

Victory after a Long Fight to Save Bangladeshi Indigenous Villages and Thousands of Trees

Two years ago, four thousand trees were allowed to be chopped down at Khegurichora Area of Sreemangal District, Moulavibazar, Bangladesh. Nahar Tea Estate got that permission and started cutting down trees that were mostly located at several Khasi Punjis (indigenous villages).

This created not only ecological damage, but threatened the very existence of the Khasis of Aslom punji, Kailin Punji, Nakfool Punji and Rom Punji. Trees in Khasi Punjis are the basic requirement for Pan cultivation which is their only livelihood. The Khasis living there are still deprived of their land-rights. The movement for saving the Indigenous Environment there, led by APRA {Adibasi Poribesh Roskhya Andolon (Save Indigenous Environment Movement)} of BAPA {Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bangladesh Environment Movement)}, was a big fight against the evil forces of this society and state-mechanism. There were a number of protest events locally, regionally and nationally along with strong advocacy at different levels that included embassies, ministries and parliament.

Government conducted at least two formal inquires to review the decision, ultimately revoking the permission, although 1200 trees had already been chopped down. On 5th January 2010, the Ministry of Environment ordered the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Moulavibazar District to settle the dispute sitting together with BAPA, Khasi leaders and Tea Estate Authority.

Fr. Joseph Gomes, Regional Coordinator of APRA and I were able to address the meeting on 6th January 2010 at Moulavibazar after just one day of the International Conference on the Bangladesh Environment (ICBEN-2010) hosted by us on 3-4 January 2010 in Dhaka. Although the meeting was held on very short notice, we were able to offer our strong arguments regarding the ecological and human-rights impacts.

The meeting decided that not a single tree will be allowed to cut from any Khasi Punji further from that area.

It is a big victory after a long fight that saved many indigenous villages and thousands of trees at the Tripura Boarder in Bangladesh.

Thanks to all on behalf of APRA and BAPA who contributed their valuable efforts and inspiration to make this movement a success.

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