

CHT: Restrain internal strife

EKRAM KABIR

THE gunfight between Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati (PCJSS) and United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) on 21 January may have hit the front pages, but it hasn't come as a surprise. Incidences such as this have happened on regular intervals since the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Treaty in 1997. Most of the times, these find places in the inside pages of the print media. Some of the times, such as this one, when fatalities are too many, they hit the headlines. The latest fight left five persons dead.

According to reports, at least 300 persons were killed and about 900 others wounded since the signing of peace accord. Apart from these, clashes and feuds have been leading to loss of property in the region. The above picture says the peace accord may have stopped insurgency in the region, but it has certainly not made CHT stable. JSS, the pro-peace treaty hill organization, and UPDF, known to have its stance against the treaty, have been at loggerheads for many years now. The latest gory incidence, reportedly took place over establishing supremacy over certain area. The reports say the common objective of the feuding parties seems to be collection of tolls. This reminds how insurgents used to collect tolls during the time of war for a long time.

The issues of seizing influ-

ence in an area and collecting tolls are understandable because this is nothing new in Bangladesh politics. But what is worrying is that if these infightings continue, the implementation of the peace accord would perpetually remain a far cry. The people of the CHT would never see the light of development that they earnestly desire. And Bangladesh would still be toiling with a huge number of population who still be extreme poor.

CHT is also strategically important area for Bangladesh. It has borders with two very important neighbours. The area that borders India is a very sensitive one. On the other side of the border in Indian North-East, the issue of separatism is very much in place. A stable CHT would be urgently required to keep workable ties with the Indian government on the issue of separatism. Then again, CHT is the only communication link on land with Burma. The Burmese border is more important than the Indian one. Apart from trade and commerce with Burma, this stretch of border is also the sources of illegal infiltration as well as drug and weapons smuggling. These are very important for Bangladesh's internal security.

The success of Bangladesh's counter-terrorism efforts would also depend on a peaceful CHT. The law enforcers quite often unearth militant training camps in the remote hills and jungles of the region. If the

local indigenous leaderships don't help the government in its anti-terror drives, the region will continue to be a terrorist den.

The JSS, as local organization, would have to go a long way. The JSS should remember that there have been a few positive developments since

Councils, and shall also superintend and harmonize all the affairs of and assigned to the three Hill District Councils. Besides, in the event of lack of harmony or any inconsistency being found in the discharge of responsibilities given to the three Hill District Councils, the decision of the Regional

if these infightings continue, the lot will never improve there. JSS has many grievances over the state of affairs in CHT. It has been alleging about government's indifference in implementing the treaty, human rights violation by the army as well as Bengali population, rapes, abductions etc.

the government for the present state of affairs. He alleges the lack of government initiatives in implementing the accord. He may be quite right. But the time has come to question: how must JSS as the prime organization has done so far? The JSS may also need to assess the factionalism within itself. Because factionalism weakens a party.

UPDF, on the other hand, opposes the accord. It wants full autonomy of the region. Well, here lies the tricky part. UPDF may have its reason for opposing the treaty, but it must not oppose the issues that will help CHT to develop.

Both these two organizations need to remember that these incidences may scare the international development partners away from the region. The implementation of the accord may take a long time, but the development of CHT region is a must. The urgent agenda for the JSS as well as UPDF would have to be to "let the region develop." UPDF's objectives say: "The party shall endeavour to ensure the rights, dignity and interest of all residents of the CHT. The party shall give priority to the specific issues of the people of the CHT in performing its activities. The party, with a view to ensuring the rights of the citizens of the country and to establishing a democratic society, shall work together with other democratic parties."

However, if this is about mere toll collection, both the parties would risk losing respect of the overall population of Bangladesh. The state

may have different attitude towards the indigenous people, but the common people of this country bear huge respect for the indigenous communities. Any deviation from the promises by the indigenous leaders would certainly tarnish their image among the people.

The government, on its part, needs to be serious about CHT. The faster it gets into business of implementing the accord, the better for the whole country, not to mention the region. The CHT Affairs Ministry is only in the news when there's an occasion such as World Indigenous Day and the Accord-signing anniversary. The people are in dark about the activities of the ministry to harness the tremendous potentials of the region. The ministry could have helped by holding a press conference immediately after Friday gunfight. In fact, the ministry would do a great service to the indigenous people as well as the overall population if it holds regular briefing on CHT issues.

In its efforts to develop the region, the government may focus on its potentials in tourism. CHT is really a "sleeping beauty" (The independent, UK). All the government needs to do is to wake the region up. CHT is still a fearful region for the majority of Bangladeshis. As long as these infightings continue, it is likely to remain "fearful" and the country would miss out on all the potentials.

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the accord. The CHT Regional Council (CHTRC) is the direct result of the accord. The sub-clause (a) of the Clause 9 of the accord says: "The Council shall coordinate all the development activities carried out by the three Hill District

Council shall be final." Now, does JSS have any time for anything else? Does it have any time for getting locked in infighting? Since the chief of the CHTRC and JSS is the same person, he is in the perfect position to realize that

There is a chance that the government may not have any other option but to redeploy the troops who were pulled out after the present government came to power. No-one wishes to see that happening. The JSS chief keeps blaming

US & China building strategic mutual trust

MAHMOOD HASAN

PRESIDENT Barack Obama played host to Chinese President Hu Jintao from 18-21 January 2011 in Washington. This was Hu Jintao's second state visit to the US and came amid growing mistrust between the two largest economic power houses of the world.

Since US formally recognized the People's Republic of China in January 1979, visits at the highest level have been exchanged at regular intervals and dialogue continued. President Barack Obama visited Beijing in November 2009. With this visit the two leaders have met for the ninth time in the past two years.

Western media and US lawmakers have been particularly critical of China over several issues. Some of the issues that bedevil US-China relations are: China manipulating the value of its currency Yuan (renminbi); China's enormous trade surplus at the expense of US; Washington inviting Dalai Lama at the White House despite Chinese warnings; US supplying \$64 billion worth arms to Taiwan; China violating Intellectual Property Rights (IPR); deteriorating human rights in China (Liu Xiaobo, Nobel Laureate for Peace 2010 put to jail); China's aggressive claim over some islands close to Japan; China's friendly policies towards North Korea and Iran; China's rapid growth in military strength and technology and other irritants.

The 41-paragraph US-China Joint Statement issued on 19 January, dealt with all the issues of concern between the two sides. The document is divided into six parts (i) Strengthening Relations; (ii) Promoting High-Level Exchanges; (iii) Addressing Regional and Global Challenges; (iv) Building a Comprehensive and Mutually

Beneficial Economic Partnership; (v) Cooperating on Climate, Energy and the Environment; (vi) Expanding People-to-People Exchanges.

The currency issue that angers US the most has been addressed at length. United States accuses that the undervalued Chinese 'Yuan' is the cause of American economic woes. Because of cheap currency, low-cost Chinese exports have flooded US markets and pushed out American factories causing huge unemployment in US.

China has promised to move towards floating market value of the 'Yuan', albeit at its own pace. Actually the 'Yuan' has appreciated in value between 2005 (Rmb 827) and 2010 (Rmb 674) to the US dollar. To pacify the Americans, China signed procurement deals with US companies worth \$45 billion. China is now the second largest economy of the world with a GDP of \$42 trillion (2010), behind United States \$142 trillion (2010). At the current rate of growth (103%) China is projected to overtake US by 2020. No wonder Washington is worried.

China currently has the larg-

est foreign exchange reserve of \$285 trillion and has invested over \$800 billion in US treasury bonds, apart from billions invested in manufacturing in the US. It is deeply concerned that US Treasury's 'Quantitative Easing' (QE) policy to sell \$600 billion worth of bonds will depreciate the value of the dollar and consequently its investments and reserves. China has asked US to refrain from taking any step that reduces the value of the dollar. Hu Jintao before going to Washington has said that US-dollar-dominated international currency system is a "product of the past." China would like to see a new international currency that is stable and easily convertible.

The joint press conference also centered around three main issues devalued 'Yuan'; Korean peninsula and Iran; and Human Rights situation in China. Both Obama and Hu Jintao spoke candidly about their respective positions on these contentious issues.

On violation of Human Rights the Senate and the media repeatedly attacked the Chinese President. Hu Jintao replied that China had a huge population

and a developing country in a crucial stage of reform. China still faces many challenges and lot needs to be done in terms of human rights. China is willing to engage in dialogue and exchanges with the US on the basis of mutual respect and principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

While Hu Jintao admitted to shortcomings on the issue, it was indeed ludicrous for the Americans to lecture China from a moral high ground, particularly when Guantanamo Bay is yet to be dismantled.

There is no doubt that over the past few years China has become more confident of its economic prowess and its military strength and has gone about asserting itself. Immediate neighbours Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, India and ASEAN countries view China's rise deeply worrying.

For the US the disadvantage is that in the Asia-Pacific region it does not have NATO-like alliance to contain 'communist China.' Though it has separate defense pacts with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan it has failed to give leadership to the smaller nations in the region. China naturally is trying to fill in the vacuum.

US-China relations are a matter of analysis and debate, but one thing is clear that the significance and influence of US-China relationship is no longer a bilateral affair -- it has gone beyond. Regional and global issues today are influenced and affected by the equation that exists between the two economic power houses. It would be naïve to conclude that Obama succeeded in pushing over Hu Jintao. On the contrary, Hu Jintao stood his ground on all the contentious issues, but wrapped them in soft diplomatic language. He skillfully demonstrated that China is neither a coward nor a bully. The

Washington Post assessed the visit with the heading "Summit yields gains for both China and US." The Chinese media also called the visit a great success.

Actually relations between the two countries, having vastly different political systems, were never on an even keel. Relations between them have always been complex and multi-faceted and fraught with frictions and irritations. They are simultaneously adversaries in some areas and partners in others. Fortunately China and the US are neither enemies nor allies.

It may be pointed out that both the leaders will be coming to the end of their term in 2012. President Barack Obama finishes his first term in November 2012 and may seek reelection. While President Hu Jintao will be completing his term and handing over power to Vice President Xi Jinping at the end of 2012. Both leaders are under obligation to leave a legacy for their successors that relations between the two countries have been beneficial for their people and the world. The summit between the two leaders was expected to set the course for at least the remaining period of their terms. The overall tone of the summit was more high level contacts and dialogue and more cooperation between the two countries.

On China's rise as a major power President Obama said he welcomed China's rise but wants to make sure that the rise is done in a way that reinforces international norms and enhances security and peace as opposed to it being a source of conflict. He went further saying that frictions and irritants have to be removed to build "strategic mutual trust" between the United States and China.

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Israeli army introduces new 120mm tank round

THE Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Armored Corps positioned along the Gaza Strip were recently equipped with IMI's new High Explosive Multi-Purpose (HE-MP) M339 tank round (in Hebrew: Kalanit).

The advanced tank round has been developed by IMI as a response to an urgent request of the IDF Armored Corps based on lessons learned in the 2006 Second Lebanon War and the 2008 Cast Lead Operation.

The unique, state-of-the-art tank round is designed for the Merkava Mk3 and Mk4 and worldwide Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) equipped with 120mm smooth bore guns.

The sophisticated round is based on the knowledge, experience and successful implementation of IMI's 105mm APAM-MP-T M117/1 tank round which has been in use and combat proven by the IDF in recent years.

The newly developed tank round is based on the perception of using one kind of round against a wide range of targets and scenarios in the modern battlefield, ultimately decreasing the different kinds of tank rounds used before.

The fuse of the tank round is programmable after it is loaded in the chamber, enabling the crewmen increased capability in both handling and in accomplishing their goals in all fighting scenarios-against fortifications, urban structures, Light Armored Vehicles (LAVs), as well as, anti-tank and ambush infantry squads.

When used against fortified structures or bunkers, the round effectively penetrates the obstacle before detonating, scattering thousands of deadly fragments inside.

The M339, which is referred to by the IDF as the "Kalanit", has recently undergone successful field trials and has proven to be an important advantage for the Armored Corps in fulfilling their missions in the protection of the Israeli settlements around Gaza as it provides efficient and accurate hit capabilities, while significantly minimizing collateral damage.

The "Kalanit" tank round sheds light on IMI's capability to supply the Israeli Defense Forces with advanced solutions, meant to fully respond to specific and urgent needs.

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