IN order to resolve the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) problem through political and peaceful means, the CHT Accord, popularly known as CHT Peace Accord was signed between the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) on December 2, 1997. This Accord was achieved after a series of dialogues between the government and PCJSS. This Accord paves the way for re-introducing special government system in CHT.

It is mentionable that the CHT is a region inhabited by the indigenous Jumma peoples. During pre-colonial period, this region maintained its sovereignty under its own feudal kings. After inclusion of this region under the British Empire in 1860, the British government enacted the CHT Regulation of 1900 to preserve a separate administrative status for the Jumma peoples of this region. Later, the Pakistan government recognised the CHT Regulation of 1900 to be in effect under its 1956 constitution, preserving the status of the CHT as a region with a separate administrative system. The second Pakistani constitution of 1962 also used the term "tribal region" to recognise the CHT as a special region.

In 1964, when the Tribal Area status of the CHT was revoked in the Constitution of Pakistan, despite demands from the Jumma peoples, the special status of the region was not revived. Then in 1972, the demands of the late M N Larma for constitutional safeguards for the CHT and recognition of the identities of the indigenous peoples of the CHT fell on deaf years. Hence, PCJSS launched an armed struggle for right to self-determination since 1976 onwards when all democratic avenues failed to draw the attention of the government.

Though the armed struggle continued for about two and a half decades, the PCJSS always kept open the path for a political solution to the CHT issue by peaceful means. Consequently, formal negotiations started in 1985 with the government of General Ershad. Finally, the historic CHT Peace Accord was signed with the Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina in 1997.

The CHT Accord had ended the decades-long fierce armed conflict between the Jumma people and the Government of Bangladesh. This Accord has laid down a basis upon which to bring forth people-oriented development in the CHT.

Though the then Awami League government signed the CHT Peace Accord, the regime as a whole showed a lack of seriousness in implementing the Accord. It nevertheless took several initiatives toward implementing it. Just after the signing of the Accord, some matters have been implemented, including the formulation of some of the related laws. This has created the practical basis for the implementation of the Accord. Formulation of the CHT Regional Council Act (CHTRC) and three Hill District Council Acts, establishment of the CHT Affairs Ministry, repatriation of the Jumma refugees from India are some of the matters that have been implemented.

In fact, though the Regional Council Act and the three Hill District Council Acts were enacted, they were never properly enforced, so the special administrative system with CHT Regional Council and three Hill District Councils (HDCs) could never be made effective. The CHTRC is expected to be the final authority with regards to development and administration in the CHT. In practice, due to lack of political support from the successive governments, the CHTRC has not been able to exercise its full authority over the CHT. Similarly, the HDCs have not been empowered yet by the government to exercise their full authority in their respective districts.

The temporary camps of the armed forces are yet to be closed down as per CHT Accord; rather, de facto military rule was imposed under the name of "Operation Uttoron". The Jumma refugees who returned from India and the internally displaced Jumma people were not rehabilitated, rather, Bengali settlers were included as internally displaced people and efforts were made to rehabilitate them in the CHT in violation of the Accord.

Though the Land Commission was formed, it was unable to resolve any land disputes and the Land Commission Act was passed with provisions that were contradictory to the Accord. In addition, present chairman of the Land Commission declared to conduct a land survey in violation of the provisions of the Accord and continues to adopt decisions without holding meetings with the members of the Commission.

The provision vesting the circle chiefs with exclusive powers to grant permanent resident certificates was not enforced; instead, the deputy commissioners were given the power to issue permanent resident certificates violating the CHT Accord. Land leases previously given