



**Torture to death  
of a prominent  
tribal leader,  
Mr Choles Ritchil  
of Bangladesh**

**An Appeal to the Heads of Delegations  
of the 14th SAARC Summit**

**ASIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**



## I. An appeal for justice

Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) urges the heads of the delegations (members and observers) participating in the 14th Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to intervene against torture to death of prominent tribal leader, Mr Choles Ritchil in the custody of the joint forces<sup>1</sup> of Bangladesh stationed at Khakraid under Modhupur Police Station, Tangail District on 18 March 2007. Mr Ritchil was tortured to death, among others, by Warrant Officer Jamal, 2nd Lt. Minhaj, and Sergeant Shahadat under the instructions of Major Toufiq Elahi of Khakraid army camp.

Mr Ritchil's dead body, which was handed over to the family members on 19 March 2007, bore torture marks like eyes plucked, testicles removed, anus mutilated, two hand palms smashed, nails of 3 fingers of the right hand removed etc.

Though deceased Ritchil's wife, Sandha

Rani Simsang, filed a complaint with the Modhupur Police Station on 20 March 2007, no First Information Report (FIR) has been registered as of 2 April 2007. Many NGOs in Bangladesh such as *Ain o Salis Kendro*, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Adhikar, Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB), Centre for Sustainable Development (CFSD), Action Aid and *Nijerakori* demanded registration of the FIR. But, because of the fear of reprisals from the joint forces, no further action has so far taken to approach the judiciary against the police for their failure to register the FIR.

The caretaker government of Bangladesh has failed to take appropriate actions against the culprits.

## II. Background on repression against indigenous Garos and the role of Choles Ritchil



Mr Choles Ritchil comes from Beribaid village under Modhupur Upozila under Tangail District. Beribaid village is one of the oldest villages,

established over 300 years ago. It presently has 82 Garo families with a population of 520 persons. Mr Ritchil was one of the prominent leaders of the Garo indigenous people in the area.

In 2003, the government of Bangladesh announced a plan to create an Eco-Park in Modhupur forest and started erecting

a wall around 3,000 acres of Modhupur forest without seeking the consent of the Garo people living in the area. About 25,000 indigenous Garo people faced eviction because of the Eco-Park. On 3 January 2004, thousands of Garo people staged a peaceful protest against the Eco-Park. At Jalabada village, the police and the forest guards resorted to indiscriminate firing, killing one Garo, Piren Snal on the spot and injuring 25 others including women and children.<sup>2</sup>

After the incident of 3 January 2004, the Forest Department postponed implementation of the Eco-Park. But the officials subsequently filed more than 20 false against the indigenous Garos.<sup>3</sup> Mr Choles Ritchil who was one of prominent indigenous leaders to oppose the Eco-Park, was implicated in all these false cases.

After the declaration of the state of emergency on 11 January 2007, the Forest Department officials restarted the construction of the controversial boundary wall for the Eco-Park. Indigenous Garos under the leadership of Mr Choles Ritchil again protested. The Forest Department had to suspend the construction of the wall but this had further enraged the Forest Department officials.

On 10 February 2007, the Joint Forces personnel including Warrant Officer Jamal, 2nd Lt. Minhaj, Sergeant Shahadat raided Beribaid village in search of Mr Choles Ritchil. Not finding Mr Ritchil, the Joint Forces personnel detained Mr Protab Jamble, Mr Biswajit Simsang, 10th grade student (son of Mr Ritchil), Mr. Prem Kumar Sangma, 10th grade student, Mr Nosil Ritchil, a relative of Mr Ritchil and Nokul Chandra Burman (41) working at Choles Ritchil's house. All of

them were beaten mercilessly and received medical treatment at Health Complex, Modhupur from 11 to 13 February 2007.

### III. Arrest of Mr Choles Ritchil on 18 March 2007

At about 1:30 pm on 18 March 2007, Mr Choles Ritchil was arrested by a group of 6 plainclothes personnel belonging to the Joint Forces at Kalibari under Muktagacha Upozila. Mr Ritchil was coming from Mymensingh town in a microbus accompanied by 3 indigenous persons namely Mr Piren Simsang, Mr Tuhin Hadima and Mr Protab Jamble.

Following their arrest, the Joint Forces personnel made telephone calls and about 40 law enforcement personnel in two lorries arrived. The security forces took them to nearby Khakraid army camp at about 2:00pm.

In the army camp, while Mr Choles Ritchil and Mr Protab Jamble were in kept one room, Mr Piren Simsang and Mr Tuhin Hadima were taken to another room.

### IV. Torture to death of Mr Choles Ritchil

According to the eye-witnesses (names withheld for security reasons), Mr Choles Ritchil was tied to the grill of a window and mercilessly beaten by nine law enforcement personnel. At one stage Major Toufic Elahi entered the room and ordered the junior officers "to size up Choles" and torture began again.

The Joint Forces personnel used pliers to

press the testicles of Mr Choles Ritchil and put needle on his fingers. They poured hot water into his nostrils. He was then hanged upside down and brutally tortured. He vomited blood again and again and fainted many times. At one point of time, one physician in uniform accompanied by Mojoy Toufic Elahi came into the room. Mr Choles Ritchil was taken out of the army camp.

Some of those who tortured Mr Chales Ritchil were identified as Warrant Officer Jamal, 2nd Lt. Minhaj, Sergeant Shahadat and Major Toufiq Elahi.

All other detainees i.e. Mr Protab Jamble, Mr Piren Simsang and Mr Tuhin Hadima too were tortured. While Mr Piren Simsang and Mr Tuhin Hadima were released at about 5 pm on 18 March 2007, Mr Protab Jamble was released from Khakraid army camp at about 10 pm on the same day, as he was given medical treatment because of severe torture.

## V. Evidence of torture

Mr Ritchil's dead body was handed over by the Superintendent of Police (officiating) of Tangail District and the Assistant Superintendent of Police of Gopalpur Circle of Tangail District to Ms. Jita Ritchil (aunt of Mr Ritchil), and Kholes Ritchil (elder brother of Mr Choles Ritchil) along with Rev. Father S. Tolentino and other indigenous leaders at about 2:00 pm at the Jalchatra Corpus Christi Church compound on 19 March 2007.

Mr Ritchil's burial took place at Beribaid village at about 1 pm on 20 March 2007.



*Dead body of Mr Choles Ritchil*

Before the burial, as per religious customs, Choles Ritchil's dead body was given a bath. Those who performed the religious bath (name withheld for safety reasons) reported the following torture marks:

“Choles's two eyes plucked, testicles removed, anus mutilated, two hand palms smashed, nails of 3 fingers of the right hand removed, left hand thump finger nail removed, two palms had holes, upper right hand had severe wound, several blood stains on the back part of the body, in both thighs middle part there had been two holes, back part of the body had several black marks, several deep marks of wounds on both lower legs, there had been black marks on feet, no nail on thump of right foot, all fingers of two hands were broken.”

## VI. Failure to register First Information Report

Mr Choles Ritchil is survived by his wife Sandha Rani Simsang (28), son

Biswajit Simsang (15) and three daughters: Priyanka Simsang (13), Konka Simsang (10) and Tiromoni Simsang (6).

On 20 March 2007, Choles Ritchil's wife Sandha Simsang filed a complaint at the Modhupur Police Station but as of 2 April 2007, Modhupur Police station has not registered any case.

Many prominent NGOs in Bangladesh such as *Ain o Salis Kendro* (ASK), Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Adhikar, Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB), Centre for Sustainable Development (CFSD), Action Aid and *Nijerakori* demanded registration of the FIR. However, as of 2 April 2007, no further action has been taken to approach the judiciary against the police for their failure to register the FIR. ACHR believes that the atmosphere of fear created by the security forces who act as law unto themselves prevails over.

## VII. Request for action

It is unfortunate that an appeal has to be made to the heads of the delegations participating in the 14th SAARC Summit to request registration of a First Information Report against the torture to death of a prominent tribal leader to allow the law to take its own course. The registration of an FIR is the first step towards ensuring justice.

If the care-taker government of Bangladesh is serious about respect for human rights, it must take appropriate actions against such blatant violations of

the right to life. ACHR urges the heads of delegations of the 14th SAARC Summit to intervene with the delegation of the government of Bangladesh to:

- Order a judicial inquiry into the killing of Mr Choles Ritchil;
- Order registration of the First Information Report by the Madhupur Police Station;
- Order suspension of the Warrant Officer Jamal, 2nd Lt. Minhaj, Sergeant Shahadat, Major Toufiq Elahi and other security personnel of Khakraid army camp to ensure a free and fair inquiry;
- Order exhumation of the dead body of Choles Ritchil for autopsy by independent panel of doctors;
- Award compensation of Taka 10 lakhs (one million) to the family of the victim;
- Provide safety and security to Ms Sandha Rani Simsang and her family members and other witnesses against intimidation by the Joint Forces; and
- Cancel the Eco-park project in Madhupur forest.

## Endnotes:

1. Joint forces consist of Bangladesh army, police and other para-military forces.
2. Indigenous World 2005, International Work group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, Denmark
3. Indigenous World 2006, International Work group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, Denmark.

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