

Class-9,10 textbooks: TIB worried over exclusion of the word 'indigenous'

CHT Commission slams attacks on students

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed concern over the National Curriculum and Textbook Board's (NCTB) removal of the word "indigenous" from the graffiti on the back cover of textbooks for grades 9 and 10.

In a statement issued yesterday, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said that this decision, along with subsequent attacks on peacefully protesting indigenous groups, betrays the ideals and aspirations of an equitable and discrimination-free Bangladesh, which was born from the bloodshed and sacrifices of student and public movements.



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"Through this decision, NCTB has shown that despite the fall of 15 years of authoritarian rule, the practice of authoritarianism within this institution persists. Legitimate questions arise as to whether NCTB is actively conspiring to uphold the agenda of fallen authoritarianism," TIB executive director said.

Iftekharuzzaman added that the NCTB, along with those opposing the self-identification of indigenous communities as "indigenous" and those who devised the bizarre theory that the term "indigenous" cannot be used in Bangladesh, is continuing the legacy of authoritarian governments.

TIB has called for accountability from the NCTB and urged the organisation to be restructured to eliminate authoritarian influences.

TIB also urged the government to clarify its position on recognising indigenous communities' self-identity as "indigenous" and ensuring their equal rights.

'NOT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT'

Meanwhile, the CHT Commission yesterday condemned the attack on indigenous students and their supporters on January 15 in Dhaka.

In a joint statement signed by the commission's co-chairs, Sultana Kamal, Elsa Stamatopoulou, and Myrna Cunningham Kain, it said that when a group under the banner "Aggrieved Student-Masses" organised a march on January 16 to protest the attack, the police responded with excessive force, including baton charges, water cannons, and sound grenades to disperse them.

"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 statement said.

The commission believes the attack on 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 warns 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 destabilise the government itself and undermine its promised vision of a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh," the statement read.

The commission urged the 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 honour its commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh.

TORCH PROCESSION

Members of Democratic Rights Committee, Left Democratic Alliance, and indigenous communities yesterday staged a demonstration at Dhaka University protesting Wednesday's assault on students and the subsequent use of excessive force on the protesters by police the following day.

Angkan Chakma, president of the Hill Students' Council, Abdullah Kafi, a leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, researcher Mahtab Uddin, author and researcher Maha Mirza, and Masud Imran Manna, a teacher at Jahangirnagar University, and eminent economist Anu Muhammad addressed the programme.

"During and after the July uprising, our youths painted colourful graffiti that depicted their dream of a discrimination-free, new Bangladesh. They dreamed of a Bangladesh where there would be no place for autocracy and discrimination and that Bangladesh would be full of people who would embrace diversity. However, we do not see any similarity between that dream and the reality nowadays," said Professor Anu Muhammad.

Author and researcher Maha Mirza said, "In this country, indigenous people have been brutally assaulted when they were speaking for their rights. Dhaka's streets have been stained by blood. We did not want this Bangladesh, so we must restart our struggle."

Afterwards, demonstrators brought out a torch procession from DU campus.