

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

Co-Chairpersons:
Sultana Kamal, Lord Eric Awebury, Ida Nicolaisen
Members:
Shapan Adnan, Lars-Anders Baer
Victoria Tauli Corpuz, Sara Hossain
Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Lee Swepston
Robert Evans, Hideaki Uemura

24 April 2011

To
The Honorable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Prime Minister's Office
Tejgaon, Dhaka

Subject: Renewed violence in the CHT and the need for implementation of the CHT Accord

Dear Madam,

The CHT Commission has observed with alarm the developments in Ramgarh upazila in Khagrachhari district of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

In the first four months of this year there have already been two major arson attacks in the CHT. During both incidents there have been losses of lives, severe injuries to both Bangalis and Paharis and extensive damage to property. During both incidents there have been allegations that a group of Bangalis in presence of security personnel, set fire to homes of Paharis. There has been some damage also to homes of Bangalis. In the case of the incident on 17 April in Ramgarh, three Bangali men, one Pahari man and a child have allegedly lost their lives. We condemn such killings and demand that the perpetrators of these acts be brought to justice. There have been allegations in the Ramgarh attacks that Paharis who were not concerned with the attacks in Ramgarh and were travelling in public buses were attacked by Bangalis in presence of security forces. There are also allegations that a Pahari man is still missing after these attacks. It is elemental that the people who carried out and abetted this violence be brought to justice and investigations carried out immediately to find any missing persons.

The overriding factor in both the incidents in February and April is the unresolved land disputes. Until and unless the land disputes are settled by the Land Commission these incidents will continue to take place and there will no peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Madam, your government signed the CHT 'Peace' Accord in 1997 and the CHT Commission fully supports this Accord. It is imperative that the government implement all clauses of the Accord in full. The functioning of the Land Commission should be a top priority for the government.

In view of the recent violence we therefore recommend that the government immediately take the following actions:

- a) The government should immediately set up a team to carry out an investigation in a thorough, transparent, independent and impartial manner to probe into the incidents that led up to the attacks on 17 April.

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- b) In the interests of justice, and to prevent land-related conflicts and ethnic tension, the government should issue instructions to all civil, military, and other security personnel to refrain from involving themselves in land-related disputes, which are by law only within the jurisdiction of the Land Commission, courts of law and traditional indigenous authorities.
- c) All persons involved with the killings, arson attacks, carrying out injuries to others, or destroying property should receive exemplary punishment.
- d) The members of the security forces including Border Guards Bangladesh, the members of the Bangladesh Army, and police personnel must be held accountable for allegations, of negligence of duty and complicity, against them.
- e) The government must ensure that proper relief and rehabilitation is provided to all the victims of the violence.

To prevent any further violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts we recommend:

- a) That the government amends the Land Commission Act according to the CHT Accord.
- b) That the present Land Commission Chairman be replaced with a neutral person acceptable to all groups and stakeholders in the CHT.
- c) That the Land Commission, including the new Chairperson, immediately starts resolving land dispute from all over the CHT, after the Act is amended according to the CHT Accord.
- d) That the Land Commission carries out its functions in a transparent and acceptable manner.
- e) That there be an independent judicial inquiry into all previous attacks and the findings be made public. This includes the attacks in February 2011 in Longadu, in February 2010 in Baghailhat and August 2009 in Sajek.
- f) That the government declares a roadmap to implement the CHT Accord within its present term in office to fulfill its Election pledge.

The CHT Commission extends its full support to the Government of Bangladesh in realizing its commitments to the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

On behalf of the CHT Commission

Yours sincerely
Eric Avebury

Eric Avebury
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission

Sincerely yours
Sultana Kamal

Sultana Kamal
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission

Yours Sincerely
Ida Nicolaisen

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cc to:

1. Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, MP, Honorable Deputy Leader of the House & Chairperson, National Committee for Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord.
2. Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
3. Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
4. Mr. Syed Ashraful Islam, MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
5. Mr. Rezaul Karim Hira, MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Land, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
6. Mr. Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, Honourable Chairman, CHT Regional Council, Rangamati.
7. Mr. Dipankar Talukdar MP, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of CHT Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
8. Dr. Hasan Mahmud, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
9. Mr. Promod Mankin, MP, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Cultural, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
10. Mohammad Shah Alam, MP and Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee, Ministry of CHT Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
11. Mr. Jatindra Lal Tripura, MP and Chairman, CHT Task Force on Returnee Refugees and Internally Displaced People, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Khagrachari.
12. Mr. Bir Bahadur, MP and Chairman, CHT Development Board, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Rangamati.
13. Justice Khademul Islam Chowdhury, Chairperson, CHT Land Commission.
14. Mizanur Rahman, Chairman of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).