

Peace in CHT: A perspective on development

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SINCE long a lot of development programmes had been undertaken in CHT by many of our development partners. However, more needs to be done to fulfill the needs of the tribal people. And there are significant realities that the state faces, and those are felt by the "loyal soldiers" too. Therefore, this paper will analyse the peace and development issues of CHT and look for newer approaches for a long-lasting peace as the people dream.

The development partners were chosen from the national and international nongovernmental organisations, and their entry was encouraged to ensure inflow of cash into CHT to complement the government's development initiatives. Millions of dollars were poured into different projects for five to ten years' development goal. But ironically, the only visible developments in CHT till now are the initiatives taken by the government. Millions of dollars may have been poured in CHT by various development partners but visible effect is yet to be seen or even recognised by the people of CHT.

The development partners have, on the other hand, engaged the elite tribals tactfully to ensure publicity of their development work despite the ambiguous outcomes. A generous outlook was shown to the development partners by the government with the idea that whatever is donated by them will enhance the government's development efforts. The generosity of the government and the crafty play by the elites in CHT have been able to project these development partners as the real saviours of the tribal people. These partners have been somewhat of an alternative to the government, at least to the elites in CHT. Therefore, the state of peace in CHT is what is perceived by these development partners and echoed by the people of CHT.

Significant progress has been made as regards the creation of local government promised by the Accord despite the fact that it lacks legitimacy under the unitary system of government of Bangladesh. One can question the effectiveness of this local governance due to incomplete authority given to them or lack of proper rules of business for establishing clear co-relation to the other institutions and the traditional feudal character of "local administration."

Transfer of a number of subjects to this local government has already been done. The constitutional caveats didn't allow the handover of all the subjects, specifically those related to revenue, which are still controlled by the central government. An accord was signed agreeing to the many demands without considering how those could be applied to two different categories of inhabitants of CHT; it is difficult to provide the constitutional rights to the tribals ignoring the other community. Even before the government could really provide them such rights, legal complications have arisen due to a writ petition submitted in the High Court. Despite the constitutional complications, numbers of constitutional bodies have been formed to facilitate the process of peace, although their effectiveness is under question for different reasons.

If the government claims substantial progress in the implementation of peace, it is theoretically difficult to challenge it. But the perception of

cance when juxtaposed with these four issues. And when publicising the lack of progress the aforementioned actors conveniently overlook the complexities of the matter.

The military should not be considered as an occupational force. Regrettably, all benign activities of the military are still labeled as evil by the elites of CHT and the common people believe so unwittingly. The military is working selflessly without any effort to publicise its activities. The fact that the peace effort was initiated by the military and carried through by the politicians has been forgotten due to long lapse of time and also due to the fact that other actors have turned out to be more influential.

Fourteen years and changeover of four democratic governments couldn't yet deliver what was expected by the people. A complete set-up of local government in the running of the affairs could not be established due to the constitutional provisions. Handover of all the thirty-two subjects prescribed in the Accord is

people feel that the lion's share has been pocketed by the elites without any significant development in changing their lives. Major development projects are being undertaken by the government, but cannot be projected properly because a vicious circle has grown to deprive the ordinary people. It is felt, though not expressed by the local people, that the military approach is the better option for development to bring changes in the lives of ordinary people.

The direct military, political or economic approach seems to have failed to ensure peace as per the dream of the general people. Direct approach will perhaps not succeed due to the complexities of the current situation and loss of public trust in them. Leaving it to time to take care of the peace is not the right idea as that will sideline the tribal population and make the non-tribals benefit eventually.

The tribal elites, getting the maximum benefit from all the actors, will keep the problem alive as long as they enjoy the benefits. An alternative method of attaining peace must be looked for so as to sideline the elites and involve the ordinary class in the process. Economic benefits must be ensured for the ordinary people, as well as their participation in different activities. Education at the middle level must be developed and job opportunities should be created for them in CHT.

Employment opportunities will only occur if sufficient power or electricity is ensured to allow the private entrepreneurs to invest. Frequent arrangement of reality shows, sports, theater etc could restore trust of the tribals in the government. The military can be the main partner, having been involved in the situation the longest. They can be the most effective actors to contribute to the process which can restore trust of the people in the military.

Midlevel leadership must be allowed to grow and establish local contact to avoid the rigid and old-fashioned leadership, which impedes instead of facilitates peace. Regional politics must be allowed to grow to add plurality in national politics. Finally, a piloted programme of the land issues can be undertaken to show that success can also be achieved in critical issues that are apparently intractable.

The author is currently commanding an infantry brigade in CHT. (This is the concluding part of the three-part series.)

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the other stakeholders is quite different. The military continues to be in the driving seat to control the overall situation as law enforcing agencies and civil administration have not been developed substantially. The military therefore, doesn't feel the real progress in peace implementation at the tactical level. The other actors, like the people, media or development partners etc., have a different view of the state of peace in CHT. Because of the fact that these actors have turned more powerful than others, the state of peace portrayed by them appears more credible to the national or international observers.

Removal of Bengalis settled in the '80s from CHT, withdrawal of the military, conventional management of land by the tribals, and voting rights of Bengalis are the four cardinal issues of CHT. In number they may be only four, but for their complexity they stand unparalleled to a lot that has been already done. Thus, the claims of substantial progress of the government pale into insignifi-

perhaps difficult because of the constitutional stipulation. The latest denial of the government to accept the locals as indigenous people has been seen as an effort to marginalise them. The peace process is blocked and the hearts of the tribal people are broken and the political approach needs a review. The reality is, even the handover of all the subjects will not ensure peace unless the four aforementioned cardinal issues are resolved, which is indeed critical for any government.

The economic approach has also failed to deliver as was projected. The entire gamut of development in CHT as seen is: fifteen hundred kilometers of roads, increase in the number of schools and hospitals, telecommunication and things like that. The youth have no opportunity for jobs, except for a small segment absorbed by the NGOs and IOs. The benefit of the economic approach is again taken by the elites and the ordinary people are left out of it.

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The Arab genie shaking Wall Street

ALAMGIR KHAN

SINCE the fall of the Soviet Union, humanity has been witnessing assassinations of leaders of states that recall the middle age or further back. The latest is the killing of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi who was shot, kicked around and buried at a secret location in the desert. During his reign, US President Ronald Reagan, throwing any sign of civility to the winds, called Gaddafi a "mad dog." On the other hand, Nelson Mandela, the most honoured leader in the present world, has always considered this "mad dog" as one of his greatest friends because of his contribution to freeing South Africa from the yoke of apartheid.

Not only leaders, but also tens of thousands of people have been tortured and millions killed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya by the US-European military coalition, and yet no peace, in whose name these killings are being carried out, has come to these regions with the situation getting worse day by day.

The Arab genie is no more a character in the Arabian night stories, it is a reality that Nato has to face

everyday. The American and European leaders are working hard to pacify this genie and put it back in the bottle. So the fearsome genie is once kissed and then kicked around and again called by the the endearing name of Arab Spring. But the genie already escaped to Wall Street and shaken major capital cities in the world.

Yes, the Arab uprising and the occupy movement have something common at the core. Joseph E. Stiglitz wrote on November 4, 2011 in a Project Syndicate article: "The protest movement that began in Tunisia in January, subsequently spreading to Egypt, and then to Spain, has now become global, with the protests engulfing Wall Street and cities across America. ... There is a common theme, expressed by the OWS movement in a simple phrase: 'We are the 99%.' That slogan echoes

the title of an article that I recently published, entitled 'Of the 1%, for the 1%, and by the 1%', describing the enormous increase in inequality in the United States: 1% of the population controls more than 40% of the

wealth and receives more than 20% of the income."

Another Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman, however, thinks that "the 99% slogan aims too low." He thinks that it should be, "We are the 99.9%" (*International Herald Tribune*, November 24, 2011). In the article, written in May, whose title sounded like Lincoln's famous definition of democracy, Stiglitz wrote: "America has long prided itself on being a fair society, where everyone has an equal chance of getting ahead, but the statistics suggest otherwise: the chances of a poor

citizen, or even a middle-class citizen, making it to the top in America are smaller than in many countries of Europe. The cards are stacked against them. It is this sense of an unjust system without opportunity that has given rise to the conflagrations in the Middle East. ... As we gaze out at the popular fervour in the streets, one question to ask ourselves is this: When will it come to America?"

Before long it came and swept over cities in the US and Europe. Even some months ago, the barometer of *The Economist* ("The Arab spring's chill winds," April 20, 2011) read the rise of the pressure in the Bangladeshi political weather when the prime minister of Bangladesh had to scrap her plan for building a new airport thanks to a strong mass protest in the country.

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SHIFTING IMAGES

A spoon full of love



MILIA ALI

DURING the recent holiday season my social life suddenly erupted into an unusual explosion of activities. Excuses for entertainment ranged from baby showers, weddings, anniversaries and birthdays. Amidst all the dinners and lunches I attended, the one that stood out as a truly epicurean experience was the party organised by my friend to

celebrate her husband's retirement. My friend's gastronomic creations are renowned for their exquisite taste, natural ingredients, and stylish presentation. Be it beef stroganoff, chicken *tikka massala* or vegetable frittata, the sauces and flavours of the dishes she cooks are distinctively different -- yet they seem to preserve the character of the originals. The amazing thing is that my friend can make the process of putting together a gourmet meal seem like an effortless exercise. Despite a hard day's labour in the kitchen, she manages to greet her guests with a glowing smile looking more fresh and manicured than the invitees!

I am not being facetious in admitting that I am one of her most ardent admirers. This hero worship stems from the fact that for me cooking, even in its basic form, is a serious challenge. For some reason, I decided early in life that I was not going to pursue any form of culinary ambition. In fact, like most women of my generation, I was eager to break out of the confines of the home and pursue a "career" in the professional world. Hence, I perceived the kitchen to be an obstacle, even a symbol of bondage.

With time I have revised my views about what seemed like a stark choice between cooking and career goals and have come to appreciate that the two need not be mutually exclusive. Ironically, my itinerant life has steered me to a path where I have had to deal with both. My experience has taught me that cooking a healthy meal every day for the family can be no less challenging than a nine to five job.

I regret not paying more attention to my grandmother who would persistently give me cooking lessons, despite my utter lack of interest. She was not only a phenomenal cook but also a wise woman who knew how to produce an excellent meal with minimum of trappings. True, she was

I may be biased, but there is one aspect of my dadima's cooking that is hard to replicate. She gave everything to it because it was her way of expressing her devotion to her family. It was almost an act of worship. Her culinary treats were not about a few spoonfuls of instructions from a recipe book -- they were created with a heart full of love!

not an expert in haute cuisine and did not experiment with casseroles and soufflés. But she could intuitively combine, mix and match ingredients to produce the most delicious South Asian meals.

I never cease to marvel at this quiet, caring woman who was married at the age of fifteen. *Dadima* (as I called her affectionately) never went to school but her home education was solid enough for her to participate in family discussions which sometimes ranged from Debdash to Hamlet! At some point in her early life she graciously took on the responsibility of ensuring that there was always sufficient food and bonhomie around the dining table. What is more amazing is that she carried out this task stoically until the fag end of her life.

Despite my *dadima's* attempts to educate me in the art of gastronomy, it has taken me hours of self-instruction from cookbooks and Internet recipes to learn how to put together a satisfying dish. For years, I followed cooking instructions religiously not daring to leave out or substitute an ingredient, especially when I was faced with the daunting task of laying out a meal for friends. Today, occasionally I add or subtract a spice or an herb, resorting to "loose estimation." Most of the time it seems to work and I have actually started enjoying it. After all, this is an activity, which yields immediate results. From planning a menu, to shopping for the ingredients, cooking and, finally, putting the finished product on the table, the process follows a concrete path toward a definite goal. And if you are lucky you might even bag a compliment -- or two!

I am not ashamed to admit that once in a while my cooking experiments do fail: the spinach tastes like autumn leaves and the mustard-fish is bitterly inedible! When this happens I try to retrieve my grandmother's instructions from my subconscious memory. What is it that made her cooking so special? I never saw her use a cookbook, yet every dish was perfectly balanced in taste, flavour and aroma. I may be biased, but there is one aspect of my *dadima's* cooking that is hard to replicate. She gave everything to it because it was her way of expressing her devotion to her family. It was almost an act of worship. Her culinary treats were not about a few spoonfuls of instructions from a recipe book -- they were created with a heart full of love!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.