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6.3.2. Communal violence

As noted by The Diplomat there has been a ‘long-standing pattern of violence and discrimination against indigenous communities’ in the CHT (see section 6.3.), and there is deep mistrust between indigenous people and Bengalis in the area.595 On 18 September 2024, a young Bengali man, accused of stealing a motorcycle, was beaten to death by a mob in Khagrachhari Sadar, which sparked intercommunal violence between indigenous people and Bengalis in the districts of Rangamati and Khagrachari.596 Over the two following days597 at least four indigenous people were reportedly killed, 75 injured, and 142 properties looted, destroyed and torched, including Buddhist temples598 and homes and business properties of indigenous people.599 According to Minority Rights Group (MRG), indigenous families fled and took shelter in the forest.600 On 19 September 2024, police reportedly opened fire against a group of indigenous students blocking the road Khagrachari–Panchari, protesting against the violence of the previous day. Police fire killed two students and injured nine.601 On 20 September 2024, indigenous people held a protest march in Rangamati Sadar,602 and they were attacked by Bengalis.603 One indigenous person was killed, and properties of indigenous people were set of fire, including a Buddhist temple,604 the CHT Regional Council’s office,605 and at least 50 shops.606 IWGIA accused the military of launching organised attacks with Bengalis on 19–20 September 2024, targeting indigenous people. The organisation further accused the police of not intervening to protect indigenous people or their properties during communal violence,607 and that Bengali settlers use incidents such as the mob beating on 18 September 2024, as ‘a pretext to unleash violence against the indigenous population’, often ‘with the express or tacit support of the nearly 100% Bengali security personnel.’ IWGIA also reported on the military searching the phones of indigenous people in Rangamati, deleting footage of the attacks, and beating those having such records.608 This information could not be corroborated within the time constraints of drafting this report. In September 2024, the CHT Commission also documented a gang rape of an indigenous woman, and two attempted rapes of an indigenous woman and an eight-year old indigenous girl, by Bengalis.609

‘Heavy law enforcement’ was reportedly deployed in the CHT following these events,610 and the local administration imposed Section 144611 in Rangamati and Khagrachari612 – restricting unlawful assemblies of four or more persons.613 The Business Standard reported on ‘a 72-hour blockade of roads and waterways’ in all districts of the CHT, and disruptions of the mobile network and fixed broadband internet.614 On 1 October 2024, intercommunal violence broke out again after a mob killed a teacher accused of raping an indigenous girl.615 Indigenous properties were torched and vandalised.616 According to the Daily Star, Section 144 was

withdrawn on 2 October 2024 ‘as tension eased’. Although things seemed to be ‘back to normalcy’ at a local bazaar in Khagrachhari, only Bengali traders were present on 3 October 2024.617 Moreover, on 6 October 2024, the Buddhist community cancelled a significant annual ceremony, Kathin Chibor Dan, due to security concerns. Several Buddhist temples and statues had been vandalised, and donation boxes looted during the violence.618

On Christmas eve, 24 December 2024, 17 houses of the Christian Tripura community in Bandarban were set on fire.619 The interim government condemned the attack, and the local police stated that they had arrested four suspects on 26 December 2024.620 A land dispute was reportedly the motive behind the attack,621 although the International CHT Commission stated that the perpetrators, allegedly connected to a former IGP, had made repeated attempts to evict Tripura families by threats, coercion and violence. It further highlighted the continuing influence of former government affiliates,622 which TIB has also reported on.623

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