



CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS COMMISSION

CHTC urges urgent action to address escalating tensions in Bandarban, emphasizes the need for a peaceful resolution, protection of civilians, and calls for action against alleged sponsored proxy conflicts

16 April 2024

The International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC) is deeply concerned about the escalating tensions in Bandarban and their potential impact on regional peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The Commission emphatically calls for the protection of civilians and urges immediate action to tackle the challenges posed by alleged sponsored proxy conflicts. The Commission also calls for concerted efforts to uphold the CHT Accord and facilitate constructive dialogue for sustainable peace.

On April 2nd and 3rd, 2024, the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) carried out a series of bank robberies in Ruma and Thanchi Upazila of Bandarban. They also attacked police forces, bank security guards, and Ansar members, while looting firearms.¹ The CHTC strongly condemns these criminal acts by the KNF, especially since they occurred less than a month after the 2nd round of peace talks held between KNF and the 'Peace Committee', led by Bandarban Hill District Council's Chairman, Kya Shew Hla².

Responding to the KNF's actions, Bangladesh Army Chief General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed visited Bandarban on April 7th, 2024, and announced a military operation against the KNF³. According to the media report, as of April 14, a total of 62 individuals have been arrested during raids against the KNF⁴. However, reports have emerged that many of the arrestees are innocent civilians, including pregnant women, students, teachers, and government employees from the Bawm community⁵. There are also reports of restrictions being imposed on Jumma residents of Ruma, Thanchi, Rwangchari, and Chimbuk, including limits on their rice purchases to a maximum of 5 kilos, aimed at disrupting KNF's supplies⁶. The CHTC strongly denounces the indiscriminate arrests and collective punishment of the entire Bawm community due to the actions of a few KNF members and demands the immediate release and protection of innocent civilians.

¹ <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/8qxp8j3udq>

² <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/341080/knf-peace-committee-holds-2nd-meeting-in>

³ <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/j3v7atblac>

⁴ <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/343971/4-more-knf-suspects-sent-to-jail>

⁵ <https://hillvoice.net/en/54-men-women-of-bawm-villagers-arrested-in-ruma-most-of-them-innocent/>

⁶ <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news-573831>

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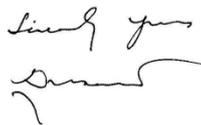
<https://chtcommission.org>
<https://iwgia.org/en/cht>

Additionally, the Bangladesh Student Union claimed in a press statement on April 10th that the KNF's activities were staged to justify the increased presence of security forces in the CHT⁷. There have been even allegations that the creation of KNF is part of a 'divide and rule' policy to maintain unrest in CHT by a vested interest group⁸. Further, reports have surfaced regarding a newly formed armed group in CHT known as the Marma Nationalist Party (MNP), allegedly sponsored by the same vested group that backed the inception of KNF⁹. The CHTC has repeatedly voiced concerns about the support provided to such armed groups by this vested group to hinder the implementation of the CHT Accord and to create unrest in CHT by destabilizing harmony among the indigenous groups¹⁰.

The CHTC is deeply worried about these developments and believes they stem from the prolonged non-implementation of the CHT Accord, even 25 years after its signing. The longer the government delays implementation, the more complex the human rights and political situation in CHT will become. To tackle these issues, the Commission recommends urgent implementation of the following measures:

- The government must identify and take action against vested groups that sponsor armed vigilante groups like KNF and MNP to undermine the implementation of the CHT Accord.
- The government should promptly start implementing the CHT Accord without further delay.
- Security forces must cease collective punishment against Bawm civilians, halt human rights violations, and release innocent civilians immediately.
- The Commission urges KNF to resume peace dialogue with the peace committee, cease criminal activities, and return to normalcy to preserve peace in the CHT.

On behalf of the CHT Commission,



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⁷ https://chtnews.blogspot.com/2024/04/blog-post_17.html

⁸ <https://www.borderlens.com/articles/knf-another-ploy-of-divide-and-rule-in-cht-of-bangladesh/>

⁹ <https://hillvoice.net/en/construction-of-barracks-and-increased-activities-of-army-backed-mog-party-in-rajasthali/>

¹⁰ <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/5325-iwgia-condemns-killing-four-indigenous-leaders-killed-chittagong-hill-tracts.html> and <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/5191-the-international-chittagong-hill-tracts-commission-is-shocked-at-the-death-of-eight-indigenous-bawm-men-and-expresses-deep-concern-at-continued-human-rights-violations-in-the-cht.html>