

FOCUS

Is Peace Essential in CHT?

by Mohammed Farashuddin

Tribal areas are, in general, treated on special basis everywhere and always. Such special treatment extends to political, administrative and economic management issues.

THE Peace Accord signed on December 2, 1997 by Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah MP on behalf of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Mr Jotirindro Bodhipriyo Larma (Shanto Larma) on behalf of the Parbata Chittagong Jono Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) has attracted significant global attention. And the Arms Surrender Ceremony on February 10, witnessed by a jovial and dancing crowd of more than thirty thousand *pahtaris* and *Bangalis*, has aroused optimism within the country about the inevitability of peace in Chittagong Hill Tracts after more than two decades of bloodshed and fratricidal killings. But why is peace necessary at all?

In order to understand the CHT issue in proper perspective, it may be necessary to briefly look at its genesis. CHT area now comprising of three districts constitutes about a tenth of the land area of Bangladesh. The land is poor with mineral prospects and is already growing useful agro-based industrial raw materials such as cashew nut and rubber. There is excellent prospect of tourism in the CHT area. Timber is plenty and of superior quality. Pineapples which are big and sweet hold out prospect for export quality jam/jelly. Several tribes inhibit the CHT area predominant of which are the Chakmas but there are other tribes of significant numbers.

The hills people are known to be peace-loving and have a very rich cultural heritage. They are a hard working lot. The hills people know how to love and respect but they do so only in respect of real good people. Late Mr L R Khan, Late Mr Abdul Kader and Mr Ali Haider Khan who served the CHT people very well in the past are loved, adored and remembered fondly. What then led to the conflict? Is it only due to settlement of the non-hilly people in the CHT area? A historical look at it may be useful.

1947-1971

There is a suspicion that the CHT tribes did not fully coop-

erate in the creation of Pakistan. Consequently the rulers of Pakistan took an unkind attitude without really trying to understand the difficulties, problems and expectations of this minority people. Neither was there any specific effort in the so-called national integration. Instead, the area was filled up with an atmosphere of mistrust; intelligence agencies particularly of the ISI type undertook intensive missions and operations. Bloodshed and killings were common. Many plainland inhabitants started settling in the hill area. Kaptai Dam was created and a large number of hills people were evicted from their ancestral land without compensation. Settlers occupied lands in and around the Kaptai Lake area. 'Outsiders' and law enforcing personnel were accused of misconduct against the hills people and their culture. Many left the country and took shelter in India.

1971-1975

With the establishment of a secular, democratic and socialist Bangladesh, the CHT population expected a much better deal. Although they did not vote for the Awami League, they felt comfortable with the new government. Raja Tribib Roy, the elected MP of the hills people went over to Pakistan, got a minister level job first and then an ambassadorial position; he joined the forces of vilification against Bangladesh. The Father of the Nation made a failed attempt by sending Binita Roy to bring back Tridip Roy to Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister although appreciative of the predicaments of the hills people did not agree to two of their four main demands. Bangabandhu did not agree to the full autonomy demand of the *pahari* area; nor did he accept the demand for the expulsion of the Bengali settlers. Mujib government, however, accepted to pay adequate compensation against land acquisition for Kaptai Dam project and agreed to take back and grant clemency to those who migrated to the nearby Tippera district

and elsewhere. Those who take the jokingly exhortation of Sheikh Mujib to Manabendra Narayan Larma, the dominant tribal leader and MP to become Bengali would do well to recall the fruitful negotiations the Mujib government had with the tribesmen. Following intense, engaging and at times heated negotiations protracted over a period of time, there had evolved an agreed framework of a solution of the difficult CHT issue during the 22-24 June 1975 visit of the President of Bangladesh to the Rangamati area.

If I recall the date correctly, on the mid night following June 23, 1975, Manabendra Narayan Larma MP, the acknowledged leader of the hills people agreed with Bangabandhu to (a) denounce the arms conflict, (b) join the government, sign the Constitution and serve the Republic as Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance, (c) give up the demand for the expulsion of the non-local people in exchange for (i) general clemency to the hills people, (ii) return and rehabilitation of those who crossed over to India, (iii) adequate compensation for the acquisition of hills land for the Kaptai Dam project and other projects and (iv) significant development efforts in the CHT area under a regional body.

These were verbal agreements and those of us who had been privileged to witness the nocturnal negotiations, Professor Mohammed Khalid and Mr Subimal Dewan amongst them, would have no hesitation in saying that it is the re-emergence of trust and confidence between Bangabandhu and Manabendra Larma that clinched the issue. But as is well known, after the 1975 assassination of the Father of the Nation, the intrigue and mistrust reappeared in the hills area whose inhabitants were once again been treated as aliens. Even before

the killing of Bangabandhu some quarters in his government tried to undo the agreements prescribing application of force in solving what is essentially a political problem.

1975-1989

This period saw a complete reversal of the bridge of trust and confidence. The CHT issue was seen by the government as a military problem requiring a military solution. On the other hand, the hills people interpreted the new posture as tantamount to ethnic cleansing and escalated the level of hostility. Outmigration increased to a total of 50,000 people. In the armed confrontation, casualties mounted on both sides. There had been internal turmoil within the hills people leading to the assassination of Manabendra Narayan Larma by the forces loyal to Priti Lal Chakma. Tension, destruction and killing rose to such an extent that the Zia government, during its last few weeks in office decided to try the route of political solution again and accordingly released in 1981 Shanto Larma and Chobri Marma towards creating a congenial atmosphere for negotiations.

Negotiations continued throughout the decade of the eighties but so did the conflict, killings, intelligence operations and mud slinging. However, Ershad government in its effort to reach an understanding with the hills people passed Act 19 of 1989 entitled Rangamati Parbatta Zila Shanthi Shorkar Parishad Amd. 1989. This legislation essentially accepted the idea of a local/regional council and dealing with the hills problem simultaneously as both a political and a military matter. However, the misunderstanding and arms conflict kept on increasing.

1991-95

The democratically elected

government which came into power through a credible election under a neutral caretaker government in 1991 seemed to have been genuinely interested in reaching an accord with the hills people. The setting up of a Committee under the Chairmanship of Col (Rtd) Oli Ahmed and inclusion of opposition leaders in it testified to the goodwill of the government. It has been hinted by the knowledgeable quarters that at some stage, the Committee even gestured to consider a Legislative Council — going far beyond the local/regional council agreed to in the Act 19 to 1989. In that context, the 'sell out' cry waged by the main opposition party now is a bit surprising. The efforts to have a Peace Accord with the hills people by the immediate past regime faltered primarily because of mistrust of each other by the two sides. Neither did the government accept the demand to expel the settlers nor did the hills people relax on their demand for autonomy. The political disturbances in the country during 1994 and 1995 also caused disruption in the concentration in negotiations which reportedly had been tantalizingly near completion many times.

1995

The present government accorded high priority to the solution of the CHT issue even before its leaders came into power. In fact, since 1986 when Sheikh Hasina became the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, she indicated a sincere desire to reverse the chain of injustice done to the hills people without undoing the fact of settlement already in place. Thus it was quite natural for the government to have constituted the National Negotiations Committee within a few weeks of its taking oath. And it is to the credit of the Committee that in seven ses-

sions it hammered an honourable agreement which has been acclaimed home and abroad as highly beneficial to the national interest in general and conducive to sustainable human development in particular. It is in a way tragic that the main opposition decided to stay away from the deliberations of the Committee for its wisdom, insight and experience of past negotiations would have certainly made the agreement much more useful.

It is perhaps worthwhile asking as to why Sheikh Hasina government has been able to achieve such a crowning success. Incidentally, many leaders of the stature of world statesmen such as Nelson Mandela and Lord Peter Shore have lauded the CHT Peace Accord as an outstanding success of the present government; these and many other leaders have characterised the accord as a precursor to an era of peace, prosperity and sustained human development for the entire people of Bangladesh including the tribesmen.

The point of departure of the present government's understanding of the CHT problems is an ability to treat the hills people as integral part of the nation with distinctive characteristics of their own. Tribal areas are, in general, treated on special basis everywhere and always. Such special treatment extends to political, administrative and economic management issues. For instance, in Pakistan the tribal areas of NWFP and Baluchistan provinces used to be placed under the administration of a Political Agent rather than a Deputy Commissioner. The special arrangement still persists in which community ownership of land and other resources as well as revenue sharing for meeting all costs including development costs are provided for. Treatment of tribes and other special

people on a non-conventional basis is also in vogue in Australia, New Zealand, Europe and even in the United States. The success of the CHT Accord is being watched very carefully by many other countries for possible replication in their specific situations.

The whole nation has been made aware of the 18-reason objective raised by the main opposition party to the CHT Accord and the government's reply to it. It appears that the opposition bases its objection on three perceived reasons:

(a) Bengali people settled in the CHT area would loose their rights including land ownership.

(b) The hills people may break away from the country as there is too much power vested in the Regional Council; and

(c) The ability of the government to protect its sovereignty in the CHT area would be impaired by the withdrawal of the Defence Forces.

A careful scrutiny of the Accord as well as the government's categorical reply to the 18-point objections clearly negate such possibilities as alleged. The fact that the people of the country have in general received the Treaty as a good faith optimal under the circumstances, arrangement for acquiring peace, the best infrastructure for socio-economic development, bears testimony to the success of the government.

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build a bridge of trust and confidence amongst the aggrieved hills people. The promptness in dealing with the compensation issue would give further reasons to solidify such trust.

The fact that the Prime Minister in her speech on February 10 convincingly reiterated the Accord provision never to expel a non-local settler should also go long way to reassure the common people who fall easy prey to false propaganda. All the canons in the CHT area would reportedly remain in place and only the expensive camps would be closed on a phased basis in order not to compromise on the ability to defend every inch of our sovereign territory. This position should also be made known to the members of the public. As to why the Act 19 of 1989 and its local/regional council were not so objectionable and why the present Accord is modified version with every guarantee of the integrity of the country but allowing an honourable position to a part of the country and its people are questions the objectors would owe to the people to explain.

The public relations media supporting the government does not seem to have been very effective in explaining the various provisions at least in the beginning. Also the political organisation of the ruling party did not live upto a position to effectively reassure the tribes people and the non-locals by explaining the various provisions of the treaty. Of late, the media has played a remarkable role in projecting the treaty in a matter-of-fact manner. The people of this country by and large would like to take advantage of peace towards building up a poverty-free society and all objectively enlightened discussions on the treaty are to be welcome.

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activities remained limited.

Conclusion

Political stability is an essential pre-requisite to effective development while participation of the local community is a pre-condition for sustainable development.

Development Programmes for CHT

The Hill Tracts Development Board was set up in 1976 "for ensuring local participation and decentralised decision making."

Although 60 per cent members of the board were tribal, the decision making authority was vested entirely with the Cabinet Division. The board had an allocation of less than Taka two crores initially. The CHT Board was allotted a sum of Tk 8 crore for 236 development schemes during the 1978-80 Two-Year plan. Tk 13 crore was allocated during the 2nd Five-Year Plan (1980-85) most of which was spent on rehabilitation of the Bengali settlers. A five-year development programme was taken up for the CHT in 1984. A total amount of Tk 261.23 crore was allocated for 19 major projects in the fields of road and tele-communication, electrification, water supply, integrated afforestation, agriculture, education, health, sports, cottage industries, livestock and family planning.

Major allocations during the last BNP government up to 1994 included Block Allocation of Tk 45 crore for Development, block allocation of Tk 7 crore to CHT Development Board, Tk 10.7 crore for Upland Rehabilitation Scheme under the Multi-sector development programme and Tk 35 crore for the Afforestation of the Unclassified State Lands in CHT project of the Ministry of Environment and Forest. A Unisef sponsored project entitled Integrated Community Development Project was run up to 1993 at the cost of Tk 21.16 crore.

The development programmes brought in infrastructural changes in the communication and education sector but failed to generate tangible benefits for the community. There are at present 10 colleges, 79 high schools, 1173 primary schools but the literacy rate still remained at 27 per cent on average which is below the national average. Many roads in the hilly areas remain almost empty of vehicles. Tourism remained at a standstill, land allotment activities has been corruption-laden and agricultural

Several tests were made to explore the gas and other mineral resources since 1964. A 0.03 million cft of gas reserve had then been confirmed. A lull in exploration activities prevailed after Shell had withdrawn in 1984 due to insurrections. Recently, US company UMC has made extensive surveys in the region and signaled bright prospects for possible gas strikes.

During the period of 1965-70 in the then Pakistan, the value added for each taka of investment in the Tourism sector was 4.84 against 1.96 of the manufacturing sector. Justifiably, planners in independent Bangladesh gave most importance to the tourism sector in the planned development of CHT during the first Five-Year Plan. At the centre of it was the Kaptai lake. Although each and every area of the CHT is attractive as tourist site, the Krewkedang Peak at Bandarban, Chimbuk/Formaine of Rangamati, Alur Tila of Khagrachari, Bainkhain Lake of Rangamati and the Bogakai Lake where reportedly no living thing survives are of prime attraction. Apart from the King's Palace, Pagodas, waterfalls, birds and animals, life-styles of the 13 tribes in the 3 circles are sure to entice tourists seeking exotic experiences.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 51st Prosecution Witness

Excerpts from cross examinations of PW-51 in Bangabandhu murder case, the then metropolitan magistrate Afzalur Rahman, by advocate Abdur Razzaq Khan, lawyer for accused Lt Col (retd) Sultan Shahriyar Rashid Khan:

Q: Was Shahriyar shown arrested in the case on 3/10/96?
A: Yes.

Q: Was he produced before the court to send him on remand?
A: No.

Q: Did you fill up the form of producing the accused before recording his statement?
A: Yes, in presence of him.

Q: Was he hand-cuffed when he was taken to your chamber?
A: Yes, but his hands were freed after I ordered.

Q: Was the IO or any CID personnel present at your chamber when his statement was recorded?
A: No.

Q: Did the accused bring allegation against police of torturing him?
A: No.

Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.

Economic Implications of CHT Peace Accord

By Syed Shafique Ahmed

Political stability is an essential pre-requisite to effective development while participation of the local community is a pre-condition for sustainable development. A situation of prolonged war and racial enmity dampens the prospect of both.

Depositing revenue to government exchequer was non-binding. Newly appointed headmen were given some revenue collection authority and relatively strict revenue collection methods were imposed under the act of 1900.

The British decided to link this region to East Pakistan at the time of partition of India in 1947 because of the region's overwhelming economic dependence on Chittagong. The hill people however agitated in favour of autonomy but those were nipped in the bud by the Pakistani rulers. Some Muslim immigrants from India were rehabilitated in the region. By 1951, non-Bengali rose to 9 per cent of the total population. With only one secondary school, 20 primary schools and no college, the literacy rate in 1947 was only 3 per cent. The Pakistani rulers cancelled the special administrative status of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and re-introduced right for outsiders to settle in the area.

Up till 1952, other than Jhum cultivation, some farmland, some barter trade, the tribals had no other means of livelihood. Between 1952 and 1960, the establishment of a plywood factory, the Karnafully Paper Mills and construction of the Kaptai Dam and the highway opened ways for employment of up to 2700 tribals.

Sociologist Barnet had predicted in 1953 that Jhum cultivation is bound to be abandoned but as the statistics show, the area under Jhum has raised from 2100 Hectare in 1963 (survey report of Forestal Int'l, Canada) to 6500 Hectare in 1985 (British ODA sponsored survey report).

During the war of liberation, Chakma King Tribid Roy and Chakma leader Ang Shu Primo Chowdhury acted in favour of the force of aggression. The former acted as an international spokesman for the Pakistanis while the latter became a member of the puppet government.

BUETTA demands action against teachers of Architecture Dept

By Staff Correspondent

BUET Teachers' Association (BUETTA) has demanded action against the teachers of Architecture Department for what it said, "violating the rules and regulations of the university".

At an emergency general meeting with its president Dr Mohammad Abdur Razzak Akond in the chair yesterday, BUETTA also condemned the teachers' "whimsical activities" and held them responsible for "tarnishing the image of the university" by their actions.

"BUETTA at a general meeting on February 11, urged all the teachers to accept the decision of the BUET academic council regarding the admission test of the year 1998 and to continue the regular activities of the university. But some teachers of Architecture have treated the call with disregard," the press release said.

The teachers are now engaged in activities out of the frame of rules and have tarnished the glory and tradition of the university by issuing statement to the news media in this regard," it said.

Furthermore, "they have lowered the prestige of the university by putting fabricated and misleading statements at a press conference on Saturday," the press release said.

Quikhwani of Justice Badrul Haider Chy held

The quikhwani of former Chief Justice Badrul Haider Chy was held at his Gulshan residence yesterday, reports UNB.

Chief Justice ATM Afzal and former Chief Justice Kemonul Hossain, who were once colleagues of late Justice Choudhury, attended the *mildat* after the Magreb prayers.

Law and Justice Minister Abdul Matin Khasru, Shipping Minister ASM Rob and State Minister for Cultural Affairs Obaidul Kader were present.

Memorial service for Dr Richard Moorehead

The British High Commission will hold a memorial service today for Dr Richard Moorehead the First Secretary of the High Commission who met his tragic end on Monday, reports BSS.

The service will be held at the garden of the High Commission at 2-15 pm, a High Commission source said last night.

Dr Moorehead (46) was found dead at his Gulshan residence on Monday morning and the police have stated that he had committed suicide, the sources said.

He is survived by his wife Susanna Moorehead and two minor children.

Continuous violence has meanwhile taken toll on lives of 373 defense personnel, 1062 Bengalis and 237 tribal civilians. Missing are over 1000 army men died of malaria alone since 1983. Apart