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Last six Marma families evicted

Land grabber plans to build 5-star hotel, resort in Bandarban Marma Para



Influential people built this structure after ousting six families belonging to ethnic Marma community from their ancestral land at Saingya Marma Para in Bandarban Sadar upazila in January this year.

Sanjoy Kumar Barua

The indigenous communities of Bandarban live on in fear as their ancestral land continues to be grabbed by influential people.

Once inhabited by 42 families, the Saingya Marma Para of Bandarban in southeast Bangladesh has been subject to land grabbing for long. There were only six families remaining till middle of last year when they began receiving death threats to leave their homes and their government-allocated jhum lands.



The last of the inhabitants finally moved out in January, said Paincha Thoai Marma, headman of the affected para. He has currently taken shelter at his father-in-law's house at Dalu para.

The land and approximately 100 acres of jhum land are now under the control of Jasim Uddin Mantu, chairman of Sylvan Wye Resort and Spa Ltd, he added.

“When we protested, the grabbers lodged a false case with Bandarban Police Station. Later, the police picked up me and my son.”

The other victims include the families of Mong Kya Prue, Ani Mong, Mong Yoi, Mong Ba U and Fow Sha Ching, said the headman. They are now dispersed and have taken shelter in Joutokamar Para, TNT and Bakichhara area, about 12 to 15 kilometres away from their homes, he added.

“We are helpless; they forced us to leave our ancestral land. We want our land back.”

According to the Hill District Council Act 1989 and Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1900, no land shall be leased out, settled with, purchased, sold, or transferred without prior approval of the department concerned.

Since the 1997 signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts peace agreement, around 180 indigenous families have been evicted from their ancestral land in Bandarban, grabbed by Bangalee settlers, private rubber plantation owners and horticulturists, said Jumlian Amlai, president of Parbatya Chattagram Forest and Land Rights Protection Movement, Bandarban Chapter.



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A handful of villages together are called a Mouza in Bandarban, each headed by a government appointed headman. There are 109 mouzas in the hill district.

The job of the headman is to look after the land and assign the indigenous people, who depend on jhum cultivation and forest resources for their livelihood in hills.

Refuting the allegation, Jasim, also younger brother of lawmaker Nazrul Islam Chowdhury of Chittagong-14, said he bought around 150 acres of land in the Bandarban Mouza.

“I bought the lands to build a five-star hotel,” said Jasim.

“I gave a good sum of money to the six indigenous families while they transferred their land to me willingly,” he claimed.

On receiving payment for the land, Mong Ba U, one of the victims, said, “I borrowed money from Jasim on several occasions for my wife's treatment. But I am not able to repay him.”

He took money three to four times, ranging between Tk 20,000 and Tk 40,000, he added.

The Daily Star also obtained a document that shows that Jasim donated 0.1837 acres of this grabbed land to an individual -- Bandarban Superintendent of Police Md Jaker Hossain Majumdar.

When asked, Jaker said, “We only took the land to set up a police camp in the area.”

Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council member KS Mong Marma said, “Our investigation is going on. Primarily, we found the involvement of local leaders in this case.”

The grabbers will not stop unless the authorities concerned take stern action, he added.

Bohmong chief and headman of Bandarban Mouza U Chaw Prue refused to comment in this regard.

Aung Jai Khyang, head clerk of Bohmong office, said, "Jasim misguided us and grabbed the land."

Some 22 Tripura families of Saingya Tripura Para are also facing threat near the Saingya Marma Para area, said Birendro Tripura, headman of Saingya Tripura Para.



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