagers. At a stage on 20 April 2008 the Bengali settlers with the direct support of army of Baghahat zone attacked on the 7 villages of indigenous Jumma peoples and at least 76 houses of indigenous villagers were completely burnt to ashes.

Again, since starting of January 2010, Bengali settlers with the support of Baghahat army zone resumed expansion of their settlement in Sajek area under Baghaichhari upazila in Rangamati district. A number of houses have already been erected by the Bengali settlers occupying Jumma villagers' land.

The villagers, under the banner of Sajek Bhumi Rakkha Committee, submitted a memorandum to the Baghaichhari UNO 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, Jumma villagers started their agitation and started to boycott Baghahat market from 18 January 2010. On the other, on 25 January 2010 the PCJSS sent a letter to the Home Minister with copy to State Minister of CHT Affairs Ministry and other concerned government authorities demanding to stop settlement programme and to withdraw Bengali settlers from Baghahat area. However, government did not take any measure in this regard.

On 19 February 2010 afternoon a group Bengali settlers went to the Gangaran Duar area and put pillars on the land of indigenous Jumma villagers for construction of house there. At that time, the Jumma villagers protested and opposed the Bengali settlers.

Again at night around 8.30 pm hundreds of Bengali settlers led by leaders of so-called Sama Odhikar Andolon under full protection by a group of army from Baghahat zone of 8 Bir Bengal gathered at Gangaram Duar area and started to set fire on the houses of Jumma villages. At that time, at least 35 houses including 7 shops, a church and a UNDP-run village centre, in three Jumma villages of Gangaram Duar, Chaminichara and Baluchara were burnt down. Jumma villagers alleged that Bengali settlers also looted the valuables while they were burning the houses. The villagers fled into the jungle when the attack took place.

After the first attack, the villagers returned to their villages the next morning and gathered in Gangaram to protest it. The Bengali settlers returned in the morning on 20 February 2010 equipped with sharp weapons, machetes and sticks.

Further, at around 10.00 am on 20 February 2010 tension mounted throughout the area while the army and Bengali settlers ordered the Jumma villagers to leave the area, but they refused to comply. At around 10.00 am the army started to beat the Jumma indiscriminately. One Jumma villager chopped an army named Sergeant Rezaul Karim while beating him brutally and then the army fired leaving him spot dead. Following this, the army opened fire into the Jumma villagers indiscriminately without any sort of provocation, leaving at least 8 dead and 25 wounded. Only two dead bodies have found where other six are still missing.

Since the start of firing, Bengali settlers with the help of army set fire on Jumma houses at Hajachara, Guchchha Gram, Balughat, Simanachhara, Baipaichhara, Suranganala, Kerekkaba Retkaba, Jarulchhari, Dane Bhaibachhara, Bame Bhaibachhara, MSF Para and Purbapara villages. Bengali settlers also burnt Banani Bana Vihar, a Buddhist temple. The monk of the vihara Ven. Purnabas Bhikkhu, fled the temple without taking meal. One statue of Buddha was looted and another one which was given by Thai government was looted. As they continued the arson attacks, the indigenous community began resisting them. During this resistance, six indigenous persons were injured.

Two indigenous Jumma villagers were shot death by military forces. Indigenous Jumma villagers claimed that two villagers remain still missing.

On 20 February 2010 afternoon the army imposed section 144 in the area to prevent Jumma villagers from taking out protest demonstrations.

These communal attack destroyed 434 houses of indigenous Jumma villagers including two Buddhist temple, one Church, two schools run by BRAC (a national NGO), two para kendra (village center) of UNICEF. Two indigenous Jumma villagers were shot death in this arson attack. The government officials have confirmed their name as Ms. Buddhapudi Chakma (45) and Mr. Laxmi Bijoy Chakma (35). But

according to the local Jumma peoples, six have still been missing. About 25 indigenous Jumma villagers were injured.

Thousands of indigenous people fled away from their homes and went hiding in forests fearing more attacks. They were reportedly living in a critical condition under open sky and without food and drinking water and medical facilities. In order to prevent the truth from coming out, curfew has been imposed in the Baghaihat area. The Bangladesh army personnel have prevented any independent observer including journalists and human rights activists from visiting the affected areas to hide the truth.

The communal attack on indigenous Jumma villagers continued spreading in different areas of CHT including Khagrachari municipality on 23 February. 61 houses of indigenous people were burnt down in Khagrachari district town alone and dozens of indigenous people were injured in a series of arson attacks in other areas.

4. Perpetrators

The Bangladesh Army and illegal Bengali settlers were involved in these incidents. The main reason of massacres and arsonings was the policy of Bengali settlement and militarization in the region. The following army commanders of Baghaihat army zone of 14 Bengali Regiment of Bangladesh military forces led the Baghaihat attack-

- (1) Lt. Colonel Wasim, zone commander of Baghaihat Army zone
- (2) Major Julfiqur, assistant zone commander of Baghaihat zone
- (3) Mr. A H M Humayun Kabir, Upazila Executive Officer of Baghaichari upazila

The 21 Bengali settlers were identified as main perpetrators of Baghaihat attack. Among them, Farid Soudagor of Baghaihat Chowdhury Para, Dr. Nazim (40) of Segun Bagan and Abdul Hai (45) of Gangaram Duar led the attack.

On the other hand, 21 Bengali settlers were identified as main perpetrators of Khagrachari attack. Among them, Mr. Jamal (40) of Kalabagan village, Abdul Rab alias Raja Commissioner (40) of Islampur and Md. Kasem alias Machhya Kasem (45) led the attack.

5. Reaction

Massive reaction against the heinous attack sparked world-wide. In CHT, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), Hill Students Council, Hill Women's Federation, Parbatya Chattagram Mahila Samiti, community based organisation, civil society group, Sajek Land Protection Committee, Sajek Nari Samaj brought out procession in CHT, Dhaka and Chittagong.

At national level, various political parties, human rights organisations, citizens groups, youth and student organisations, media groups also raised voice against the heinous attack. On the other, UN Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon, European Union, United Kingdom, Amnesty International, Survival International, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Jumma Net etc also condemned the attack. International Jumma community organised protest rally in New York, London, Tokyo, Seoul, Delhi, Paris, California, Kolkata etc.

6. Action taken by State authorities

On 20 February 2010 State Minister for CHT Affairs Mr. Dipankar Talukder visited Baghaihat area and assured the indigenous people that action would be taken against those responsible for the attack within the next seven days. But no action was taken.

Again, on 6 March 2010 parliamentary standing committee on CHT Affairs Ministry led by Mohammad Shah Alam MP visited affected areas of Baghaihat and Khagrachari. The committee members assured the arson victims to ensure a proper probe into the recent spate of violence and exemplary punishment to the culprits. Except leap service, action was not taken against the culprit.

On the other, Lt. Colonel Wasim, zone commander of Baghahat zone was transferred from Baghahat zone to Ruma cantonment in Bandarban Hill district within CHT while Mr. A H M Humayun Kabir, Upazila Executive Officer of Baghaichari upazila was closed from Baghaichari upazila.

On 22 February 2010 Uttam Kumar Chakma, husband of killed Buddhapudi Chakma lodged a case charging arson, looting and killing against 26 Bengali settlers with Baghaichari police station. But no perpetrator was arrested so far. On the contrary, Md. Abul Hossain, a soldier of 14 Bengali Regiment of Baghahat zone (army no. 4501670) filed a false case against 400/500 Jumma villagers including Liton Chakma (24), Batya Chakma (19), Rupen Chakma (16) and Debendra Chakma (50).

On the other, Karunamoy Chakma, a villager of Mahajan Para of Khagrachari municipality filed a case (GR no. 09/16 dated 24 February 2010) against 5/6 thousand Bengali settlers with Khagrachari police station. On the other hand, Mr. Dulal, an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of Khagrachari police station also lodged a case (GR no. 11/18 dated 24 February 2010) against 8/10 thousand of Jumma villagers and Bengali settlers including 60 arrested persons (34 indigenous Jummas and 26 Bengali settlers). In addition, a Bengali settler named Hussain Ahmed Sarkar alias Sultan also filed a case against 3/5 thousand unknown Jumma villagers including 34 Jummas whose name were mentioned.

Processions have been brought by indigenous organizations in Rangamati, Khagrachari and Dhaka protesting against the attack. At 11.00 am on 20 February 2010 PCJSS brought out procession in Rangamati. On the other, Pahari Chatra Parishad (Hill Students Council) also brought out procession at Dhaka University campus in Dhaka.

The human rights organizations, human rights activists, journalists, writers, university teachers have been visited affected village. The team members recommended to the Government to take proper action against the culprits, but no action have been taken yet.

7. Action taken before international bodies:

The international organizations such as the European Commission, Amnesty International, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), CHT International Commission has sent concern letter to the Bangladesh Government on the attacks. Further those international organizations demanded for an impartial investigation including bringing justice the perpetrators. But no action has been taken yet.

8. Key issues that need immediate attention.

This type of communal attack by the security forces and illegal settlers in CHT is not new. They committed more than dozens of massacre on indigenous Jumma people before signing the CHT Accord. Due to non-implementation of CHT Accord, massive communal attack and genocides on indigenous Jumma peoples continued unabated. Bagahat and Khagrachari were the latest.

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. Indigenous Jumma people did not get justice any of those. Rather, their land were grabbed, they displaced from their ancestral land and at present living inhumanly.

It is also surprising matter that hundreds of thousands of army personnel from Bangladesh Armed Forces are participating in the UN Peace Keeping Mission in many countries of the world. But the same army personnel of Bangladesh Armed Forces have been killing, torturing, raping, kidnapping and grabbing land in CHT. The Bangladesh army, despite its positive reputation in UN peacekeeping missions overseas, is still committing gross human rights violations in the CHT. The killing, rape and torture of Jumma indigenous people remain commonplace, as does the burning of their houses and theft of their land.

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 CHT 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.

With this backdrop, indigenous Jumma peoples, civic groups of Bangladesh and international community made appeal to Government of Bangladesh to take urgent steps to solve CHT problem permanently with the following measures:

- 1) To conduct a prompt, impartial and independent judicial investigation into the killings and arsons attack in Baghahat and Khagrachari;
- 2) To take appropriate action against the perpetrators Bengali settlers and military personnel that responsible for killing and arson attacks.
- 3) Provide proper, adequate and effective compensation for the victims of Jumma indigenous peoples;
- 4) To stop expansion of Bengali settlement and to close Bengali settlers from Baghahat areas and return back land and homesteads occupied by Bengali settlers to Jumma villagers;
- 5) To close Baghahat Army zone soon and to withdraw all temporary camps including de facto military rule 'Operation Uttoran' as per CHT Accord;
- 6) To implement the CHT Accord and to declare roadmap with timeframe for speedy and proper implementation of CHT Accord.
