

# CHT in the 21st Century

CHT is our heritage, our history and our soul. Let us protect and preserve CHT and its indigenous people; and let us hold them dearly to our hearts.

A.K.M.A. QUADER

WHAT happened on the night of February 19, and what followed thereafter in CHT are sad, unacceptable and unpardonable. CHT is an integral part of Bangladesh; but the greater truth is that for thousands of years CHT has been the home of indigenous CHT people, and it still belongs to them only. Let us not distort the history of CHT and its indigenous people in the name of national integration.

The seed of the CHT problem was sown with the implementation of the Kaptai Hydro Project. The indigenous people there could not fathom the impact of this project upon their life, livelihood, culture, heritage and sense of belonging. They were shell-shocked to find their capital, Rangamati, swallowed by the created lake, and their cultivable land and homes submerged forever. The

promised compensation for the affected was never delivered. Nobody ever calculated what the social and environmental impact upon the people there would be, and how the future generations would react.

The problem began to worsen with our perception of modern state and government, disregarding the inalienable rights and practices of the indigenous people. Our so-called "modern perception" is medieval and colonial. We think it is right and legal to acquire land and properties of the common people, especially farmers and non-privileged, in the name of state through decrees or confiscations -- like the colonial masters of Africa, North and South America and Australia, where they not only took away the land and properties of the indigenous people through decrees but also decimated the people by destroying their civilisation and distinctive identity. The whole action is unethical, and is not

simply on in the 21st century. No one has the right and authority to dispossess people of their life and livelihood.

To marginalise the indigenous people in CHT, the governments in the late seventies and early eighties sent people from certain districts to settle in different parts of CHT. Whose land were these settlers allotted? This was the worst blunder by the government. When the settlers started to grab more land than was allotted, disputes arose and the CHT indigenous people were compelled to take a stand to preserve their existence. This was followed by a military operation there to bring them to submission. What a mad decision! The result was a catastrophe. How on earth could Bangladesh wage a war upon its indigenous citizens in CHT when it itself had won freedom through a bloody war?

The indigenous people of CHT today belong to the new generation who are socially and politically more conscious about their history, culture, heritage and values, as well as the injustices meted out to them in the recent past. Decrees, batons and bullets will no more be able to subjugate this generation. Be sane and practical while dealing with the



The *adivasis* belong to this land.

crisis in CHT. Leave the CHT indigenous people undisturbed and let the settlers be happy with what the government has allotted

officially. Do not push a military solution. Implement the signed CHT peace accord sincerely and, if necessary, revise it. Would you permit someone dispos-

essed to sleep in your backyard? The answer is no. Then why not leave CHT to the indigenous people. The air, water, land and sky of CHT belong to them only. Nothing in CHT is for sale or takeover, when you ask for it you are asking them to give away their body and soul. This is too much.

The CHT indigenous people realise that the so-called development project like Kaptai Hydro, KPM or forestry etc have not benefited them at all. Why should they allow their resources to be exploited and ravaged without delivering any tangible benefit to them?

It is high time that the government initiates program to establish a university, a medical college and other similar institutions there to begin a true face lift of CHT. Let us make an honest beginning to assert that we mean it. Let us not try to teach them what is best for CHT, as the donor agencies tell us what is good for Bangladesh. CHT is our heritage, our history and our soul. Let us protect and preserve CHT and its indigenous people; and let us hold them dearly to our hearts.

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# Bridging the academic gap

In this modern world, not only education policy, but the state as a whole, needs to be secular because most countries have people of diverse religious beliefs. The aim of creating a secular mentality is in conformity with the Quranic verse -- "There is no coercion in religion (2:256)." If the aggrieved quarter wants that some believers of other religions embrace Islam, they can show the greatness, liberalism and modernity in Islam.

ABDUS SATTAR MOLLA

THE education policy-2009 is ready to be discussed in the cabinet soon. Indeed, it needs to be reviewed thoroughly by the government (and even in the Parliament) before it is implemented. Such a need is felt because some appreciate the policy highly, some analysts ask for some amendments and some conservatives even express negative views about it.

The debates are especially on two aspects: i) the degree of uniformity or diversity among various streams the policy proposed, and ii) the inclusion of religious education, especially Islamic education, in the proposed policy. This article will dwell on the second matter of contention because some conservative groups are criticising the madrasa education policy.

To my understanding, the problems prevailing in this field are as follows:

Compulsory religious education up to Grade-10 in the country has so far failed to raise the literate citizens' moral standards. One of the causes, I think, lies in the fact that the courses on religion put more emphasis on the beliefs and rituals than on social behaviour.

Madrasa education is producing many more low and mid-level graduates (*Aalims*) than the country actually needs for the posts of Islamic studies teachers, imams, *kazis* and *muazzins*.

Madrasa education doesn't impart as much general, vocational/technical education as required to prepare the graduates for jobs other than the religious ones mentioned above.

The problem is that some madrasa students are lured by local and international gangs into prospective but destructive professions; thus some of them end up being terrorists.

The country doesn't have as many Islamic scholars as it needs. As a result, some lower level so-called *aalims* declare decrees (*fatwas*) on some legal matters, which creates social problems --

some of them even involving life and death.

Now we need to see how many of these problems can be solved by the proposed religious education policy.

In the introduction to the policy document, while describing the aims and objectives of education, the policy committee spoke of creating "secular mentality" in the graduates. Some quarters are misinterpreting the word "secular" as "anti-religious." To my understanding, the policy committee did not mean that, rather the policy is to create a congenial atmosphere in the society where people of diverse religious beliefs will not claim their religion to be the lone acceptable one, or try to impose their religion on others or, in extreme cases, declare religious war (Jihad) against others. The education ministry is said to be considering deletion of the word "secular" from the policy document, but I don't think that is necessary.

In this modern world, not only education policy, but the state as a whole, needs to be secular because most countries have people of diverse religious beliefs. The above-mentioned aim of creating a secular mentality is in conformity with the Quranic verse -- "There is no coercion in religion (2:256)." If the aggrieved quarter wants that some believers of other religions embrace Islam, they can show the greatness, liberalism and modernity in Islam. Coercion (that is forbidden in Islam) can never help the process.

I find no specific suggestion for solving the first problem in the proposed policy. I suggest that a compulsory religious education course should put more emphasis on inter-personal social relations than on religious beliefs and rituals, which are readily learned in the family. It may be mentioned here that many religious people have a wrong idea: Allah will forgive any sin they commit, if they can call Him properly. But my understanding is that Allah Himself has made the scope of forgiveness limited to His own rights (*Hooqullah*) and will not

forgive the sins committed to others. That is, every human being must do justice to others and fully pay others' dues (*Hooqul I'bad*). It may be added here that rights of Allah to a man are unlimited, we don't know how much (prayer) is enough; while others' dues are limited and known and can be easily paid fully if one is serious about paying.

To solve problems number 2 and 3, the policy committee proposed some "core" subjects that every madrasa student must study, so that the graduates can be absorbed also in jobs other than religious ones. Once problem numbers 2 and 3 are solved, the 4th problem would be neutralised automatically.

It seems that the aggrieved quarter is displeased at the policy of introducing general and vocational/technical subjects in the madrasa education sub-system. To provide food for thought, here I quote (English rendering from original Bangla) a portion of the policy described in "Madrasa education" chapter: "Along with teaching Islamic education properly, provision will be made to study various branches of scientific knowledge so that the students can excel in various ways of earthly living as well (p.57)."

There is nothing wrong in earning a living through doing earthly jobs. Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) himself did that. We all should remember that every Muslim longs for and prays to have well-being both here and in the hereafter (*Fidduniya o wal akhirate hasanah*).

To solve the fifth problem, the policy committee proposed several measures. The main one is to extend the *Fazil* course to a 3-4 year one (as in Honours course) from its present 2 years. It may be mentioned here that each *Fazil* and *Kamil* course is of 2-year duration and, thus, is weaker than the Honours-Masters courses of general education.

In addition to the new measures, there is scope for potential students to be enrolled in Honours-Masters courses in Islamic Studies, both in general universities and in the Islamic University to become Islamic scholars. We can hope that the new measures along with the present facilities can go a long way in producing sufficient numbers of quality Islamic thinkers in the country and, thus, we would be relieved of the unscrupulous fatwas (decrees) now being imposed illegally by some half-educated people.

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# Israel as a rogue state

A settlement of the Palestinian question remains a precondition for a breakthrough in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Muslim world. This can only happen if Israel is effectively delegitimised as a law-abiding state, and punished -- not indulged.

PRAFUL BIDWAI

EVIDENCE has now emerged that Israel's secret service Mossad assassinated Mahmoud al-Mabhouh of the Palestinian-Islamist group Hamas in Dubai on January 20. Closed-circuit television footage of the execution, available at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), leaves little room for doubt of Mossad's involvement.

According to the London Sunday Times, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu approved the assassination plot no less. The criminality of al-Mabhouh's killing stands compounded by the use of forged passports, including one diplomatic passport, of Israel-based dual-nationality British, Irish, French and German citizens.

Israel has recklessly used such illegal means to the point of jeopardising its relations with friendly countries. In the 1980s, the UK government shut down Mossad's local operations after it forged British passports. Mossad habitually practises such means in many countries, barring US.

The British foreign secretary's "outrage" at al-Mabhouh's murder was mild, although it violates international law. If an Iranian agency had murdered an Iranian resistance member, an emergency UN Security Council meeting would have been convened, and stiff sanctions imposed on Iran.

Israel has long used assassination as state policy, and killed numerous opponents -- most famously, Hezbollah's Abbas al-Masawi in the early 1990s and Hamas's wheelchair-bound, nearly-blind, quadriplegic Sheikh Yassin in 2004.

It's legitimate for Mossad to gather intelligence, but no lawful state can commit cold-blooded murder.

Not only are non-judicial executions morally repugnant. They will eventually jeopardise the safety of Western and Israeli citizens.

Assassinations of national liberation leaders at best cause a temporary setback. Soon, new leaders or more militant organisations emerge.

So far, Hamas has confined its activities to Israeli-Palestinian soil. If Mossad continues to target its leaders on foreign soil, then Hamas could also reciprocate, leading to more violence and mayhem.

Mossad, often lionised by the media as super-efficient and flawlessly run, has often bungled. In 1973, it killed a Moroccan waiter in Norway, mistaking him for a Palestinian guerilla. In 1997, it tried to assassinate Hamas leader Khaled Mashal in Jordan by spraying nerve toxin into his ear, but failed; its agents had to take shelter in Israel's embassy.

Mossad has had some big successes, as in kidnapping nuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu from Rome (1986) and killing a Canadian ballistic expert in Brussels (1990). The successes are often achieved by repulsive means. Al-Mabhouh was attacked with a stungun, tortured and smothered, besides being shot.

His assassination follows Israel's ruthless policy of consolidating its occupation, expanding illegal settlements, and tightening its economic hold over Palestinians -- in repeated defiance of Security Council resolutions and global opinion.

Israel's daily infliction of pain and humiliation on the Palestinians, its policy of pauperising them and controlling their physical movement makes classical colonialism look like a picnic. No Palestinian may go to his field, cross a village, or earn a living unless the Israeli state permits.

Israel has turned Gaza into an open-air prison. People's movement in the West Bank is severely regulated through 700-900 check-

points, barriers and closures (state-imposed bandhs) -- as many as 100 a year.

The 20-kilometre drive between Jerusalem and Ramallah, the capital of non-sovereign Palestine, takes Israelis 20 minutes. A Palestinian could take between two hours and forever. Scores of Palestinian women, stuck at barriers and denied ambulances, are forced to give birth without medical attention.

Israel imposed the unjust 1992 Oslo accords on the compromised Yasser Arafat leadership, but reneged on its part of the deal. Arafat and his protégé Mahmoud Abbas -- now Palestine Authority president -- were systematically weakened. Mr. Abbas's writ doesn't extend to Gaza, leave alone East Jerusalem, Palestine's historic capital.

The PLO recognised Israel and agreed to keep only 22 percent of Palestine's original area. But Israel thieved yet more land and water from Palestine.

Successive US governments have coddled Israel, protected it from sanctions, and pumped huge economic and military aid -- equivalent to \$1,000 for each citizen. President Bush was particularly indulgent towards Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Bush all but legitimised illegal settlements. He even denied the Palestinian refugees, uprooted by the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe), their right of return -- a fundamental international right.

President Obama raised hope by reiterating his support for talks for an independent Palestine in his Cairo University address last June. He hasn't reined in Israel's rogue-like regime, but dropped US insistence on freezing settlements. Other Western powers, like France, periodically make the right noises, but don't act effectively.

Israel is trying hard to gain diplomatic space by courting small, weak states in Africa and Asia. It has also built a strong military-supply and intelligence-sharing relationship with India.

India, which has long advocated an independent Palestine, now cravenly sides with Israel. India didn't even unequivocally condemn the 2008 invasion of Gaza, for which Israel stands indicted by the UN's Goldstone Report.

Israel cynically exploits India's fear of terrorism by offering anti-terrorism expertise and equipment. India is now Israel's biggest weapons customer and is buying sophisticated anti-missile systems. Israel often jumps India's armaments bidding process by setting up joint ventures with Indian public-sector arms producers.

This unhealthy relationship is unbecoming of an emerging power with a history of non-alignment.

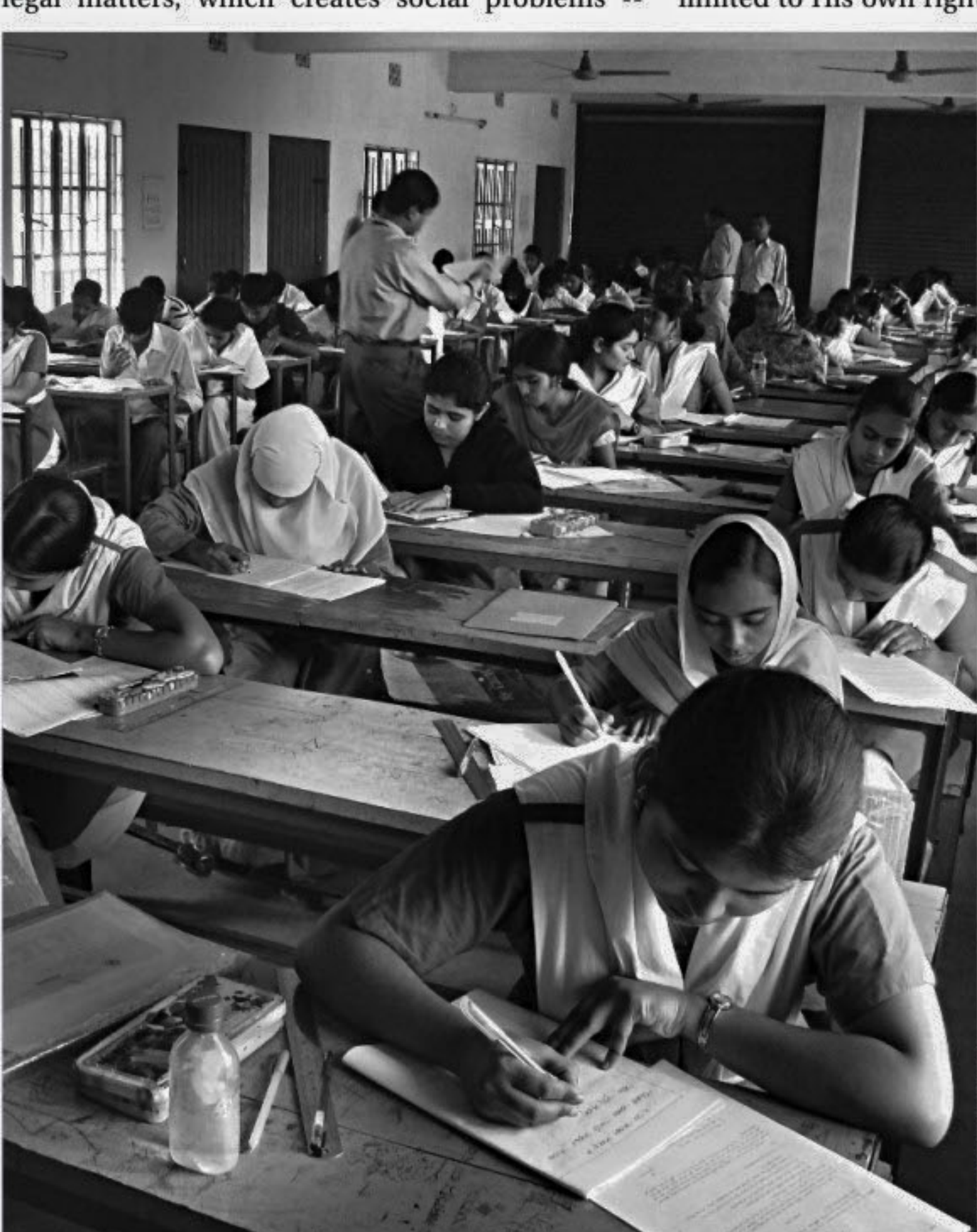
Israel's roguish conduct is one of the greatest barriers to peace in West Asia. The fear of Israeli power is used by countries like Iran to escalate uranium enrichment and crack down upon domestic dissidents.

Hundreds of Iranian dissidents have been rounded up for protesting against the recent allegedly rigged presidential elections and for sympathising with domestic reformists. Some are falsely charged with spying, which carries the death sentence. One such Iranian is social scientist Kian Tajbakhsh.

The more Israel acts like a rogue, the more it will encourage the persecution of people like Mr. Tajbakhsh, and inflame anti-West sentiment in the Arab world, fuelling turmoil, unrest and violence.

A settlement of the Palestinian question remains a precondition for a breakthrough in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Muslim world. This can only happen if Israel is effectively delegitimised as a law-abiding state, and punished -- not indulged.

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Education must be all-inclusive.



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