

12TH ANNIVERSARY OF CHT PEACE DEAL

Hopes high to finish the remaining task



SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

Political as well as civil society leaders of indigenous communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have demanded a specific roadmap from the government for full implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.

Resenting 'non-implementation' of the peace agreement in the past decade, they also expressed dissatisfaction about slow pace of implementation of the peace pact during the current Awami League-led grand alliance government.

The government authorities, however, claimed that many provisions of the agreement have so far been implemented and the remaining ones will be executed gradually as they are very sincere about its full implementation.

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) has taken different programmes, including rallies and discussions in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari to observe the 12th anniversary of the accord.

This year the anniversary will be observed centrally in Rangamati. A discussion meeting will be held at 11:00am today on the premises of Rajbari Gymnasium in the town.

As vital clauses of the accord remained unimplemented in the last decade, many incidents of communal clashes had taken place in CHT between indigenous people and Bangalee settlers, leaving five indigenous people killed, 316 injured, said a report published by PCJSS, adding that 16 indigenous women were raped during clashes.

Besides, 625 houses were burnt and 698 houses of ethnic people were ransacked and looted allegedly by the settlers in different areas of Khagrachhari and Rangamati districts during the period, the report said.

A total of 39,936 acres of land owned by indigenous people were acquired by the army in the name of setting up new camps and expansion of a brigade office in Bandarban, it added.

However, situation of CHT has relatively improved after the present government came to power, indigenous leaders said.

After assuming power, the present government has taken a number of initiatives including appointing the chairman of CHT Development Board from indigenous community for implementation of the peace accord. Lawmaker Bir Bahadur is now chairman of the board.

Expressing his expectation that the present government will implement the peace deal, Sanjib Drong said, "I believe the government will fully implement the accord. However, it should declare a timeframe immediately for the work."

The government should launch a massive campaign by including Bangalee political leaders, intellectuals, educationists, cultural personalities, journalists and indigenous people for successful implementation of the accord, Sanjib added.

Ushatan Talukder, a senior PCJSS leader, said the acts of CHT Regional Council and three hill district councils must be amended to activate those local institutions.

Mongal Kumar Chakma, information and publicity secretary of PCJSS, said one decade has passed after signing of the agreement. But the political, social and economic rights of Jumma people have not been established yet due to non-implementation of the peace deal.

Mongal said suspicion now arises among the hill people for this reason. He stressed the need for government's roadmap in this regard.

"We see a positive sign as the present government has already taken several initiatives for full implementation of the deal," said Gautam Dewan, civil society leader and former chairman of Rangamati Local Government Council.

State Minister for CHT Affairs Ministry Dipankar Talukder said, "We just have overcome the deadlock of past seven years. We have reconstituted all bodies -- Land Commission, peace accord implementation committee and Refugee Affairs Taskforce. The government is sincere to implement the peace deal. I hope we can finish the remaining work within the period of our government."

All pro-peace accord forces have to work together for this purpose, the minister added.

After signing of the CHT agreement on December 2 in 1997, approximately 1,000 people were killed and 1,500 injured in violent clashes between the activists supporting the peace accord and their opponents, different sources said. Many people were abducted in the region during the period.



CUNNING DEVICE TO EXTORT: An elephant rider has the giant animal extend its trunk to trick people into giving money at Shaikupa Bazar in Jhenidah. The photo was taken recently.

BDR, BSF hold flag meeting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A battalion commander-level flag meeting between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) was held on Charabaria border under Satkhira Sadar upazila yesterday.

The flag meeting was held following a request by the BSF authorities to return the firearm and ammunition left by a BSF man in Bangladesh territory on November 29, BDR sources said.

On the day, BSF jawan Sitaram of Amudia camp entered Bangladesh territory through Taluigachha border in Sadar upazila. As BDR personnel of Charabaria camp chased him, the Indian border guard 'mahaged' to 'cross' the border leaving a self-loading rifle (SLR) with 20 bullets. BDR seized the gun and bullets.

In the meeting the BSF expressed sorrow for entering the Bangladesh territory by a BSF jawan violating the international border law and assured its Bangladesh counterpart of taking necessary steps in this regard. BDR handed over the SLR and bullets to the BSF authorities.

Trans-border problems, including drug smuggling, woman trafficking and other issues, were also discussed in the meeting.

INTERNAL FEUD IN BNP

Separate committees in C'nawabganj, council boycott in Nilphamari

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Rival factions formed two separate committees of BNP Chapainawabganj district unit on Monday while Nilphamari unit of the party held its council the same day amid boycott by a section of leaders.

In Chapainawabganj, former lawmaker Shahjahan Mia-led group held its conference at Shibganj Dak Bungalow ground while former lawmaker Harunur Rashid faction declared district unit committee without holding any conference, reports our correspondent.

Chaired by Shahjahan Mia, the Shibganj council was addressed, among others, by Aziz Layek, Ashraf Alam Rashid, Abu Taher Khokon and Abdus Samad Azad.

A 101-member committee of the district unit was declared at the council with Shahjahan Mia as president and advocate Nurul Islam Sentu as general secretary.

Shahjahan Mia-led faction claimed that leaders of four

upazila and three pourasava units out of nine were present at the council.

District unit sources said another faction led by Harunur Rashid declared the committee the same day without holding any conference.

Harunur Rashid and Aminul Islam were made president and general secretary of the district unit.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reported that the council of the BNP district unit was held in the town on Monday amid boycott by a section of leaders.

Joynal Abedin Farook, chief whip of the opposition party in the parliament, was the chief guest at the council. Chaired by district Convener Ahsan Ahmed, the council was addressed by Mizanur Rahman Minu, central organising secretary for Rajshahi division, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anny, former president of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, and Bilkis Islam, former woman lawmaker of the district.

Four joint conveners out of

eight and 20 members of the 52-member committee boycotted the council. The joint conveners, who boycotted the council, are Anisul Arefin Chowdhury, Alamgir Sarker, Mir Selim Farook and Sohel Parvez. They all belong to former president of the district committee Shahrin Islam Tuhi who was not included in the district convening committee formed in June this year.

At the council, Ahsan Ahmed and Shamsuzzaman have been made president and general secretary of BNP Nilphamari district unit.

In Pabna, though a faction led by Engineer Habibur Rahman Tota held a separate council of the district unit on Monday, it could not form the committee as of 7:00pm yesterday, according to our correspondent.

Another faction captured the party's district unit office and held a meeting there the same day. The faction declared a committee with Abdus Samad Khan Montu as president and Saiful Islam as secretary of the unit.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Villagers form a human chain on the bank of Bhabadaha drainage canal at Mahakal Alipur in Avoynagar upazila of Jessore district yesterday demanding construction of a quarter-kilometre-long box culvert across the canal and a road there.

When will sodium lamps light up the streets?

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Sodium lamps in the streets of Moulvibazar town have not been lighted one and a half years after their installation as the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) is yet to hand over the lamp posts to the municipality authorities.

Meantime, three of the posts have been damaged.

RHD completed installation of 151 sodium lamp posts in Moulvibazar town portion of Dhaka-Moulvibazar highway in the middle of 2008, RHD Moulvibazar office sources said.

The fittings were found all right as the mayor of

Moulvibazar municipality inaugurated lighting of the sodium lamps. But as the RHD has not handed over the lamp posts to the municipality authority, the latter could not light the lamps for regular use till now.

Under the same project costing Tk 7 crore, 65 more sodium lamp posts were installed in Court Road area of the town by June this year and they were lighted for testing, RHD sources said.

But these too have not been handed over to the municipality authority.

"After exchange of several letters between the municipality authorities and the RHD, now the latter has

agreed to hand over the lamp posts. It is the duty of RHD to light the lamps before handing over the lamp posts. After taking over, the municipality authorities will maintain and take care of them," Moulvibazar municipality Mayor Md Fayzul Karim Mayun said recently.

Moulvibazar RHD Executive Engineer Md Shaukat Ali said, "Installation of sodium lamps in the town portion of Moulvibazar-Dhaka highway was completed before my joining Moulvibazar RHD office. Now we have made a written request to the mayor to take over the lamp posts."

Jewellery trader stabbed

UNB, Shariatpur

Criminals stabbed a jewellery trader and his brother and took away their motorbike from Balakhana in Sadar upazila on Monday.

The victims are Mujibur Rahman, owner of Rahman Jewellery at Baitul Mukarram in Dhaka and his brother Rashed Khan, a student of Stamford University.

Locals said, a gang of 20-25 intercepted the two brothers when they were returning home at noon.

They stabbed them indiscriminately and took away their motorbike leaving both critically injured.

RED CHILLI BUSINESS AT FULBARI OF BOGRA

Turnover goes up to Tk 100cr from Tk 5cr in just 5 years

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

A serene Bogra village has turned into a hot spot of red chilli trading with renowned spice producers and marketers sourcing bulk of their raw materials from the place.

Within a span of five years, the annual turnover of red chilli business at Fulbari village of Sariakandi upazila in Bogra has gone up from a just Tk 5 crore to Tk 100 crore, said local businessmen.

For producing package red pepper, companies like Square, Acme and BD Foods now collect their chillies from as many as 12 purchase centres at Fulbari. Over 2000 poor rural women are employed in these centres having potentials of supplying about 3000 MT red chillies.

As Bogra is known for producing quality hot red chillies, five enthusiastic businessmen set up the chilli market at Fulbari in 2004 aiming to supply chillies to spice factories in the capital city.

Over the years spice makers got good consumer base, particularly in the urban neighbourhoods where working women and also the home-makers running families without assistance of domestic helps find it easier to buy a sachet of red pepper than grinding chillies at home.

"We started the red chilli business first in 2004 along with a few local businessmen including Moksedul Alam and Moazzar Hossain in a very low scale," said wholesaler Md Zahurul Islam.

"So far I remember, I sup-

plied only 80 MT of red chillies in the first year and the volume has now gone up to 300 MT fetching me around Tk 3 crore a year," said Md Zahurul Islam.

Chilli trader Md Moksedul Alam told The Daily Star that at least 5000 jobs have been created in the areas centering production, processing, trading and marketing of red chillies at Fulbari during the last five years.

Alam, who also works as a local agent for Radhuni, a Square spice brand, said initially Radhuni used to collect red chillies worth Tk 10 crore annually from Fulbari but the volume of purchase has now shoot up to Tk 30 crore.

Now 12 businessmen are supplying quality chillies to over 10 spice companies having factories in Dhaka, Natore, Sirajganj and Comilla districts.

"I employed 20 women and five men five years ago when I started my business. Today, 60 women are working at my purchase centre," said Moksedul Alam.

"I have started my business with only 46 people including 30 women five years ago but now the centre has around 300 employees," said another trader, Md Zahurul Islam.

According to Islam, about 2000 women are engaged in the trade starting from on-the-

field chilli sorting to its processing and packaging.

Didarun Bibi, 50, who has been working in a purchase centre at Fulbari village since 2004 said, she earns Tk 1500 per month.

"I bought some cultivable land in the area from my own income," said Bibi recalling that previously she used to work as domestic help in the neighbouring Amtoli village at a paltry wage of Tk 200 a month.

Gini Bibi, 35, another proud worker said, she was able to support the education expenses of her son and daughter from her earnings from chilli purchase centre.



STAR FILE PHOTO

Women workers sort red chilli at Fulbari village in Sariakandi upazila of Bogra district.