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CHT accord signed within purview of Constitution: PM

UNESCO peace award to Hasina a glory to the nation: President

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed on Friday said that for greater interest of the country and to establish peace, some concessions had been given in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Agreement, reports UNB.

Addressing a reception given in honour of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Bangabhaban for receiving the UNESCO Peace Award, he spoke of "ample similarity" between the problems in the CHT and the Northern Ireland, where many quarters still oppose the agreement.

The President said: "There is ample similarity between the problems in the Northern Ireland and the Chittagong Hill Tracts and till on Friday there have been many quarters who oppose the Good Friday Agreement. Specially, the IRA is yet to surrender all its arms as per agreement."

"However, this is likely to be solved through discussions. The British government had to give some concession to reach the agreement." He added: "For greater interest of the country and to establish peace some concessions had been given in our CHT agreement too."

President Shahabuddin termed the receipt of UNESCO peace award by Sheikh Hasina "a glory

to the nation."

There would be no fear or confusion in anybody's mind if the Land Commission completes its job in the CHT as soon as possible, he said.

"The area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is 5,500 square mile but its population did not cross 10 lacs including tribal and non-tribal people. It would be possible to rehabilitate everybody living there if the huge area is developed."

In his speech, the President re-

ferred to the Prime Minister's assurance to all the tribal and non-tribal people on February 10, 1998, the day the armed members of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity had surrendered in Khagrachhari, that they would be rehabilitated in the area.

"She (Hasina) has been given the Felix Houphouet-Boigny peace prize by the UNESCO for the steps to achieve peace in the region," he said.

Referring to the law passed by

Parliament to establish the CHT Regional Council and amendments in the laws relating to the three Hill District councils, the President said anyone could challenge any part of the three laws if it is contrary to the country's Constitution.

"However, as the laws concerning the three hill districts are act of Parliament or general law, they could be amended by simple majority," he said. "But in case of any amendment, it is

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desirable through consensus after discussion with every quarter."

President Shahabuddin said there might be reasons to oppose any portion of these laws, "but those could be resolved through discussion."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also addressed the reception given in her honour by the President.

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, Chief Justice Mostafa Kamal, former Chief of Caretaker Government Justice Habibur Rahman, Justice Kamaluddin Hossain, cabinet members, Parliament members, judges of the Supreme Court and High Court, diplomats, chiefs of three services, editors and high civil and military officials were present.

Another report says: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who was awarded UNESCO Peace Prize said the uniqueness of CHT accord is that it was done within the purview of the Constitution and without mediation by any third party.

"What we did, did within the ambit of the Constitution and without any mediation we have implemented it," she told a cutting-edge audience at a reception accorded to her by President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed at Darbar Hall of Bangabhaban on Friday afternoon.

Hasina billed the CHT peace accord unique compared with other peace deals in the world and tribal guerillas surrendered their arms and all refugees returned to their homesteads with the signing of the agreement.

The peace agreement, she said eloquently speaks to the motto "We don't want war, we want peace, we don't want conflict, we want understanding."

She said people of Bangladesh believe in peace as they have seen the grim face of war and dictatorial rule that plagued the country in the past.

Hasina underscored peace as a prerequisite to any development

and said without peace and stability a developed nation is not possible.

In an oblique reference to the opposition role, Hasina said: "if we could work unitedly, we would be able to build Bangladesh as a prosperous and economically developed nation."

Giving a brief background of the signing of the peace accord on December 2, 1997, the Prime Minister said the previous BNP government had formed a committee but could not achieve success. While in the opposition, Awami League had formed a cell and identified the nature of the hill-tracts problem as political and suggested a political solution.

Hasina said after assuming power, a committee was formed, which worked with all sincerity and scored success in a spirit of understanding and accommodation.

Referring to her government's plan to meet the challenges of the new millennium, the Prime Minister said: "We have our vision to turn Bangladesh into a prosperous country in the new century with our limited resources and myriad problems."

She said the crucial problem before the nation is poverty and "We must win the fight against it."

The Prime Minister made her promise that she would continue to devote herself to the service of humanity and the nation as people entrusted her with onerous responsibilities.

She thanked President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed for accord- ing her reception for winning the UNESCO Peace Prize.