

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Need for Transparent, Independent Inquiry into Abuses in Chittagong Hill Tracts

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(New York) The [Bangladesh](#) authorities should immediately conduct an independent and transparent investigation into the death in custody of an Indigenous political activist, Human Rights Watch said today. Any officers found responsible for Nabayan Chakma Milons torture and death should be held accountable.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, an independent rights group in the region, said that soldiers detained Milon in Dighinala sub-district on March 15, 2022, at 3:30 a.m. while he was recovering from a medical procedure. Witnesses saw the soldiers beating and kicking Milon for over an hour until he was half dead, barely conscious, and appearing to have broken limbs. The soldiers then took him away in a military vehicle. Nearly four hours later, soldiers brought Milon to Dighinala Upazila Hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Nabayan Chakma Milons tragic death is just the most recent case in a pattern of abuses by the Bangladesh military in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, said [Brad Adams](#), Asia director at Human Rights Watch. The authorities should immediately open an independent and transparent investigation into Milons death as well as other cases of military abuse in the CHT that the government has persistently ignored.

Milon was a member of the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF), an ethnic political party with some armed factions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The party was formed in 1998 by Indigenous groups that were dissatisfied with the terms of the 1997 Peace Accords signed between the Bangladesh government and the armed insurgent group Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), ending [a twenty-year conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts](#) over Indigenous autonomy and land rights. Under [the 1997 Peace Accords](#), the Bangladesh government committed to military withdrawals and transfer of authority to representative Hill District Councils, including over local police, land management, and environmental protection.

The 1997 peace agreement has never been fully carried out. Nearly 25 years later, much of the region remains under military occupation, and most of the commitments laid out in the accord have yet to be realized. Instead, Indigenous rights groups in the Hill Tracts say that the military presence has increased in recent years.

A witness whose name is withheld for his protection told activists that the soldiers took turns beating Milon in an effort to get the password to his computer. The witness told activists that the soldiers repeatedly kicked Milon on his thighs and testicles and beat him with a wooden baton. When he couldnt stand up, they threw water on him, he said. Eventually Milon lost consciousness, at which point the soldiers carried his body out on their shoulders. He was almost dead at that time, he said.

Another witness said that the soldiers had tied up Milons arms and legs and were beating him with sticks and guns: They were kicking him like a football with their boots, beating him up with sticks. His arms and legs were broken; he was half-dead.

Thorough investigations into abuses against Indigenous activists in the Hill Tracts are rare, and those responsible are almost never held to account. Three years after the disappearance of [Michael Chakma](#), an Indigenous rights activist, the government has ignored appeals from his family, as well as inquiries from [the High Court](#), [the National Human Rights Commission](#), and [the United Nations Committee against Torture](#). In January 2020, the police finally responded to an order from the High Court by simply stating that they could not find anybody named Michael Chakma in any prisons in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh military and other branches of law enforcement commit widespread abuses against Indigenous people living in the Hill Tracts, including [extrajudicial killings](#), [enforced disappearances](#), [sexual violence](#), and [land-grabbing](#), with little redress.

Nearly 25 years after the signing of the Peace Accords, the Bangladesh government has so far been correct in assuming the international community will ignore abuses in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Adams said. The Bangladesh military should not be allowed to continue to

rape, torture, and kill Indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts with impunity.

A Decade of Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh

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