

FEDERATION OF TRIBAL COUNCIL OF NICOBAR

6th, December 2007

To,

Chief Secretary,
Andaman & Nicobar Islands
Port Blair.

Sub: Grant of Autonomous District/region status to the Nicobar Islands as per the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Respected Sir,

The Central Nicobar Islands are primarily inhabited by the indigenous Nicobari community for over 2,000 years. Within independent India, the Nicobarese maintained rights to their land and have been governed by their traditional system of governance and customary laws, particularly concerning internal community matters. There is a system of elected Tribal Councils, comprising of village captains (chiefs) who are responsible for maintaining internal peace but we feel that we are not taken up for full consultation by the administration for our all round development. This system has functioned for over a century, with varying levels of governmental interventions.

The Administration has played a crucial role in providing a supporting framework for delivering welfare programmes as perceived by the officials. In the past years, the community has felt less empowered to negotiate their future, particularly the control over their resources and land. There has been a gradual infiltration of non-indigenous (illegal) on our islands leading to marginalisation of the Nicobarese. Consequently, this is threatening not only our economy, but our very way of life and culture.

It has been a long standing demand of the Nicobarese to bring the Central Nicobar Islands within the framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (as is applicable in the tribal areas of Northeast India). The existing Tribal Councils in the Nicobars provides a good foundation to restructure itself according to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. Furthermore, it is an ideal time to initiate this process since the Nicobarese are determined to direct their future in the face of present external influences that threaten our very existence. Recently, the Tsunami has shown that the Nicobarese need a firm control over their internal and external dynamics since there are emerging issues concerning the restructuring of our socio-economic organisation and protection of our lands from outsiders. With respect to our culture and our island way of life, we need to make our own decisions concerning our development in a sustainable and ecologically friendly way.