April 2020: Monthly Report on Human Rights Situation in CHT

The traditional national festival of the indigenous Jumma peoples living in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari hill districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) called Biju, Boisu, Sangrai, Bishu and Bihu was postponed, due to worldwide outbreak of coronavirus, including Bangladesh. Decision for postponement of the most endearing festival was taken to avoid mass gathering and maintaining social distance in the interest of preventing the Covid-19 infection.

Thousands of Jumma wage earners working in different districts of the country including in the Dhaka, Chittagong and Comilla cities found themselves to have landed in extreme financial hardships due to consecutive declaration of general holidays prompted by total closure of factories and industries wherein they work and not receiving salaries and allowances from their respective authorities. As a result, these Jumma working youths of both males and females, while risking their lives, began to return to their respective homes in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari towards mid of April 2020. As the public transport was closed down, they had to continue their journey amid extreme hazard during which also they had to undergo untold harassment and repression of the army and law & order forces at the points having common boundary of three hill districts with the Chittagong district.

As in other parts of the country, CHT is also in no exception to the outbreak of deadly coronavirus and its impact. As a result of lockdown for prevention of the COVID-19 infection, joblessness, food crisis among the working people and panic of coronavirus infection also reigns over the CHT region alongside the country wide plight of sufferings. Even amid such disaster and crisis, military operation of the army, BGB and law & order forces takes no pause in its course. Illegitimate occupation of lands by the influential individuals in the power and the outsider land robbers continues with a great pomp. This April 2020 also witnesses illegal land occupation, arbitrary arrest and detention, meting out atrocities, unwarranted searching of houses and continuation of supporting the armed terrorists by the army at its full swing.

The chronology of atrocities in April 2020 reveals many incidents of human rights abuses that include: 7 innocent persons held, 13 persons tortured and harassed, 8 persons detained for the time being, 13 houses searched with a blank fire for no reason and what appeals the most was the death of a pregnant indigenous woman who was detained for almost an hour in the name of security searching on her way to the hospital. In Bandarban hill district, 5,000 acres of rubber plantation of the indigenous people, were burnt down by the ruling party Awami League leader and outsider land robber gang aimed at grabbing the lands; threatening the indigenous Jumma villagers to vacate their villages; and arresting the innocent villagers under the projected cases filed by the land grabbers in collaboration with the persons sitting in the power and
administration. Continuation of the earlier illegal occupation process of community Jum lands measuring some 4.5 thousand acres was further accelerated amid Covid-19 crisis in last April 2020.

On the other hand, undue incidents that were perpetrated by army-backed Reformist group and so-called UPDF (Democratic) elements include: 3 persons shot death and 4 persons including 1 student kidnapped and a huge amount of money collected as ransom for their release. These armed elements have become stooges of the state functionaries obviously to ruin the movement for preservation of national entity and the entity of birth land of the indigenous Jumma peoples. They have already set up their bases adjacent to the army camps from where they watch and search the motor vehicles and boats. They are taking active part in the military operations along with the army and bring out undue harassment to own Jumma people. They are using the army vehicles to hunt their targeted individuals and after killing them, they return to the army camps. They are kidnapping innocent persons as per their prospective list and realizing huge amount of money as ransom. Thus, even world pandemic COVID-19 is incapable of refraining the army from atrocities, the land grabbers from illegal occupation of lands and the army-back armed stooges of indigenous origin from their heinous perpetrations upon the innocent people to earn for themselves and to satisfy the army at the same time.

7 Arrested, 13 Beaten Up and 13 Houses Searched by the Army-BGB

With a heinous objective of foiling the Jumma peoples’ movement for rights to self-determination, executing the anti-Accord and anti-Jumma-interest blue print, and over all, realizing the ethnic cleansing policy, the state machineries including government, army, intelligence and law & order forces have been hatching one after another unabated conspiracy involving an effort to color the indigenous right activists engaged in movement for implemntation of CHT Accord as terrorists, extortionists and miscreants. As a part of the attempt, right in April, 7 persons were held; 13 people were beaten up; 8 villagers were detained for a couple of hours/days; 13 houses were searched and firing of blank shots intended to create panic; a pregnant Jumma woman died due to having been detained for around 45 minutes by the army at Subalong Camp.

1. On 3 April early in the morning, in a fabricated case filed by Meridian Company in Lama Upazila of Bandarban, police arrested Karbari (village head) Lungkum Mro (48) and another villager Ring Rang Mro (50) from Denkhichhara Noyapara of Saroi Union of Naikhyongchari upazila. This created extreme fear in the area.

2. On 5 April at around 11.00 am, a group of army led by Subedar Farooq and Subedar Alamgir of Subalang Army Camp in Subalang Union of Barkal Upazila under Rangamati Hill District arrested an innocent villager named Shanti Jiban Chakma alias Ajit (45). At that time he was going to see his paddy land in his village home Shilchhari. He was handed over to Barkal police station on 8 April after being detained in Sublang camp for four days violating the laws. He was falsely implicated in the alleged grenade attack in Subalong and sent to jail through the court.
3. From 7 to 10 April, the military forces have conducted the patrolling and searching in the remote villages of Ruilui, Old Lankar, Balu Karbari Adam, Duluchari Para, Kanglak Para, Joleye Para under Sajek Union in Baghaichhari upazila of Rangamati Hill district, while the crisis of corona pandemic and measles outbreak continue. Such military patrolling and search operation created extreme terror and anxiety among the indigenous Jumma peoples in Sajek union.

4. On 9 April in the night, the army and BGB members of Sijok Army Camp and Durchhari Bazar Army Camp, Main Forest BGB (Chintaramchhara) Camp under Maini (Langadu) 21 Bir Sena Zone raided Sijok Golachipa area in Ward No. 3 of Sarboyatuli Union under Baghaichhari Upazila. The houses of five villagers named Binoy Kumar Chakma, Ratnadhar Chakma, Banga Chakma, Sushil Jiban Chakma and Sohel Chakma were searched.

5. On 9 April at the afternoon, a group of army of 23 Bengal led by a Major from Rajasthali camp in Rangamati district cordoned off Subhash Tanchangya's house in Mahabat Para and Hridoy Kumar Tanchanga's house in Maitri Para of Rajasthali upazila headquarters. At that time, the army ransacked the house. When Subhash Tanchangya was not found at home, the army took his passport and some documents.

6. On 10 April, the joint forces of army and BGB patrolled the Sijok Joutha Khamar and Chintaramchhara of Baghaichhari Upzilla under Rangamati district and on 11 April, they patrolled Golachibe of Sijok and Jatin Mohan Para of Tangum.

7. On 11 April at around 1:00 AM the army have intentionally arrested Chairman of Dumdumya Union, Shantiraj Chakma and another villager named Anand Chakma in connection with the shooting death of a UP member, Hemanta Chakma, in Jurachhari upazila of Rangamati Hill district. Though Shantiraj Chakma was released, but Ananda Chakma was sent to jail. Then on 12 April, Hemant Chakma's father Lokbindu Chakma filed a case against 17 people including members of Jana Sanghati Samiti, for falsely implicating them in the murder of Hemanta Chakma.

8. On 11-12 April, a group of army numbering 42 personnel led by a Major from Shilchhari army camp of Jurachhari Upazila of Rangamati district carried out searching at Begenachhari area and another group numbering 40/50 personnel from Gaskatachhara camp of Bilaichhari army zone at Naraichhari area. At that time, army fired 3 blank shots near Narachhari area of Bilaichhari. Hearing the sounds of fire, panic among the people got spread. As a result, the villagers who were already inside their houses under lockdown to combat coronavirus came out and began running here and there.

9. On 13 April from 4:00 AM at the time of Biju, Sangrain, Boisu, Bishu or Bihu – the most endearing traditional festival of the indigenous Jumma people in CHT, an army contingent numbering 150, having divided in several groups, surrounded the areas of North Rajdwip, Middle Rajdwip, Barua Para, Hindu Para and Lichubagan Para including the Rajbari area of Rangamati town and harassed villagers by searching at 6 houses.

10. On 13 April at night, a Jumma youth named Riaj Chakma (18) was detained by Banajogichara army zone near Jurachari Upazila under Rangamati district. After keeping him under army custody for 7 days at Banajogichara army zone violating the laws, he was handed
over to Barkal police station on 20 April entangling with the killing of Hemanta Chakma and sent to jail.

11. On 16 April at 11:00 AM the police and army meted out random baton-charge upon the home-bound Jumma workers from Chittagong & other cities amid crisis of corona pandemic. At this, at 5 workers including the women were injured in this baton-charge.

12. On 18 April as being ordered by camp authority, the Chairman of Jibtali Union Sudatta Chakma (61) and Chairman of Mogban Union Bishwajit Chakma (58) went to appear at the Ice Land army camp of 23 EB of Kaptai Jettighat in Rangamati district. At that time, the army ordered them to appear 4 villagers, namely, Sunil Chakma (55), Umesh Chandra Chakma (48), Sambu Chakma (57) and Swapan Datta Chakma (62) in the camp. In the mean time, the army surrounded the house of Sambhu Chakma at 9:00 am on the same day. However, at that time, he was not at home.

13. On 19 April at 3:00 pm, a group of army of Nanyachar army zone in Nanaichar upazila of Rangamati district arrested Anal Chakma, son of Shandia Chakma of Khulyangpara of Nanyachar upazila, by putting a country-made gun with the arrestee. By surrounding the house, all the members of the family were tied up at that time.

14. On 19 April at around 9:00 pm, a group of army and police led by Warrant Officer Anowar of Jurachhari (Jakshabazar) army camp at Jurachhari Upazila headquarters of Rangamati district apprehended Shanti Ratan Chakma (35) from Bekabekya Panchari of Ward No. 2 of Banjogichhara union of Jurachhari upazila and Padmadhar Chakma (50) from the Labor Para of same Ward. They were released in the evening, after harassing and interrogating them.

15. On 19 April at around 11:30 am, houses were searched at Gimrong Khyang Para No. 6 of Gaindya Union under Rajasthali upazila of Rangamati district and five Khyang villagers, namely, Raju Khiang (20), Shoimong Khyang (22), Sagya Khyang (31), Bijay Khyang (19) and Gya Khyang (43) were beaten and seriously injured by Lt. Col. Touhit Ujjaman (BSC, PSC), Commander of Kaptai zone of 23 E Bengal.

16. On 20 April the army and army-backed Reformist Group jointly patrolled the village of Balukhali, Mogban, Jhagrabil, A Block and B Block in Baghaichhari Upazila of Rangamati district. At that time, the Reformist Group have reportedly seized all mobile phones from the Jumma villagers in the area.

17. On 21 April at around 8.40 am, a group of army led by Warrant Officer Anwar from Jaksha Bazar Army Camp in Jurachhari sadar had surrounded the house of Amardhan Chakma s/o late Hamesh Kumar Chakma at Dhmaipara of Ward No. 2 of Banjogichhara Union under Jurachhari upazila. However, the army members could not enter the house as there was no one there. Amardhan Chakma is the Agriculture Affairs Secretary of Jurachhari Branch of Parbatya Chattagram Juba Samity.

18. On 24 April at around 7:30 AM a pregnant Jumma woman named Ronika Chakma (22) has tragically died before reaching the hospital due to having been detained by the army at Subalong Camp under Barkal upazila for almost an hour without reason on the way to Rangamati District Hospital from Jurachhari Upazila.
19. On 21 and 25 April a massive searching & patrolling has been conducted by army at Kibuk Para of Kuhalong union under Bandarban Sadar upazila and Bengchari area of Sadar union of Rowangchari upazila. During searching & patrolling, on the basis of direction from Bandarban Sadar army zone, the army ordered four local villagers to be present in Rowangchari Lulengpara army camp. Those occurrences have created extreme panic in the mind of local indigenous peoples, in addition to on-going food crisis happening for the lock down to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic.

20. On 24 April at around 7:30 pm, a group of army numbering around 55-60 personnel from the Rangamati Army Zone dividing into five small groups conducted a search operation again in the Rajdwip area of Rangamati District Headquarters. At that time, the army forced three youths named Protul Chakma (25), Rubel Chakma (24) and Pratimay Chakma (34) to walk around the area with them in the rain. This harassment amid coronavirus disaster caused widespread resentment among the people of the area.

21. On 27 April at around 10:00 am, a group of army of local Mitingyachari army camp took Suicha Prue Marma (45), son of late Kyaw Jaw Marma, village-Panchari, an elected member of No. 8 Ward of Raikhali union to the camp having arrested from a nearby place of his house.

22. On 28 April, in a meeting convened with all the Headmen, Karbaries and Chairman-Members of Jurachhari Union under Jurachhari Upazila, Lt. Col. Tanvir Hasan, Zone Commander of Bandukchhari Army Zone, said that in case of any untoward incident in Jurachhari area takes place, brush fire will be made on everyone, nobody will be spared.

23. On 26 April, a group of 42 soldiers led by Major Abdullah, Deputy Commander of Bilachhari Army Zone, patrolled and searched Merangchhara village in Kengrachhari Mouza of Ward No. 5 of Kengrachhari Union in Bilaichhari Upazila. It is learnt that a new camp may be set up at Merangchhara village from which a camp was withdrawn earlier.

24. On 28 & 29 April, army members from Rangamati Army Zone and Kaptai Army Zone patrolled the Deppochari area of Baradam Mouza in Mogban Union of Rangamati Sadar Upazila for two consecutive days. It is learnt that plans are being made to set up a new camp in the place of the withdrawn camp from Pratap Dewan's recorded land in Deppochari area.

25. On 29 April, a group of army numbering 60/70 personnel and 40/50 BGB members led by Major Saleh of Bandukchhari (Banjogichhara) zone of Jurachhari patrolled and conducted search at Madanpara and Baloch Para of Ward No. 8 of Aimachhara Union under Barkal Upazila. On the other hand, a group of BGB numbering 20 members led by Subedar Md. Matiur of Jagannathchhara BGB camp under Barkal BGB zone of 45 battalion went to Madanpara in Aimachhara through riverway and to join the patrol and search operation. It is learnt that a new camp could be set up in the old place of the withdrawn camp.

3 shot dead and 4 kidnapped by army-backed Reformist and UPDF (democratic) armed group

With a mean view to flow the CHT situation to different course, the quarters of the army and ruling party, has kept its ill-design unpause by providing support and assistance to the broker
Reformist group and UPDF (democratic) armed group using them against the PCJSS and by them, being carried out killings, terrorization, extortion and kidnapping in various places in CHT. As a part of the modus operandi, in April 2020, the Reformist and UPDF (democratic) terrorists shot dead 3 people and kidnapped 4 persons including a student and extracted ransom. A few incidents are as follows:

1. On 6 April a tea shopkeeper named Milan Chakma of No. 10 Police Outpost area of Baghaihat of Sajek union under Baghaichari upazila in Rangamati district was allegedly kidnapped by army-backed Reformist terrorists. Miscreants released him by paying ransom on 7 April.

2. On 16 April  army-backed UPDF (democratic) abducted a Chittagong-returnee Jumma worker named Sukhamoy Chakma (27) from Nash Number area bordering to Dighinala upazila of Khagrachari district and Baghaichari upazila of Rangamati district. He was severely beaten. He was released later in lieu of ransom.

3. On 17 April, in the morning, a villager named Aungsaimong Marma (28) was shot dead in front of a tea shop at Kanaijo Para in Noapatang Union under Rowangchhari upazila of Bandarban district. Locals said the killing was taken place as the result of inter-clash between army-backed armed groups.

4. On 23 April a group of army-backed Reformist armed terrorists has allegedly abducted a Jumma student of Chittagong University named Arpan Chakma (24) from his own house at village of Robijoy Para of Bhaibonchara union under Sadar upazila of Khagrachari Hill District. He was released in lieu of ransom on 24 April at noon.

5. On 25 April at 7:45 pm, army-backed UPDF-Democratic and Reformist armed miscreants fired a few rounds of blank shots to intimidate villagers at Madhyam Baghaichhari area of Baghaichhari upazila in Rangamati district.

6. On 28 April at around 9:00 am, an armed group of army-backed Reformist terrorists has reportedly killed two Jummas, namely Babu Chakma alias Rijang (35) and and Sudip Chakma alias Bangallo (40), by gun-shots at Banchara area of Dighinala union of Dighinala upazila under Khagrachari Hill District.

7. On 20 April in the morning, a village doctor named Prakash Chakma (40) was abducted by the army-backed reformist terrorists from Pujgang Karalyachhari area in Panchhuri upazila of Khagrachhari district. Then next day the terrorists released him in exchange for ransom.

Land confiscation in CHT continues unabated amid corona pandemic

Even during the Corona epidemic all over the country including the CHT, unabated eviction of land is going on in the CHT on the initiative of influential outsider land grabbers with the help of the administration. Here are a few facts:

Barkal Upazila: A Bengali settler named Md. Rubel, son of Md. Shah Jamal of Kalabunia village of Barkal Upazila has been hatching conspiracy to occupy paddy land belonging to Chandra Kanta Chakma, son of late Sagar Chandra Chakma, resident of Hedbunia mouza under
Aimachara union in Barkal upazila. On 30 March 2020, when Chandra Kanta Chakma went to his land for making the land ready for planting paddy, Md. Rubel along with his team rushed there and tried to prevent Chandra Kanta to cultivate his land. At that time, Chandra Kanta Chakma showed the documents of his possession. Then the settler went back after arguing in various ways.

Naikhyongchari Upazila: Huge lands measuring some 1000 thousand acres in Naikhyongchhari upazila were illegally occupied by Md. Shafiullah, Chairman Naikhyongchari Upazila Parishad and also President of Naikhyongchari Upazila Awami League Branch on plea of tourism. It has been learnt that the mass of lands is lands for Jum-cultivation and falls under category of mouza lands. The said Awami League leader began to encroach the lands of indigenous people gradually since February 2018.

On plea of tourism, the Jum lands measuring some 1000 acres have been taken away under illegal occupation covering some 100 acres in Naikhyongchari Mouza, 350 acres in Jaruliachari Mouza and 550 acres in Sonaichari Mouza. Jum cultivation in the said lands is practiced as the sole livelihood earning by the indigenous Jumma peoples living of 30 families in Jumkhola Para, 80 families in Kyakrop Para, 110 families in Khyawng Para, 90 families in Lamar Para and 50 families in Singthuai Para. All of the land belonging to the Chak and Marma indigenous communities. The indigenous communities have been living there on Jum cultivation while combating with the fierce wild animals since the ages together.

It is by might of ruling power, the Awami League leader is getting all these legalized without obtaining proper permission from the Bandarban Hill District Council. The areas are being occupied by way of showing intimidation and allurement of employment in the tourism complex. Several hundreds of poor indigenous families are all set to face food crisis for not being able to cultivate their Jumming lands. Besides, they do not have any other alternative earning source for dependable livelihood. It is feared that the livelihood of several hundred indigenous families will be under threat.

On the other side, also in the dense forest of Dochari Union under Naikhyongchari Upazila, the outsider land robbers, having occupied the lands, are cutting trees and bamboos irrespectively and extracting the forest resources away. It is learnt that the land robbers having occupied hundred acres of lands belonging to the indigenous Tripura community are denuding the forest for permanent settlement in their names. They are trafficking all those forest resources outside CHT. The livelihood earning of local indigenous Jumma villagers comprises of bamboos, broom plants and trees including collection of various forest resources and Jum cultivation in the hill slopes. The outsider land robbers are destroying their income sources. This trend is regarded to be a danger signal to the lifestyle and livelihood of the indigenous people and to the very existence of the wild elephants and other species in the forest.

Lama Upazila: In a case filed by the Meridian Agro Limited Company with the intention to evict the Mro village, on 3 April 2020. the police forcefully broke the lockdown fence of Dhenkichhara Noapara village of Sarai Union under Lama Upazilla of Bandarban hill district and arrested 2 Mro villagers namely village Karbari Langkum Mro (48) and another village Ring Rong Mro (50). Once, the Company issued an ultimatum with threatening of arson to abandon the village within one week. In later part of July 2019, the company authority had an
attempt to occupy all lands of the villagers using a gang equipped with sticks, called ‘Lathial Bahini’. During this time, the Mro villagers lodged allegation with various department including the Deputy Commissioner of Bandarban hill district.

The Company occupies more than 100 acres of land with a lease of 20 acres per plot. Thus, the Meridian Company illegally seized 3,000 acres of land. On the other hand, in the government offices, there are some officers and employees who work for the Company as hired professionals.

**Bandarban Upazila:** While the perilous coronavirus (COVID-19) reigns over the whole country, in Bandarban of CHT, the barbarity of land grabbing by MS Golam Kibria alias GK Shamim and Jasim Uddin Montu, the outsider-land robbers and masters of eviction of the indigenous Jumma people has not been put to stop. The goons of Sylvan Wye Resort and Spa Ltd owned by them have allegedly set ablaze more than five thousand rubber plants planted by the working Jumma villagers on 18 April 2020. It says that many mango and banana trees have also been burnt to ashes in this incident.

The goons of GK Shamim and Jasim Uddin Montu had set the rubber plantation and fruit garden in fire with a mean objective to evict the Jumma people and occupy their lands and homesteads illegally. Meanwhile, several hundred acres of lands of the local Jumma people have already been grabbed illegally to construct tourist resorts and luxurious hotels by way of intimidating, conspiring and having managed the local ruling party leadership and the people sitting in the administration. As a result, many indigenous Jumma families of this area had to abandon their ancestral lands and homesteads.

Earlier, in the face of atrocities of state ruling power of GK Shamim and atrocities offered through the Sylvan Wye Resort, the Sangai Marma village had already been evicted. Grabbing of lands belonging to the Jumma people of adjacent area has been being illegally occupied without any remedial measure. Right now, 170 indigenous Jumma families of Saingya Tripura Para, Laimee Para and Hatibhanga Para are under threat of eviction. It is learnt that the officials of Sylvan Wye Resort have already illegally occupied 250 acres of lands belonging to the adjacent indigenous villagers.

GK Shamim and Jasim Uddin Montu began land grabbing in Bandarban only 3 years back selecting a site for a five-star hotel. At the very beginning, they had a very slow march in illegal occupation of lands. Firstly, they started with lending money as loan to the indigenous villagers of Saingya Para. When the villagers became incapable of refunding the loan, then they began to evict the villagers and occupy their lands. In this way, it was the Saingya Para – the last indigenous village among the 13 villages to have been evicted by the duo land grabbers. The last 6 families of this village were evicted in 2018.

This report has been published and circulated by Information and Publicity Department of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Smahati Samiti (PCJSS) from its Central Office, Kalyanpur, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts.