

Follow-up Report 2013 (May)
Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh:
The Slow Demise of the Region's Indigenous Peoples

Introduction

The present report aims to follow up the report titled "Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: The Slow Demise of the Region's Indigenous Peoples" (2012, IWGIA, Organising Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre). The 2012 report considered the reasons for continuing violence and human rights violations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) after signing of the CHT Accord by the government and the indigenous armed resistance in 1997, focusing on the role of the Bangladesh military. One of the objectives of the report was to provide figures on human rights violations by military and other security forces and attacks by settlers backed by military and security forces in the post-accord period through 2011 (IWGIA, Organising Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre 2012: 15-16). The present follow-up report aims to provide supplementary data on violence and human rights violations by military and security forces in the CHT in 2012.

1. Human Rights Violations by the Military

Table 1 summarizes the human rights violations by the military from 2004 through 2012. The general trend of frequent arrests, torture and beatings is unchanged; in 2012, there was a similar number of arrests while that of torture incidents and beatings decreased. Whether this trend is temporary or will continue needs to be monitored. Of the 51 people arrested in 2012, 23 are members of the Hill Students Council (PCP) and villagers said to be their supporters, who were arrested in August in Bandarban. PCJSS, the indigenous Jumma¹ organization and signatory to the CHT Accord, asserts that these were malicious arrests. Furthermore, one PCJSS member was shot dead and five were arrested in an incident in October 2012, indicating a tendency for people affiliated with political parties or student's organizations or otherwise involved in politics to be subject to malicious arrest.

Arrest, torture and beating of people involved in political activities not only affect the victims but also hinder the free expression of political views and suppress freedom of speech.

Table 1: Military Human Rights Violations in the CHT (2004–2012)

¹ Jumma is a blanket term to refer to all the indigenous peoples in the CHT. "Jumma" derives from the term "jhum", which means shifting cultivation practiced by many of the indigenous communities in the region.

Year	DEATHS	INJURED	RAPE	RAPE ATTEMPT	LOOTING	HOMES BURNT	TEMPLES DESTROYED	TEMPLES BURNT	ARRESTS	TORTURE	BEATING	DESECRATION	HARASSMENT	EVICTON
2004	3	5	0	0	4	0	1	0	53	64	26	1	10	0
2005	1	5	0	1	20	0	0	0	84	40	36	0	0	1
2006	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	21	42	0	1	0	275
2007	3	0	0	1	0	5	2	0	38	30	1	1	0	0
2008	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	11	38	1	2	0	9
2009	5	7	0	8	0	0	1	0	159	112	36	4	33	0
2010	0	0	0	4	6	0	1	0	43	9	22	5	24	0
2011	0	11	0	1	1	0	1	0	55	39	32	3	18	0
2012	1	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	51	14	3	0	8	0
TOTAL	15	31	2	16	32	5	7	0	464	374	154	17	85	285

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that rape attempts by military personnel have continued to occur over the last 3-4 years. Victims of rape and attempted rape often are unable to report it to the authorities, so it can be surmised that these figures are only the tip of the iceberg. It should also be noted that rape incidents by Bengali settlers are occurring frequently in recent years. There has been an increase in reported violence against women (rape, attempted rape, killing, assault and abduction) in the CHT from less than 10 incidents per year in 2007-2008 to 19, 26 and 55 incidents in 2010, 2011 and 2012, respectively.² Violence against women in the CHT began during the armed conflict in the 1970's and 1980's, and was used as a means of warfare (IWGIA, Organising Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre 2012: 37). It is reported that rape by military and security force personnel as well as settlers was carried out systematically during this period (Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission 1991: 86-87). The increase in rape incidents by settlers in recent years is an issue that must be addressed, given that hardly any of the perpetrators of rape and attempted rape are arrested or punished despite the massive deployment of military and security forces in the CHT, and that, to the contrary, attempted rape incidents by military and security force personnel are also occurring.

2. Attacks by Settlers

Table 2 shows the casualties of attacks by settlers with direct/indirect involvement or negligence of duty of Bangladeshi security forces from 2004 through 2012. The only such

² Kapaeeng Foundation, "Human Rights Report 2012 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh," p. 122

incident with direct involvement of military in 2012 occurred in Rangamati town, though many other attacks by settlers have also been reported.³ On 22 September 2012, a scuffle at Rangamati College triggered an attack by Bengali students upon Jumma students. Bengali settlers outside the college joined in, attacking the Jumma students with sharp weapons and sticks that they brought in. Army and police personnel stood at the main gate of the college, but did not halt the attack by the Bengali students and settlers. To the contrary, it is reported that they lathi-charged and dispersed the Jumma students when they began to fight back at the Bengalis. At that point, already 30 Jumma students, 5 Bengali students and 2 teachers had been injured. It is reported that even after the skirmish in the college campus had subsided, military personnel chased Jumma people including women and children in the Jumma residential areas of Kalyanpur and Devasishnagar, and threatened the Chairman of the Regional Council.⁴

Table 2: Damage from communal attacks assisted by military (2003–2012)

	HOUSES	TEMPLES	INJURED
2003	466	4	14
2004	0	1	0
2005	0	0	0
2006	0	0	0
2007	5	2	0
2008	60	2	6
2009	0	1	0
2010	510	3	0
2011	132	2	22
2012	0	0	118
Total	1173	15	160

This incident triggered simultaneous attacks by settlers in various areas of Rangamati district, leaving more than a hundred people injured. Jumma politicians and citizens were assaulted, homes were torched, and motorcycles were set on fire. Many Jumma stores and people gathered in the town were assaulted, resulting in large casualties. The office of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council was also attacked. The violence spilled over to regions other than Rangamati, where there were reports of attacks on indigenous people by settlers.⁵

³ Kapaeeng Foundation, “Human Rights Report 2012 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh,” p. 41-53. Immediately outside of CHT, a massive attack by militant Muslims on Buddhist communities in Cox’s Bazaar and Chittagong District on 29-30 September 2012 also resulted in 21 Buddhist and Hindu temples and 50 homes being burnt to ashes and an additional 200-250 houses being ransacked and looted (ibid).

⁴ PCJSS e-mail news, 23 September 2012, and PCJSS (2012) *Report on Rangamati Communal Attack*, PCJSS, Rangamati.

⁵ ibid

In the past, attacks by settlers tended to occur in rural areas, triggered by land issues. However, this incident was quite different from prior incidents in that it occurred in a town area and was triggered by conflict in a college campus. The fact that the police, military and security forces did not actively intervene in the attack on the office of the Regional Council, constituted primarily by representatives of the PCJSS, one of the signatories of the peace accord, is thought to have had major repercussions among the Jumma people. The town of Rangamati is the hub of the CHT. It is very likely that the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police also observed these occurrences at close range. The government should explain why it was unable to bring this violence under control.

It is reported that 23 families fled from an attack by settlers in Matiranga in April 2013. The tendency for attacks involving land issues to occur in rural areas continues as before, so there is a need to keep a close eye on the situation.

References:

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (1991) *Life is not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.*

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