



Justice for Lakingme!

Chakma girl from Bangladesh abducted, converted, raped, and reportedly murdered

A 14-year-old Indigenous Chakma girl named Lakingme Chakma was abducted, forcibly converted to Islam, raped, and reportedly murdered by a non-Indigenous Bengali in the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh.

What happened?

Lakingme was in the seventh grade and had just turned 14 years and 10 months old on 5th January 2020 when she was abducted from her village home (Shilkhali Chakma Para) in Cox's Bazar. Five abductors (aged 22-28) led by a Bengali Muslim man, Ataulah (aged 23) of Cox's Bazar, allegedly abducted her from her house. Lakingme's mother and elder sister had gone to work in the betel leaf garden, and her father had gone to sea to fish. She was alone. Some children, including Lakingme's younger brother (11 years old), were playing in the yard and witnessed the incident. A number of people who were attending afternoon prayers at a local Buddhist temple also witnessed the kidnapping as they heard cries from a three-wheeler coming from the direction of Lakingme's house.

Lakingme was held by Ataulah in different places around Cox's Bazar. On 11 January 2020, she was taken to Cumilla district where, on 21 January, she was forcibly converted and married to Ataulah at a registrar's office, a false birth certificate being produced to show her age as 18.

After 11 months and six days of abduction, on 9 December 2020, the police called Lakingme's father to identify his daughter's body in the Cox's Bazar hospital morgue. Ataulah's mother claimed that Lakingme had committed suicide by drinking poison. However, a civil society-led fact-finding team investigated the case from 27-29 December 2020 and stated that *"the law enforcers must investigate whether she killed herself or was murdered, because we have found many examples that she was instigated to commit suicide."*¹ Allegations include that she was frequently tortured by Ataulah and forced to work as a sex worker. These gruesome occurrences led Lakingme to believe that she may not be accepted back into her family and society ever again.

¹ https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=122412719703309&ref=watch_permalink

<https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/take-prompt-action-against-culprits-nari-pragati-sangha-2023209>



Even after identifying his daughter in the morgue, the police refused to hand over her body to the family on the grounds that she was married to one of her abductors, who had managed to fake a birth certificate showing her to be 18 years of age. Due to an unresolved issue concerning her religion and birth date, the dead body of Lakingme Chakma was held in the custody of Cox's Bazar Police for 26 days (9 December 2020 – 4 January 2021). Finally, in pursuance of a court decision proving that she was a child and under 18, her body was finally handed over to her Chakma Buddhist parents on 4 January 2021. Lakingme had just given birth to a baby girl 13 days before she died.

Action taken

Following his daughter's abduction, Lakingme's father went to the nearby Teknaf Police Station to file a complaint. However, the Officer-in-Charge (Pradeep Kumar Das) refused to record the abduction case. At the suggestion of the Officer-in-Charge, her father filed a general diary but no action was taken. He therefore filed a case with the Cox's Bazar Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal on 27 January 2020. On 15 December that year, this Tribunal ordered RAB-15 (Rapid Action Battalion) to reopen the investigation. RAB-15 is now handling this case. Following the submission of their primary investigation report no. 5, the dead body was handed over to Lakingme's parents.

The Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) were negligent in their investigation of this case. If the Officer-in-Charge at Teknaf Police Station had recorded the case when Lakingme's father reported it, it is believed she could have been rescued in time.

To date, no-one has been held to account for the atrocities committed against Lakingme.

Indigenous Peoples living in fear

The Chakma population in the village of Lakingme's family has gradually become a minority due to the infiltration of Bengali settlers – something that is happening all over the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Lakingme's family now feels insecure. The perpetrators are their neighbours. The family received no help from the local police; quite the contrary, the local Bengali population and police took the side of the abductors. Justice must be served for her and her family, and the perpetrators must be held accountable for this crime.

In fact, five crimes have been committed in this case: abduction, forced conversion, child marriage, rape, and instigation to suicide/murder. Such crimes cannot go unpunished in any State with a functioning rule of law.

And the shocking tale of Lakingme is not the only case of violence against Indigenous girls and women in Bangladesh – far from it.



At least 54 cases of violence against Indigenous women were reported between January - December 2020 alone. Of these 54 cases, 35 were reported in the plains and 19 in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). At least five Indigenous women were sexually or physically assaulted in these incidents. At least 18 women were raped, and attempted rape was committed against another 14. Among other incidents recorded, three women were gang raped, five were physically attacked, four were killed and, in two cases, land belonging to Indigenous women was grabbed by creating terror².

These numbers are only the tip of the iceberg, as many cases go unreported and unrecorded for several reasons (social stigma, cultural and language barriers, remoteness of survivors etc.). Nonetheless, the numbers speak for themselves. The situation for Indigenous women and girls in Bangladesh is unacceptably dangerous, and the Government of Bangladesh must take action.

We urge the Government of Bangladesh to:

1. Take immediate action against those involved in Lakingme Chakma's abduction, forced conversion, child marriage, rape, and instigation to suicide/murder.
2. Pass an exemplary punishment on the perpetrators.
3. Conduct an impartial investigation into Lakingme's death and release her autopsy report.
4. Make a divisional enquiry to the Police Bureau of Investigation team and Cox's Bazar Public Prosecutor for the negligent handling of Lakingme's abduction case.
5. Ensure punishment of those involved in forging Lakingme's birth certificate, her forced conversion and the marriage of a minor.
6. Take the initiative to take ensure the safety and care of Lakingme's baby.
7. Ensure the security of Lakingme's family and their proper compensation.
8. Ensure access to justice and security on the part of all Indigenous women and girls in Bangladesh.
9. Implement the recommendation "to effectively investigate all reports of gender-based violence against Indigenous women connected with land grabbing and take measures to bring those responsible to justice" as issued by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

² Kapaeeng Foundation, *Human Rights Report 2020 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh*, 2021, Dhaka.