**Submission on Tourism and Indigenous Peoples in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

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1. **Description of Submitting Orginastion:**

The Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) is a representing organization of the eleven-multilingual indigenous Jumma people of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), south-eastern part of Bangladesh. It was formed on 15 February 1972 based on the fundamental principles of Nationalism, Democracy, Secularism, Equality and Social Justice.

1. **Alleged Victims or Affected Community:**

11 Indigenous ethnic group, namely, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Lushai, Khumi, Chak, Khiyang, Bawm and Pangkhua. They collectively identify themselves as the Jumma people (High Landers), the first people of the CHT. Population of indigenous Jumma peoples are around 900,000 (census 2022).

1. **Alleged Perpetrators:**
2. Army Welfare Trust, C/o Army Headquarters, Welfare and Rehabilitation Division, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka
3. Director General, Operations and Planning Division, Armed Forces Division, Prime Minister's office, Government of Bangladesh, Tejgaon, Dhaka;
4. Minister, Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry, Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka;
5. Secretary, Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry, Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka;
6. Minister, CHT Affairs Ministry, Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka;
7. Secretary, CHT Affairs Ministry, Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka;
8. Chairman, Bangladesh Tourism Corporation, 83-88, Mohakhali Commercial Area, Dhaka;
9. Principal Executive Officer, Bangladesh Tourism Board, 22, Purana Palton, Dhaka;
10. **Summary of Events:**

**1. Tourism in CHT Accord and Laws:**

In Section 34 under Part-B of the CHT Accord signed between the government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS in 1997, the subject ‘Local Tourism’ was incorporated in Sub-Section-(f) among the 12 (Twelve) fresh and important subjects under the functions and responsibilities of the Rangamati, Khagachari and Bandarban Hill District Councils. Later on, the subject ‘Local Tourism’ was incorporated in the functions of the Hill District Councils (HDCs) and Section-28 of Schedule-1 of the amended three Hill District Council Acts in light of the Accord.

Apart from this, there is also a provision in Section-9 under Part-D of the CHT Accord that states: ‘...Keeping in view the environment of this region, the Government shall encourage the development of tourism facilities for the tourists, indigenous and foreign.'

Despite having been included in the three Hill District Council Acts as per the Accord, the government did not transfer the subject even after passing almost 15 years. The CHT Regional Council (CHTRC) and the PCJSS and civil society organizations repeatedly demanded for proper and fullest implementation of the CHT Accord including transfer of those subjects to the HDCs. At last, the government transferred the ‘Tourism’ to the Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban HDCs on 28 August 2014 towards the end of 16th year.

**2. Inconsistent Transfer of ‘Tourism’ to HDCs:**

Though there is legal provision by merit of which the CHT Regional Council has been empowered to supervise and coordinate all the programs relating to development, general administration, and law & order, but it is not involved to deal activities of Tourism including development program. The local Tourism, i.e. Tourism of three hill districts has though been transferred to Hill District Councils in 2014, but it is not devaluated properly. The office and tourism centers run by Bangladesh Tourism Corporation or some other organizations have not been transferred to the Hill District Councils. In place of devolvement of the subject ‘Tourism’, the Hill District Councils has been left with only the provision by which the Hill District Councils can develop tourism at its own fund the provision of which is absolutely contradictory to the spirit of the Accord. On the contrary, various government agencies and authorities, army and various business institutions have established tourism centers and running them violating the Hill District Council Acts and CHT Regional Council Act.

The Regional Council had several meetings with the concerned ministry in 2015 to transfer the concerned offices and institutions of Tourism to the Hill District Councils through issuance of an Executive Order cancelling the devaluation of function of the Subject Tourism through the Agreement with the Hill District Councils in 2014 and it was decided that the concerned offices and institutions would be transferred. But this has not yet been implemented.

**3. Inconsistent decision and proposal on Tourism in CHT in inter-ministry meeting**

On 10 August 2014, an inter-ministry meeting was held at the initiative taken by Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry on ‘Identification of attractive tourism spots and formulation of plan for their proper development.’[[1]](#footnote-1) It is of regretting to observe that a good number of decision and proposals have been taken in the meeting, all of which are contravening to the CHT Accord and the laws framed in light of the Accord. A few other decisions are mentioned herein below:

“3.1. Step for implementation of the projects to be undertaken for tourism development in CHT will have to be taken under PPP (Public Private Partnership).

3.2. Subject to approval of the related Steering Committee/competent authority, the entrusted stakeholders will adopt coordinated program on the affairs of project designing, technical support, financial source exploration and propagation.”

Besides, a decision was also taken to constitute a 12-member Steering Committee with the Secretary of Civil Aviation & Tourism Ministry as Chair and the Chairman of Bangladesh Tourism Corporation as Member-Secretary to carry out programs directing to development of tourism in CHT with all the stakeholders concerned.

It is needless to be mentioned that as per the CHT Accord, in case of undertaking any plan on tourism in CHT and its implementation, whereby, the HDCs, CHT Regional Council and Ministry of CHT Affairs are supposed to play the main role, it is in fact, these institutions were by-passed in the said inter-ministry meeting. The institutions that were formed in light of the CHT Accord, whereby, are supposed to discharge their role as decision-makers, instead, there cannot be a fresh ground as before for the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry or any other authority or any Committee through which, in this case, undertaking plan, proposal and decision cannot be ethical or in conformity with the Accord. Besides, also it cannot be considered that the said decisions taken in the inter-ministry meeting are corresponded with the provision as stated under Section 42 of the Hill District Council Act 1998 according to which the programs undertaken at national level are to be implemented by the concerned ministry or department through the Hill District Councils.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In addition, it was made known in the inter-ministry meeting that ‘A five-member Committee has been formed incorporating the representatives from Armed Forces Division, Environment and Forest Ministry with the Additional Secretary of this ministry as Convener to study the possibility to identify the attractive tourist spots in CHT and formulate proper plan for their development.’ Initially, the Committee selected 15 tourist spots namely, (1) Jiban Nagar, (2) Dim Pahar, (3) Nil Giri, (4) Chimbuk Pahar, (5) Shoila Prapat, (6) Nilachal, (7) Parjatan Complex, (8) Jibtali Lake Site Resort, (9) Aranyak lakeside Resort, (10) Subhalong, (11) Resort ECB Sajek, (12) Alutila, (13) Baghalhat and (14) Girishobha etc. located in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari districts.

It may be noted that as per the CHT Accord, three Hill District Council Acts and CHT Regional Council Act, in this case also, it is the Hill District Councils and CHT Regional Council are the competent authorities to take any step or to undertake plan including implementation as the subject of ‘Local Tourism’ or ‘Development.’ Besides, it is of foremost necessity to formulate proper guiding principles taking into consideration whether there will be adverse impact upon life-style, culture, neighborhood, social atmosphere of indigenous Jumma people and above-all whether there will be any impact detrimental to the geo-natural environment. Whereas without taking all these issues under consideration and by-passing the competent authority and accepting the public opinion unilaterally taking up bottom-down step cannot be regarded as a well-considered measure.

**4. Tourism by army and impact on livelihood of indigenous peoples in CHT**

With Tourism, the indigenous Jumma people are supposed to be encouraged and optimistic as it is a potential industry. But it has become an issue to be considered as a matter of concerned and negative message to the indigenous Jumma people for, the subject not having been transferred properly to the three Hill District Councils in one hand while on the contrary, as a result of establishing tourism centers elsewhere by forcible occupation of their lands and eviction of the indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, on the other. So much so that recently, at the government and non-government initiative, especially, conspiracy of forcible acquisition and occupation of lands, *jum* (shifting cultivation) lands including homesteads and lands of religious shrines and recorded lands, pasture lands and the lands in usage of the indigenous Jumma people has increased in the three hill districts directing to establishment and expansion of army and BGB camps. At the same time, construction of various tourist spots, resorts, restaurants, shopping centers, luxurious hotels, motels, etc. entertaining and commercial centers on the other side.

Numbers of indigenous villages and families in CHT to be affected by Tourism

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Places | Quantity of occupied lands | Number of Villages | Numbers of families | Community peoples | Perpetrators |
| Five-Star Hotel and Amusement Park in Chimbuk | Lease- 20 acres & occupied 800-1,000 acres | 116 | 300 | Mro, Tripura & Marma | Army |
| Nilgiri (Kapru Mro Para), Bandarban sadar upazila | Recorded-16 acres &  Occupied-60 acres | 6 | 200 | Mro and Marma | Army |
| Jibannagar (Sepru Para), Bandarban sadar upazila | 600 acres | 3 | 129 | Mro | Army |
| Chandra Pahar, Bandarban sadar upazila | 500 acres | - | - |  | Army |
| Sajek Resort, Baghaichari, Rangamati | 5 acres | 2 | 65 | Tripura, Lusai, Pangkhua | Army & BGB |
| Dim Pahar (Kraudong), Alikadam-Thanchi upazila | 500 acres | 12 | 202 | Mro | Army |
| Nilachal, Bandarban sadar upazila | 20 acres | 3 | 100 | Tripura, Tanchangya and Marma | Deputy Commissioner |

At this, many indigenous Jumma families either have obliged to take shelter to another place leaving own homesteads or many are in the wake of eviction. Hence, the indigenous Jumma people in the CHT are on the verge of total eviction from their ancestral lands where they have been living and cultivating Jum from generation to generation. For instances-

**(a) Five-Star Hotel and Amusement Park in Chimbuk**: One of the examples regarding eviction of Jumma people and land grabbing in the name of development projects is the construction of a five-star hotel and amusement park by the Army Welfare Trust at Chimbuk Hill in Bandarban since September 2020. In placing of the contribution for socio-economic development of the Jumma people, this tourist center of the army is seriously affecting their livelihood and culture and the biodiversity and environment of the area. As a result, four villages of Mro people are to directly be affected and 70-116 villages to be affected indirectly and about 10,000 Jum farmers are at risk of displacement.

The Hill District Council has leased 20 acres of land in Chimbuk Hills to the army and Sikdar Group for 40 years to build a five-star hotel and amusement park. The land was taken over by the Bandarban Hill District Council in consultation with the local Mro community in order to facilitate the livelihood of the local people in agriculture through demonstration of agricultural technology and improved farming methods. But without working for that purpose, the Hill District Council leased it out 40-years to the army for tourism purpose without any consultation or consent from the local Mro community.

Although the army were given lease of 20 acres of land, the army have already demarcated boundary with more than 20 acres in the Naitong hills evicting four Mro villages directly. From 47th km of Kapru Mro Para (Army-run Nilgiri Vacation Center Area) to Naitang hill (Chandrapahar, the name given by Army Welfare Trust) to 52nd km of Jibannagar (from one end to the other) about 5 km long area will cover a total area of ​​more than eight hundred acres.

The army have marked an area of about 800 to 1000 acres by planting red flags for the construction of roads through plantation and farm land belonging to Dola Para and Kapru Para residents. Even during the Corona virus outbreak, Army Welfare Trust and Sikder Group (R&R Holdings) have illegally occupied more than 800 acres of land on the Bandarban-Chimbuk-Thanchi road.

**Affected by the Chimbuk Five-Star Hotel and Amusement Park of Army**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Land lease (acres) | Land occupied (acres) | Directly affected villages | Indirect affected villages | Population affected |
| 20 | 800 – 1,000 | 4 villages | 116 vilages | 10,0000 |

It is to be noted that according to the CHT Accord and existing law, the subject of 'Land and Land Management' is a function under the jurisdiction of the Hill District Councils. On the other hand, there is a mandatory provision to make discussion with the CHT Regional Council in carrying out all development activities and functions of the Hill District Council in the Hill Tracts. However, the Bandarban Hill District Council has not consulted with the Regional Council about leasing 20 acres of land to the army and the Sikder group.

Since September 2020, the aggrieved Mro community and various organizations in the CHT have been submitting memorandums to the Prime Minister against the construction of five-star hotel on the Naitang hill in Chimbuk. In March 2021, civil society solidarity with Mro people has gathered in Dhaka. At various times people from different walks of life, students and political organizations, MPs, intellectuals and civil society representatives, various international human rights organizations have issued statements expressing solidarity with the just demands of the Mro people. Eight UN mandate holders have expressed deep concern over the impending crisis over the Mro people. But it is noteworthy that despite all these statements, protests and opposition, the construction work of the five-star hotel of the army has not stopped. Transportation of construction materials continued even during the lockdown imposed for the control of spreading the deadly corona virus.

Meanwhile, construction of power transmission lines, construction of buildings, water supply lines and internal roads are in progress. And the entry into the construction of the tourist center and the movement of the general public, including the Mro residents in or around it, has been banned. Army personnel have always been deployed in the area. If any indigenous Jumma people is moving in that direction, they are being stopped.

**(b) Nilgiri:** Chimbuk is one of the tallest peaks in Bangladesh and lies some 14 km from the town. Bawm villages around Chimbuk and Mro villages a little further off are also lie within a day's journey from the town.  Nilgiri tourist centre is situated at this Chimbuk top and lies some 46 km from the town. For the Bandarban ‘Nilgiri Tourism Center’ established and conducted by the army, the amount of land fixed for the center is 16 acres as per the document. But it is allegation of the local people that at least 60 acres of lands lie under occupation of the center in reality. More allegations reveal that for establishment of luxurious resorts, restaurants, shopping centers, etc. by the army, efforts for grabbing huge areas of *jum* lands of the Jumma people who are the poorest and holistically backward and living in the villages namely, Dohla Mro Para (Jiban Nagar) of Chimbuk range, Kapru Mro Para (Nilgiri), Chimbuk Sholo mile, Y-junction (also known as12 mile), Keokradawng summit of Keokradawng hill etc. The following numbers of families are in the wake of eviction-

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sl. | Name of village | No. of families | Ethnicity |
|  | Kaprue Para | 42 | Mro |
|  | Riyamonai Para | 22 | Mro |
|  | Era para | 18 | Mro |
|  | Dola Para | 25 | Mro |
|  | Kolai Para | 23 | Mro |
|  | Seprue Marma Headman Para | 70 | Marma |
| Total | | 200 |  |

It has been learnt that the army authority of Nilgiri and officers of 69 Infantry Brigade stationed in Bandarban are not letting the local people raise any sort of groves and do other work at either side of the road starting from Neel Giri of Kaprue Mro Para to Jiban Nagar. A cottage is under construction by the army at Jiban Nagar area. The following numbers of families will be evicted from Jiban Nagar area-

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sl. | Name of village | No. of families | Ethnicity |
| 1. | Khari Para | 32 | Mro |
| 2. | Enong Para | 27 | Mro |
| 3. | Seprue Para | 70 | Mro |
| Total | | 129 |  |

The army authority set huge pillars alongside of Bandarban-Thanchi road naming/writing 'Nilgiri' on them and is to claim that the said huge area measuring approximately 600 acres has been taken under acquisition of the army. Besides, the army also kept more 500 acres of land at Chandra Pahar area under their occupation.

Consequently, the indigenous Jumma peoples of this area are at the verge of getting evicted. The Jumma people living in that area, more specifically, the Bawm and Mro community people, the population of traditional dwellers living for the ages together, will face wide-ranging damage, if the plan undertaken by the army gets executed.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**(c) Dim Pahar (Kraudong):** An effort is being undertaken to establish a Tourism Center at Thanchi-Alikadam roadside of ‘Dim Pahar’ area by the army. Approximately 500 acres of land at ‘Dim Pahar’ area under Sangu and Toinfa mouzas under Alikakadam upazila and Naikhyongchari mouza under Thanchi upazila has been taken under acquisition of the army. The following numbers of families are in the wake of eviction-

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Sl. | Name of village | No. of families |
|  | Chala Mor Karbari Para | 5 |
|  | Diri Mro Karbari Para | 20 |
|  | Ada Mro Karbari Para | 20 |
|  | Paniya Member Para | 22 |
|  | Tongpa Mro Karbari Para | 35 |
|  | Resak Mro Karbari Para | 15 |
|  | Kuiring Mro Karbari Para | 20 |
|  | Kakuyai Mro Karbari Para | 10 |
|  | Namsak Mro Karbari Para | 25 |
|  | Longpuk Mro Karbari Para | 10 |
|  | Kalamiya Mro Karbari Para | 15 |
|  | Niyanak Mro Karbari Para | 5 |
| Total | | 202 |

At present, Engineer Core of Bangladesh army stationed at ‘Dim Pahar’ area. Bangladesh army put signboard covering 6/7 kilometers on the ridge of Kroudong (Dim Pahar) declaring 'Reserved Training Area, Bangladesh Army'. A number of villages of indigenous Jumma people, especially Mro people, are located within this marked area and now those indigenous Jumma people are in fear of being ousted from their ancestral lands. The Alikadam-Thanchi road was inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina through video conference on 14 July 2015.

This hill is called ‘Rongrang Hill’ by the Chakma people and Kraudong' by the Marma people. In Marma language, the term ‘Kra’ means ‘hen’ and ‘u’ means ‘egg’ and ‘dong’ means ‘hill.’ The army named it as ‘Dim Pahar’ (egg hill) translated into Bangla'

It is reported that about 150 families of indigenous people with around 500 members from Alikadam and Thanchi areas of Bandarban district left for Myanmar as they felt increasingly insecure in the place of their living. At present, a road from Alikadam to Thanchi is being constructed by the Bangladesh Army.[[4]](#footnote-4) It is learnt that Bengali settlers, particularly Rohingys Muslims who came from Myanmar, would be settled along the roadside of this inter-Upazila road. Fearing possible eviction from these areas, indigenous Marma and Mro people started migrating to Myanmar. The indigenous peope who migrated to Myanmar were learned to have said that it became increasingly difficult for them to earn a living because Bengali Muslim people were causing them a lot of trouble, and their business in Bangladesh was also failing. As they were afraid of persecution from Bengali Muslims they fled to Myanmar. This was the first group to come over this dry season; over 1,000 asylum seekers from Bangladesh already entered Myanmar in the previous years.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In Ruma Upazila, a magnificent Tourist Center has been constructed by evicting the Bawm community people from their ancestral homesteads and *jum* lands.

**(d) Sajek Resort:** Apart from various town areas of Rangamati district, a luxurious Tourist Center has been built at Rui Lui valley of Sajek hill, one of the Jumma-hill-people inhabited areas under Baghaichari upazila in Rangamati district. A luxurious Tourist Center have been made as one of the most attractive tourist spots of the country. It has been learnt that the tourist center that was built by the army at the expense amounting to millions Taka has been named: “Three Star Cottage” and the similar cottage constructed by BGB has been named “Runmoy.” The Horizon Garden, Runmoy Rest house and Ruilui Para Club House have already been developed. As a result of establishing these tourist cottages, it has been also learnt that five families of indigenous Jumma people have been evicted while 65 families in two villages have landed in the wake of eviction.

Sajek is an all-weather-friendly tourist spot. It is a union located at the farthest north of CHT. Sajek Union is under Baghaichari upazila of Rangamati district. Form Khagrachari district town it is 67 km toward north-east and from Rangamati city it is 95 km towards north-west. International boundary with India is located within 8km towards east (Mizoram). President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister of government of Bangladesh, among other dignitaries, have visited Sajek.

**(e) Nilachal Parjatan Kendra:** The Bandarban District Administration has developed the Nilachal tourist site near at Tigerpara under Bandarban sadar upazila in Bandarban district. The Nilachal tourist centre was established on traditional Jum land of indigenous peoples. It makes socio-cultural impacts on local indigenous villagers of Jouta Khamar Tanchangya Para, Hatidanda (Changya) Tripura Para and Chanya Marma Para in Bandarban sadar upazila. Though said tourist centre established on traditional land of indigenous peoples, but Jumma villagers are not getting any benefit-sharing from this tourist spot. Violating the Bandarban Hill District Council (Amendment) Act 1989, the District Administration is running this centre.

(f) Eviction of Gachbagan villagers in Bilaichari for establishment of tourist centre: In order to set up a tourist center, the army have started to evict the Jumma villagers of Gachbagan village in the remote area adjacent to the border link road in Farua union of Bilaichari upazila of Rangamati district.

Already, 17 families out of 26 families of Gachbagan village have been compelled to flee from the village to elsewhere. The remaining 9 families have also been ordered to leave by the army. Meanwhile, the army have burnt down a house, demolished two shops and razed the Jum-farming sites of four families.

It is to be noted that when Chief of Bangladesh Army, General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, visited the border road construction project in Bilaichhari-Barkal area on 30th January 2023, he gave the order to evict the Jumma families of the said Gachbagan village, said Captain Maruf.

On 6th February 2023, calling in meeting, Captain Maruf and Subedar Md. Ahmed of 26 Bengal Engineering Corps of Gachbagan Army Camp ordered 9 families of Gachbagan village and move elsewhere taking their houses and belongings, within 15 days. On 1st March 2023, a group of soldiers led by Senior Warrant Officer Ahmed and Warrant Officer Govinda of Gachbagan Army Camp of 34 Bir Bengal went to Gachbagan village and demolished two shops belonging to Chibukye Chakma and Basu Chakma. After the said incident, Senior Warrant Officer Ahmed burnt the house of another person named Batye Lal Chakma.

The army are also preventing the 9 families from Jum cultivation. Among them, Jum-farming sites of four families namely Karbari Shubmoy Chakma, Amar Bijay Chakma, Batye Lal Chakma and Buddha Lila Chakma have been destroyed by pouring soil.

A few days before the incident, Senior Warrant Officer Ahmed, threatened the Karbari of the village, Shubmoy Chakma, getting him down from the vehicle, that, 'Why are you not leaving the village, if you do not leave the village, the houses will be burnt.' A few days later, Captain Maruf went to the village and ordered that no one could set fire to Jum site.

Due to the loss of their source of income, shops and houses and obstructing to Jum cultivation, the said Jumma villagers are currently compelled to spend their days in extreme uncertainty and fear. Although the Jumma villagers were evicted, the army built a new army camp and a large mosque on the side of the road.

The army are evicting the villagers of Gachbagan to set up a tourist center in the area for the purpose of corporate business. The army are not only building the border road. In the name of border road construction, they are evicting Jumma people from their ancestral homesteads along with destroying their plantations, houses, resources and taking possession of attractive places for the purpose of tourism business. In some places they have also put up signboards saying reserved areas or designated areas for army.

**5. Cultural aggression:**

Since independence of Bangladesh while ignoring and setting aside the opinion and rights of the Jumma people and local people, development aggression is meted out one-sidedly with various development projects by the successive military and non-military governments. Instead of preserving the tribal-dominated characteristics and status of the CHT region as per the CHT Accord, the government has intensified its efforts to turn the non-Muslim CHT into a Muslim-dominated region. In defiance of the promise of rehabilitation of the Bengali Muslim settlers outside the CHT, expansion of settlers’ cluster villages and infiltration from the plain districts to the CHT continues under the support of the administration.

In violation of the CHT Accord, these infiltrators/settlers are being included in the voter list of three hill districts and are being provided national identity card and permanent resident certificates with various facilities including jobs, admissions in educational institution, business etc. This way today the tribal-dominated characteristics and status of the CHT are being undermined. As a result, the non-Muslim dominated CHT are rapidly becoming a Muslim-dominated region.

The government has been executing the conspiracy of ethnic cleansing of the Jumma people through encirclement maneuver while making use of all possible sectors. As part of the plot, by using the development as weapon, the government has been executing its conspiring design to evict the Jumma people from their ancestral lands, break up the economic backbone and the biodiversity and environment of the region. From among such development engineering mechanism, the effective ones that may be mentioned are: declaration of reserved forests, giving the traditional Jum-farming land and Mouza lands in leases to the non-residents, establishment of luxurious tourist centers, construction of border roads and link roads, establishment and expansion of security forces camps, exploration of gas and oil in CHT, etc.

The cultural expressions of Indigenous Peoples are often highlighted as a distinct feature to attract tourism. This led to risk the appropriation and commodification of Indigenous knowledge and tangible and intangible cultural property in CHT. The army, local administration and state-machineries have been changing indigenous names of places and localities in CHT and giving Islamic and Bengali names. For examples, 'Kraudong' was named as 'Dim Pahar'. In Marma language, the word 'Krau' means egg and 'dong' means hill. The army named it as 'Dim Pahar' translating it into egg hill.

**6. Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls:** Tourism projects have brought violence against Indigenous women and girls, and sex trafficking. Where tourism centers are established, indigenous women and girls are turned into prostitutes. Even, indigenous women and girls have been raped, sexually harassed and abducted by many outsider Bengali tourists. For instance, a Tripura girl was gang-raped by 5 youths in Khagrachari Zilla Parishad Park on 21 June 2018.

Violence against Jumma women and girls in CHT is used as a tool for land grabbing, eviction, expulsion and ethnic cleansing of Jumma peoples. Recently, from February 10 to March 2023, 8 incidents were committed against the Jumma women and girls that include killing, abduction and sexual violence. Out of 8 incidents, the police arrested the accused in only 2 incidents. The police did not take any action to arrest the 21 accused in the remaining 6 incidents. It is to be mentioned that in the CHT, cases of rape, abduction and torture against Jumma women and girls are regularly carried out by the settlers and security forces, but due to the lack of justice and speedy prosecution of those cases, the criminals remain unpunished. Due to the indifference of the administration and the law enforcement agencies, the criminals always get away with impunity.

**7. Militarization and labour exploitation:** Tourism projects have led militarization and labour exploitation in CHT. Although the CHT Accord stipulates the withdrawal of all temporary camps, the government is currently setting up new camps one after another or re-establishing camp at the site of the withdrawn camps. For instance, 20 new camps have been set up during the past Covid-19 pandemic alone. Initiatives of setting up 6 new camps from June to September 2022 was another example in this regard. On the other hand, instructions from the Headquarters of Armed Police Battalion (APBn) have been issued on April 13, 2022 to initially deploy police in 30 camps out of the 240 camps withdrawn by the army. However, as per the PCJSS record, out of 545 temporary camps, the government has withdrawn only 105 temporary camps in three phases since signing the Accord.

One of the purposes in massive militarization in CHT is to provide security and protection to the tourist centres established by the army. For example, an army camp was set up at Gachbagan village in Farua union of Bilaichhari with the aim of establishing tourism, evicting Jumma villagers from the village in February 2023. Further, a new army has been deployed to guard the five-star hotel and amusement park under construction by the army in Chimbuk soon after start of its construction in September 2020.

Besides, by trampling the Accord, de facto military rule named 'Operation Uttaran' was imposed in 2001 by the Awami League government, which signed the Accord. By virtue of the said 'Operation Uttaran', the security forces are controlling all the matters of the CHT including general administration, law and order, judiciary, development activities, and so on, which is leading as one of the obstacles in the introduction of democratic governance in the CHT as well as a strengthened special governance system consisting of Regional Councils and three Hill District Councils.

**6. Free, prior and informed consent of local and indigenous peoples**

Although there are provisions in the CHT Accord and laws enacted as per the Accord that the Hill District Councils shall be competent to prepare, undertake and implement development projects in respect of the matters transferred to it and all development programs at national level shall be implemented through the Hill District Councils, but the development programs of the three Hill District Councils are being implemented as per the decisions from above by the CHT Affairs Ministry, at which the right to decision making role as well as jurisdiction of self-rule of Hill District Councils gets weakened thereby. On the other end, it is due to getting most projects implemented through CHT Development Board at the approval of Ministry of CHT Affairs while by-passing the CHT Regional Council and Hill District Councils, the special governance system of CHT has been getting crippled and that the process is contributing to creation of complexity in the administration and the development as well.

It is an open fact that at present, obtaining pre and prior consent of the local and indigenous community people is treated as one of the democratic principles in the development sector, especially, while undertaking and implementing any plans in the territories of the indigenous people. Whereas, though the grand-alliance government like to introduce itself to be a democratic government and the present Prime Minister, despite being the head of the government that had signed the CHT Accord and the party; also this government, ignoring the CHT Accord, the institutions established in light of the CHT Accord and opinion of the local indigenous people, has been and is more often unilaterally taking plans, decisions and programs or implementing or trying to implement them, cannot be regarded as a democratic and pro-people principle.

**7. Recommendations**

1. National Tourism Policy 2010 is to be amended while incorporating the followings:

(a) To undertake initiative and design Tourism Projects while taking the indigenous culture, lifestyle and perspective of the indigenous people into account;

(b) To ensure the safeguard issue of indigenous peoples’ traditional land rights while taking initiative for tourism industry;

(c) To ensure benefit sharing of the indigenous peoples in the initiative for tourism industry taken under government/non-government or private sector;

(d) To undertake measures for an bank loan with low-rate interest to support initiative taken by indigenous peoples for establishing tourism industry;

(e) In case with CHT, to implement the tourism projects in light of the CHT Regional Council Act, 1998 and the three Hill District Council (Amendment) Acts 1989;

(f) To determine the definition, concept and nature of Echo-Tourism;

(g) To design the echo-tourism projects and community-based tourism projects in conformity with the natural balance, bio-diversity and in consistence with the lifestyle of the indigenous peoples.

2. To implement the following recommendations set in the letter of CHT Regional Council dated 5 May 2015 sent to the Ministry of CHT Affairs and Ministry of Civil Aviation:

(a) Since, the subject Tourism has not been devolved to the Hill District Councils in light of Hill District Council Act properly, the said agreement cannot be acceptable. Hence, having the agreement cancelled, it is to transfer all the functions relating to tourism to the Hill District Councils; and

(b) To transfer the Subjects or Functions to the Hill District Councils through Executive Order without involving any form of agreement in between.

3. On top of the decision drawn in the inter-ministerial meeting held on 10 August 2014 at the initiative of Ministry of Aviation & Tourism with a view to ‘identifying tourist-attracting spots and proper designing of development plans for them’, it is to implement the following recommendations set in the CHT Regional Council letter of dated 5 May 2015 sent to the Ministry of CHT Affairs and Ministry of Civil Aviation & Tourism:

(a) It is the Ministry of CHT Affairs to act upon all the functions relating to tourism as the ‘Lead Ministry’; and

(b) The projects applicable to CHT to be undertaken at national level are to be implemented by the Ministry of CHT Affairs.

4. To consider the inclusion of the local and indigenous peoples of both plains and CHT in the initiative for tourism industry with great importance.

5. To immediate stop construction of Five Star Hotel and Amusement Park at Chimbuk Hills of Bandarban.

6. To transfer the subject of Tourism to Hill District Councils through executive order as per CHT Accord.

7. To implement CHT Accord properly and fully without further delay and declare roadmap for the same.

Date: 30 April 2023

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS)

Central Office, Kalyanpur, Rangamati-4500

Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

1. Minutes of inter-ministry meeting held on 10 August 2014, at the initiative taken by Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry in Dhaka. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Letter of CHT Regional Council on decision of inter-ministerial meeting on Tourism in CHT sent on 5 May 2015to State Minister for CHT Affairs Ministry and copied to Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry, government of Bangladesh, Dhaka. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Prothom Alo (national Bangla daily), 26 June 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Human Rights Report on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh 2014, Kapaeeng Foundation, Dhaka [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [www.bnionline.net](http://www.bnionline.net), Ethnic Arakan Refugees Arrive from Bangladesh. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)