

Peace in CHT: A perspective on the role of the locals and media

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REGIONAL political activities that fomented communal tension rather than good politics, and uncompromising attitude, have affected the people adversely since the historic CHT Peace Accord was signed on December 2, 1997. Therefore, we need to pay more attention to the people and politics centering CHT.

While one cannot question the sincerity in approach the traditional method of looking at the issue has created complexity. The traditional approach to peace making in CHT did not change with the change of government. The overall situation there has often been considered insignificant compared to other complicated issues at the national level. There was very little dynamism in decision making; nor were experienced people posted in CHT to deal with the situation more efficiently.

Because of the divisive political culture of the country, peace in CHT has also been addressed with the same divisive outlook, failing to build trust in the locals. As a result, neither could mainstream politics be established nor could local politics mature to add to political plurality for the better future of the area and the country. Many of the local leaders who sacrificed so much for peace in CHT have also merged into mainstream politics, which has caused frustration in the locals. Politically, maximum effort has only been put during a crisis, and the focus shifted elsewhere as soon as the situation was brought under control, mostly by the security forces. Penetration of vicious groups in the disguise of various develop-

ment activities has been seldom identified, or efforts made to deal with them politically.

The same perception like the military exists in the civil administration of the pre and post-accord scenario. The civil administration, like in the pre-accord time, still feels that the onus of peace remains on the military even in the post-accord phase despite the fact that they are the most important stakeholders in fructifying peace. At the same time, their working procedure doesn't seem to vary from that of the plains. As in the plains, they still feel that the people should be dependent on them for service rather than them towards the people of CHT. They seldom realise the need for quick response to arrest a crisis. Conventionalism is the method of operation. Bureaucracy and "red tape" prevent them from taking the driving seat. As a result, they fail to understand the situational change, and take a primitive outlook in dealing with the peace process. The role of the political actors for peace in CHT is more of pessimism than hope for the people.

The tribals at the elitist level, who were instrumental in bringing peace in CHT, had taken a "u-turn" historically. Starting from the British colonial period, they had never placed confidence on any kind of government. Confusion always prevailed as to what was good for them, which made them

lose sympathy of the government. The tendency was always to walk backwards instead of moving forward.

There was always a dearth of elites to lead their struggle and it remains so today, and adequate number of elites for the next generation has not been created to inherit the ideal of their cause. Thus, the new genera-

eventually tarnished their ideal image. The lot of the majority of the innocent and poor tribals has not changed at all.

Thus the marginalised hill people are not too far wrong when they say that as yet peace is too far, although the same is also said by the elites. The poor education standard in CHT and the inability of most of the tribals to compete with the plains most often force them to return to CHT to be either absorbed by different NGOs or by miscreant groups. The other large segment of the population, the non-tribals are gradually gaining power by their sheer numbers but not intellectually. The mismatch of intellectuality between the tribals and non-tribal elites is the main reason for the failure to reach a compromise during a crisis, causing the prospect of a permanent peace in CHT to recede further.

With a much more secured environment than before, there is complete freedom of movement for everybody, even in the remotest areas of CHT. Easy access to the people and to technology in CHT has made the media a powerful actor to portray peace in CHT in an objective manner; but that is not always the case. Needless to say, there is a difference in orientation, in perspective, and in ideological leanings within the media, which has been exploited by the elite tribals of CHT to por-

tray the current status of the peace process in their own ways, which are not always consistent with reality.

The media is also playing its role from divided camps. There is an unhealthy competition by the electronic and print media through the abuse of various stringer journalists. Most of the media personnel being locals believe in serving their bosses more than serving their cause. The voice of the ordinary people is seldom heard and the elite's views are focused on mainly portraying that as the real situation. As a result, the ordinary people are befooled and national and international opinion is shaped against the situation, which is otherwise peaceful.

Any small gunfight in an intra-party clash is blown up in the first page of the newspapers or shown as running scroll in the television channels. This shows that the situation is volatile in the public mind, and questions the credibility of the security forces as well as the government's intention to implement peace.

The good work or the prolonged calm in the CHT fails to attract the eyes of the readers as these do not make interesting news. Besides, the media, with their various views, depict contrasting pictures of peace in CHT from which it is hard to form an objective view of the actual situation on the part of the general readers. Therefore, peace in CHT appears to the general people to be what the media portrays, however unreal that may be.

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tion can hardly grasp the spirit of the movement that the old generation had borne. Besides, leadership had remained in limited hands for decades, and fairness in their approach was twisted for individual gains. Peace, therefore, suffers at their hands, or it could be also said that it is slowed down by them implicitly while they explicitly proclaim otherwise.

The comparatively educated handful of youths at the mid-level doesn't find space to operate to lead the peace process due to the stubborn attitude of the old elites. Some of these elites have again been merged into the mainstream political culture. They have failed to exploit their portfolio for the benefit of the general mass and for peace, which

Selling dirtiest oil at all cost

PETER CUSTERS

IT looks like a proxy war is being fought on two fronts. On December 7, Canada's Environment Minister Peter Kent stunned the audience of the World Climate Summit in Durban, South Africa. Even as the Secretary General of the UN was making strenuous efforts to save the Kyoto Protocol, Kent publicly called on the international community to turn the page on the Protocol, which he termed outdated. Any binding agreement restricting Canada's scope to expand its CO2 emissions is seen as unacceptable.

Hardly a week before, Kent's colleague, Minister for Natural Resources Joe Oliver, had made an equally startling public statement against clauses of the European Union's draft Directive on Fuel Quality. The draft Directive seeks to ensure that the overall carbon imprint of fossil fuels used in Europe be brought down by at least 6% before 2020, as compared to their imprint in 2010. Towards this objective, the Directive cites measurements for the emissions of greenhouse gases from different fuel sources, including conventional oil and oil extracted from tar sands. Thus, the European legislation reportedly estimates the negative value of conventional oil at 87.5 grams of CO2 equivalents per megajoule, whereas the polluting effect of tar sands oil is estimated to be 107 grams per megajoule, i.e. some 22% more. This, according to the Canadian minister, is unacceptable. Hence, he called the EU Directive on Fuel Quality "unscientific" and "discriminatory."

Oliver's reaction to the Directive, addressing fuel sources by name, indicates what's at stake in Canada's war of words. But what exactly are the merits of his case? First, the measurements on emission levels of conventional versus non-conventional oil are based on a peer reviewed study of academicians which the EU had commissioned in the beginning of this year. Hence, the Canadian minister's comment seems a bit off the mark. Further, researchers linked to environmental organisations in Europe point out that the measurements quoted are based on a well-to-wheel evaluation of emission levels.

In fact, the key difference in emission effects occurs when tar sands oil is extracted and brought from in-situ mines to the surface. For it is at this point that specially large quantities of energy are required to get mining results. If, for instance, a "well-to-tank" comparison of emission levels can be relied on, the outcome is far more unfavourable to tar sands oil. For emission levels then are almost 2.5 times higher! Moreover and most ominously, Oliver's statement completely bypasses investigations which have been carried out by Canada's government. Research carried out under Canada's Environment Ministry also shows that oil sands mining and extraction, in particular the

in-situ mining that takes the lion's share, is far more greenhouse gas-intensive than is conventional oil.

To gauge the actual meaning of the pronouncements by Canada's ministers we need to travel to the northern part of that country's province of Alberta. Here, in an area 140,000 square kilometers, largely covered by beautiful lakes and forests, deposits of tar sands oil, which are truly gigantic, are located below the earth's surface. A safe estimate of recoverable reserves, cited

understand on whose behalf Canada's government is waging its proxy wars.

Further, the pressure which the oil corporations are exerting on and via the Canadian government, also needs to be seen in the light of "peak oil," the fact that the world's production of conventional crude a few years back had reached an all-time peak. Recent speculation has in particular focused on Saudi Arabia, which has been the world's leading producer and exporter of crude oil for decades. During the Gulf War in 1991 Saudi Arabia could operate as a "swing-producer" for the West, filling up supply gaps caused by the war by using its reserve production capacity. Yet, reports indicate that Saudi Arabia has recently halted a \$100 billion production expansion plan; that the country has not been able to increase its production capacity for many years, and that its oil exports have started declining.

Hence, not only had global oil production reached an all-time peak five years ago, the world's prime exporter of conventional oil had also started on its post-peak downward trend. This, of course, only increases the likelihood that oil prices will remain at \$90 to \$115 per barrel, at which they have been hovering of late. And it makes the option of investments in tar sands oil, which is costly to extract, all the more attractive for the oil corporations -- whatever be the consequences for the world's climate.

Hence, the startling pronouncements by Canadian ministers against the Kyoto Protocol and against the EU Directive on Fuel Quality are explainable, no matter how unforgivable they may be. Leading international institutions, such as the International Energy Agency (I.E.A.) and the United Nation's Environmental Program (UNEP), on the eve of the Durban Summit, warned that as matters stand now the world's average temperature may go upward by not just 2 degrees Celsius, we risk saddling future generations with a climate that may be as much as 6 degrees warmer than ours.

If the world allows the oil corporations to expand tar sands oil extraction instead of winding down their dangerous operations in Alberta, Canada will surely do the opposite from what it was committed to under Kyoto, and will contribute only more to the violence we are already perpetrating on future generations of humanity. It is not easy to differentiate or "discriminate" between what is just and what is unjust when corporate profits are at stake. Bangladesh and other vulnerable countries have no option other than to join the choir of Canadian indigenous people and environmentalists who warn that any extraction of tar sands oil is off-limits, i.e. should be stopped.

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widely, puts the total at 173 billion barrels, or 85% of the world's entire deposits of tar sands oil, also known as "bitumen." Many of the world's leading oil corporations have already swarmed down on Alberta to invest in extraction, and pressures to expand licensing are huge. One mine operated by a corporate consortium called Syncrude, for instance, is perhaps the largest mine of any type in the world. A prominent "player" is the British-Dutch corporation Shell. According to 2008 figures, the company had produced 155,000 barrels of tar sands oil per day in Alberta province, and invested tens of billions of dollars in expansion of bitumen extraction and refining, intending to raise its production level to 770,000 barrels per day! The French corporation Total, China's state-controlled firms, and the US's Chevron and ConocoPhillips too belong to the list of majors investing in Alberta. Hence, it is easy to

No education, no development

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CURRENTLY, it is estimated that the number of illiterate people in the country would be about 120 million, which is nearly half of the US population. Needless to mention, no country can move ahead with such a heavy burden of illiterate people. They are people who do not have the awareness to do their best to improve their economic condition on their own because all the governments have failed to do anything for improving their lifestyle. They lead a vegetative life, and are languishing in poverty and squalor. It is a shame that the governments have failed to improve their economic condition.

At the time of independence there were only 75 million people. Now, after 40 years, the population has increased to 160 million or more. This is quite disastrous for a small and developing country like Bangladesh. When non-thinkers are at the helm of the country such things happen. Can there be any government that is not concerned



at this high rate of population growth, and that there is no programme?

The other day, the health minister admitted that there was no family planning programme at the present time. Previously, there was one but it failed due to the rampant corruption on the part of the officials concerned.

No development can be achieved by by-passing education. Needless to mention that higher education is not a priority for Bangladesh. Rather literacy and primary education are more important as they are essential for creating awareness among people. The government is bragging that it achieved more than 90% enrolment at the primary school level, but doesn't say that out of this 90%, 70% drop-out before they complete Class 5. Can anyone accept such colossal wastage of a huge amount of money?

Inefficient ministers in all departments are the major cause of utter failure. It is not correct to think that everybody can do everything. There was a programme called "Total Literacy Movement" (TLM) conducted by the UNO, but it was so steeped in corruption that people dubbed it "total loss of money." This programme is no longer in existence.

The government people are crying hoarse that it is the syndicate which is raising the prices of commodities. Maybe it is true to some extent, but one must remember the simple economics of demand and supply. Sufficient goods are not produced mainly due to shortage of cultivable land and the outdated technology used.

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