



CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS COMMISSION

CHT Commission Condemns Attacks on Indigenous Students, Demands Accountability and Action Against Perpetrators and Rising Extremism

17 January 2025

The CHT Commission strongly condemns the brutal and violent attack on Indigenous students and their supporters on January 15, 2025, in Dhaka¹. Furthermore, when a group under the banner “Aggrieved Student-Masses” organized a march on January 16, 2025, to protest the attack, the police responded with excessive force, including baton charges, water cannons, and sound grenades to disperse them². We condemn both incidents and urgently demand justice, accountability for the perpetrators, proper medical treatment for the injured, and effective measures to prevent such occurrences in the future.

The Commission believes attack on the Indigenous students is not an isolated incident but part of a systemic culture of impunity that exists in the CHT and for Indigenous Peoples across Bangladesh, which has enabled the rise of extreme fundamentalist groups throughout the country. The Commission forewarns the Interim Government that if it fails to take immediate steps to curb the rise of these extremist forces, the consequences will extend beyond harm to Indigenous Peoples.

This malicious force will also destabilize the government itself and undermine its promised vision of a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh. For instance, this same group, operating under the banner ‘Students for Sovereignty,’ which attacked the Indigenous students and their Bengali counterparts, also protested when the Honourable Chief Advisor Dr. Yunus addressed the nation and delivered

¹ Media report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/removal-word-ativasi-indigenous-group-attacked-nctb-20-hurt-3799851>

² <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/cops-disperse-student-march-water-cannons-sound-grenades-3800616>

a live televised speech on August 25, 2024. During his speech, he used the term 'Indigenous,' which they labeled as anti-state, demanding either an apology or his resignation.

Recently, for the 2025-2026 textbook for Classes 9 and 10, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) created an artwork symbolizing the diversity of Bangladesh. The artwork depicted a tree with leaves labeled as Indigenous, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist, sending a message that no leaves be removed to promote a unified and diverse Bangladesh. However, in the revised versions of the book, under pressure from Bengali settler groups and extremist organizations, NCTB ironically removed the artwork, undermining its own message³. In response, on January 15, 2025, the Indigenous Students group organized a peaceful demonstration in front of the NCTB office in Motijheel, Dhaka. However, during the protest, they were violently attacked and severely injured by extremists and Bengali settler groups.

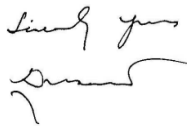
Since Bangladesh's independence, numerous gross human rights violations have occurred in the CHT. However, this marks the first time in the nation's history that Indigenous activists have been attacked so brutally in the capital city. Even during military regimes, Dhaka served as a relatively safer space for Indigenous activists and others to express themselves freely and hold peaceful demonstrations. It is both extremely disappointing and alarming that such an attack took place under the current Interim Government, which has pledged to create a new, inclusive, democratic, and diverse Bangladesh. However, unfortunately, this is not surprising given how the Interim Government has handled CHT-related issues⁴ since assuming power, enabling the rise of settler forces. After assuming power, this same government appointed members from settler organizations—who actively oppose the CHT Accord and peacebuilding efforts—to the three Hill District Councils. By further removing the word “Indigenous” from the textbook at their request, the government signaled that these forces could act with impunity. This recent attack on Indigenous advocates and their supporters in broad daylight, in the presence of numerous media outlets, is a direct consequence of this tacit encouragement.

³ <https://www.jagonews24.com/en/education/news/79764>

⁴ For instances, please see: <https://iwgia.org/en/bangladesh/5566>, <https://iwgia.org/en/bangladesh/5562>, <https://iwgia.org/en/bangladesh/5605>,

The CHT Commission welcomes the recent statement from the Chief Advisor condemning the attack on Indigenous students and his assurance of taking action⁵. We further urge the Interim Government to take swift and decisive action to curb the influence of extremist forces and settler groups, safeguard the rights and security of Indigenous Peoples both within and beyond the CHT, and honor its commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh. Failure to act promptly risks empowering these groups further, exacerbating societal divisions, and dishonoring the sacrifices of the martyrs of the July 2024 movement, who shed their blood for the vision of a fascism-free, democratic Bangladesh.

On behalf of the CHT Commission,



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