

Public Gathering at Zhimai against Tree Felling at Zhimai, Nahar, Kumarsail and Jafflong- *Sharif Jamil, National Coordinator, APRA & JS, BAPA*

Reckless tree felling at the boarder area in Sylhet Division was a common practice by the power people and particularly by the Tea Gardens for a long time in cooperation with the corrupted part of the administration. The tail of mighty Meghalaya left some hills inside Bangladeshi territory that maintains a boundary-line mostly with Tripura State of India at Sylhet Division. The hills are mostly denuded. The only greenery that is left still in the villages of Khasi indigenous ethnicity as they plant and keep trees to cultivate Betel-leaf which is the way of their livelihood.



Hills under Forest department



Hills under Khasi

With firm understanding on the above reality through the conference in 2007, we have started the movement for saving our Indigenous Environment and addressed some degradation of our greenery in Sylhet Division at Jafflong, Nahar, Zhimai and Kumarsail. All these four areas of Khasi villages are now under threat of their existence due to the greed for the trees.

In early January 2009, Zhimai Tea Estate Authority cut-down number of trees in the Pan-joom of Zhimai, Demarcated thousands of trees that are to be felled-down and started construction of Labour-quarter there in the name of expansion of the tea garden which revealed a direct threat of displacement to the Khasi people of Zhimai Punji. Despite the intervention & destruction to the land & livelihood of the Khasi, it is found that the tree felling would impact severely to the



Greenery, Bio-diversity, Ecology and overall Environment of the hills & forest of Sylhet Division, Bangladesh.

Last year the government permitted Nahar Tea Garden to chop down four thousand trees at adjacent Punji and Jooms of the Khasi people there. Due to people's movement, government adjourned their permission and declared an inquiry stopping cutting trees while more than a thousand trees were cut down till then.



However we took part to the process of inquiry and formally placed our arguments to the Forest Department. We are still to learn any development of that inquiry and also the government did not cancel the permission so far as we

demanded but the illegal activities to grave the seized tree logs had been started strongly in cooperation with the power-party leaders in Nahar.

Evidently Kumarsail Punji was established before 1930 at the remote Tripura boarder inside Borolekha Upazilla of Moulavibazar. The lessee of Kumarsail Tea Garden is disappeared since 1970 after the liberation and the Hindu legal authorities of that garden did not maintain any relation with this garden or administration from then. But surprisingly a power-person here in Bangladesh has been occupying this garden for last four decades. This illegal occupant recently started construction of a big road cutting hills and trees of those Khais villagers of Kumarshail.

Unplanned stone extraction at Jafflong area by excavator machine is an old threat to the greenery of that area. After a long fight recently through a meeting the Department of Environment banned using machine extracting stones from Jafflong area. But this decision is still to be properly enforced to nave the environment & ecology of Jafflong.



So, we organized a big Public Gathering at the Play-ground of Zhimai Punji of Kulaura Upazilla of Moulavibazar on 9th May 2009 at 11.30am. while Mr. ASM Shahjahan, the Vice-President of BAPA & former advisor of a Caretaker Government of Bangladesh was present as the Chief-



quest of the gathering. It was organized as the subsequent event against such malpractices after the first Public Gathering at Aliarchhara Punji on November 15 in presence of Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad, the President of BAPA.

Presided over by Rev. Pairin Sutting Pastor, Boromchal Mission the gathering was addressed by Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary of Bangladesh Adibashi Forum, Zakir Hossain, Joint Secretary of BAPA, Prof. Iqramul Wadud, former Principal of Brindaban Govt. College Habiganj, Prof. Abduzzaher, Vice-principal of Govt. Woman College Habiganj, Sharif Jamil, National Coordinator of Adibashi Poribesh Roskhya Andolon (APRA), Fr. Emil Moraes OMI, Oblate Delegation Superior Bangladesh, Fr. Joseph Gomes, Divisional Coordinator of APRA, Abdul Karim Kim, Member Secretary of Sylhet Poribesh Andolon, Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal, Member Secretary of Habiganj Poribesh Andolon, ASP of Moulavibazar (Kulaura Circle), Vice Chairman of Kulaura Upazilla, Local UP Chairman and the Headmen of different Khasi Pinji.



Thousands of Khasi and plain-land people participated the gathering ignoring tremendous hot and sunny day at Zhimai. After serving lunch to all participants, the meeting ended at 2pm.



Some national and local dailies including satellite channel covered the news of this mega event.

The enthusiasm and hope of the people increased significantly after the program but the tea-garden authorities and tree-gravers have become desperate to keep their control over the Khasi and trees by

threatening in various ways showing muscle, filing false cases and blocking the roads. Therefore the responsibilities of APRA & BAPA have also increased to put more concentration and efforts towards achieving the ultimate goal of saving Indigenous Environment in Sylhet Division.