

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

CHT Accord in a limbo



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I wish I could share the foreign affairs advisor's optimism that the 1997 CHT Peace Accord would be implemented in full in the next one year. Given that we have achieved very limited objectives in the last 15 years one wonders whether it is out of conviction or with an intention to assuage frayed nerves of the hill people that the advisor has committed himself. Or he must have a magic wand he is waiting to wave, and abracadabra, we will have all the 72 clauses of the Agreement fully operative in the next 365 days!

A statement he made a couple of days ago at the same discussion meeting on CHT Accord is also worth noting. He said: "The peace accord should have been implemented much earlier but there are some people in the government who wanted to go slow." He made no mention of who the people inside the government were who wanted to soft-pedal on the implementation of the accord. In this context another statement of his, made on March 5 this year shows that the issue is not for us alone to resolve. He had said: "The CHT problem is our internal issue. We've to focus on implementation of the CHT Peace Treaty to resolve the problem. International organisations should not create any further difficulty."

In this case too he did not

expand on who these international organisations were or what sort of encumbrances they are putting up which has foiled the government's effort to fulfill the commitment it had made to a section of its people 15 years ago. Is it really some errant people in the government or some international organisations who are throwing the spanner in the works? I think not, and that is why his one-year timeframe appears rather hollow.

We have been witnessing every year since 1997 a large number of roundtables, seminars and discussions participated by all shades of

Larma has to say in various forums in the days leading up to the anniversary of the Accord. And each year there is a discernable ratcheting up of his threats that I see as a manifestation of his feeling of being let down by the government. And for him it perhaps becomes more intolerable because he feels betrayed by the party that effected the agreement but in the two tenures in office has not been able to fulfill the aspirations of the people of the hills fully.

This year Mr. Larma has gone a step further and questioned the very intention of the government in

sons for doing so. For example, why has the implementation committee met only five times in the last 15 years? Why has the government not appealed against the High Court verdict on the writ that sought and got its ruling that declared some of the provisions of the agreement unconstitutional in 2010, since it violates the unitary structure of the state? There is a stay of the Appellate Division verdict since April 2010 and the government has not gone for a regular appeal yet.

There are at least six such Articles, Articles 36, 80, 122, 143 and 144, that the Accord is in conflict with. Either change the Constitution or modify the Accord? And how does the government propose to ensure the tribal predominance of the area when the ratio of tribal to plains people stands at 50:48? And why has the land issue, the core concern, defied resolution?

The state's commitment to the tribal of CHT must be fulfilled. Nobody better than the Bengalis know what it is like to be suppressed. Mr. Larma's position has become untenable, and in order to regain his credibility he may be forced to deliver on his threat of reverting to insurgency. How much that would be successful is quite another thing, but when an ethnic minority group feels compelled to contemplate the path of violence the government can overlook it only at the peril of the state's integrity.

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opinion holders and opinion makers, on the December 2 agreement. And every year we find the despondency increasing in intensity and expressed even more vociferously by the major stakeholder -- the tribals of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It will be well for all the stakeholders to take stock of why the progress has been slow and where the accord has stumbled and why. Neither emotion nor rhapsodic pronouncements of our good intentions will help solve the problem.

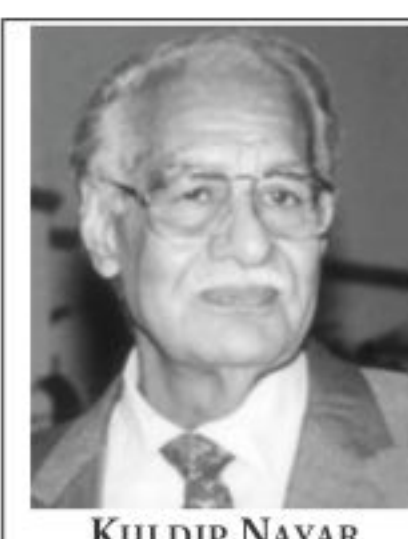
Every year I make it a point to read carefully what Mr. Shantu

penning the Accord. Without going into the specific strategic compulsions it is enough to say that the compulsion for peace was as much acute on the government as it was on Mr. Larma, and it is not for the PCJSS armed struggle alone that the parties sued for peace.

And having chosen the path of peace, if the provisions of the agreement have not been implemented in full in 15 years there is reason to ask why. Is the government unable to move forward or unwilling to do so? If the tribals question the intention of the government they may have valid rea-

BETWEEN THE LINES

No compromise on injustice



KULDIP NAYYAR

WHAT message do Muslims get when neither the civil society nor the Election Commission does anything to stop Amit Shah, a former Gujarat minister, from contesting the state assembly seat this December? He is accused of being an instigator of fake encounters against Shourabbudin Sheikh and Tulsiram Prajapat during the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002.

That the BJP has fielded Shah as a candidate only confirms the allegation that Chief Minister Narendra Modi and his ministers were part of the plan to effect ethnic cleansing. Maybe the party is not shy of playing the Hindu card and it is testing the waters in Gujarat. The BJP's image has already been damaged by the open rebellion of top leaders like Ram Jethmalani, Yashwant Sinha and Shatrughan Sinha against party President Nitin Gadkari, alleged to be mixed up with dubious business companies.

Shah's nomination could have favoured the Congress but the party is apt in scoring a self-goal. It has adopted Shweta Bhatt as its candidate in the Gujarat polls. She is the wife of Sanjiv Bhatt, the police officer who spilled the beans on the riots by admitting in public that he and other officers were instructed by the chief minister not to take action against those who were murdering Muslims and looting and burning their houses and shops. The stock defence of the BJP, more so of Modi supporters, has been that Bhatt is a Congress stooge and his statements against Modi are at the party's instance. At least some leaders in the Congress should have realised that the candidature of Bhatt's wife would give Modi ammunition which he would use.

Mrs. Bhatt probably tells the truth when she says that she was waiting

for the election so that she would have a platform to expose the dictatorial rule that prevails in Gujarat. Many would corroborate her charge because they have gone through harassment and have even been roughed up because of their criticism of Modi. I feel that she would have been on a stronger wicket if she had not accepted the Congress ticket. She would have also carried greater credibility as an independent candidate.

On top of it, her husband, Sanjiv Bhatt, a serving police officer although suspended, accompanied her to the returning officer to file her nomination. An independent officer with an outstanding service record, seen on television screens, sitting next to his wife when she files her nomina-

the Gujaratis, who gave Mahatma Gandhi to the nation. Their support to the people whose hands are tainted with blood is pathetic.

Modi and a large retinue of the BJP leaders would try to polarise the state -- their only agenda -- but it is for the Gujaratis to reject them. The nation remains secular but how odd it is that their ideological stance has been quite the opposite. They should know that the constitution enjoins upon us not to differentiate between Indians on the basis of religion or caste. Were the Gujaratis to return to the mainstream they would give confidence not only to Muslims but also to the entire nation which has put the question mark against them.

Not only in Gujarat but all over the

unimplemented. Still, what evokes hope and confidence is that there is overall communal harmony. It means that pluralism is asserting itself. The fact that there was no repercussion in the rest of India after the Mumbai attacks in 2008 shows that both Hindus and Muslims have learnt to live in harmony.

I am optimistic that the day is not far when Muslims would be able to rent a house in posh localities in big cities. No doubt, some Muslims have been desperate and adopted terrorism for their expression. But the answer to this problem is not counter-terrorism as some fanatic Hindu organisations are doing. Both communities should understand that killing begets killing.

Despite all this, the opposition leader in the Lok Sabha, Sushma Swaraj, wants to anoint Modi as the next prime minister of India. Her loyalty to the BJP is understandable. But how can she inflict on the nation a person who was a party to the killing of more than 2,000 Muslims? If the Supreme Court had not transferred the cases of "encounter" and other crimes to courts outside Gujarat, Modi and his team would have got away with their cover-up job.

The call by British envoy Sir James Bewan on Modi at Ahmedabad amounted to mocking at the critics of the chief minister. Bewan's explanation was that the UK wants to have more trade with Gujarat. He is the envoy at New Delhi, not Ahmedabad. As the Ahmedabad-based Jesuit said in his letter to the British envoy: "Morality can never be compromised by any other consideration. This was something which Mahatma Gandhi resolutely fought for and ultimately sacrificed his life for." Renewed opposition in America to Modi's visa is understandable because it does not want to give the impression that Washington will follow London's example. This message should go to all countries in the world.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

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tion papers, is bound to cost him his unsoiled reputation.

The reason why the Congress offered Shweta Bhatt the party ticket is not difficult to understand. The party wants to bring the anti-Muslim riots in the state to the fore. For some reason, the Congress itself had pushed the carnage to the background. The party should never have allowed the killings to go out of focus.

Whether the party ultimately gets more voters or not is difficult to predict, but it would be doing some justice to thousands of Muslims who live in Gujarat in fear and have little scope for their development. A re-run of the killings and other excesses committed with the blessings of the Modi government may arouse the conscience of

country, the Muslim community feels insecure and helpless. It has been seen that young Muslims have been picked up by the police on mere suspicion. Some have been set free and some still await justice. The law courts are responsible for their detention and the years they have spent in jail. Worse is that none has been held accountable. Mohammad Amir Khan, after being in jail for 14 years, was not found guilty by the Delhi High Court. He should at least be given some financial assistance as a rehabilitation gesture.

Even otherwise, Muslims have never been as demoralised after partition as they are today. There is despondency and lack of hope. The Sachar Committee report on improving their lot remains mostly

Assessing environmental impacts

A necessity for development projects

WHETHER it is social forestation, shrimp farming or extraction of natural resources, it cannot be carried out without considering the potential impact on the environment and the communities to be affected. Environmental experts have stressed as much at a seminar recently, emphasising on the need for environmental impact assessments or EIAs. Failure to conduct such assessments may result in damage to the environment as well as loss of livelihood and other negative effects on the lives of people in the local community.

Even besides this, people should have a say in what is to become of their land and surrounding areas and to participate in the process of granting environmental clearance for development projects and to the institutions implementing them. Realistically speaking, no one knows the land better than those inhabiting them for years and consultation with these parties can only benefit such projects in the long run. The need for public hearings and environmental surveys prior to providing environmental clearance is also a provision of the Environment Protection Act but has never been implemented to date.

Historically, we have also seen people rise in protest against development projects in their area either because it was justified due to the possible negative impact and lack of adequate compensation, or because they were unaware of the actual advantages and disadvantages of such projects to them. People have a basic right to information and this obviously extends to that related to their land, livelihoods and lives and a participatory approach will only serve to improve the process of planning and implementing development projects.

Protecting and preserving the environment, especially under the existing constraints of climate change and global warming, is a major concern as well as challenge. It is important that the government, development institutions and the people work together towards doing what is best for development while keeping in mind the potential impact on the environment.

Free running battery-run rickshaws

Break nexus, implement the ban

THE plying of highly accident-prone battery-driven rickshaws on the streets as reported in this paper is disconcerting. How could such vehicles that the government prohibited more than a year and a half back find a way again into service is the question.

As the report goes, some labour leaders and a number of rickshaw owners' associations in the Mirpur-Pallabi area are operating these improvised transports with some dishonest members of the police looking the other way.

Apart from their inbuilt mechanical flaws making them unfit for roads, these rickshaws are also notorious power-guzzlers. Since before the ban some 2.4 lakh such vehicles were operating across the country and the amount of power they were consuming was about 216 megawatts. That makes this type of transport doubly problematic -- it is risky for passengers and at the same time a drain on our outage-ridden power supply network.

According to a local pro-ruling party labour leader of Mirpur, around 1,500 such transports are plying under the very nose of the police.

Emboldened by police inaction, the number of such unauthorised transport is increasing rapidly. Many workshops have also sprung up in the Mirpur area and are doing a brisk business by constructing these autorickshaws.

Unless immediate steps are taken to clamp down on this unauthorised mode of transport, they will become an added threat to road safety.

The government should look into the illegal manufacture

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 6

- 1240** Mongol invasion of Rus': Kiev under Danylo of Halych and Voivode Dmytro falls to the Mongols under Batu Khan.
- 1921** The Anglo-Irish Treaty is signed in London by British and Irish representatives.
- 1965** Pakistan's Islamic Ideology Advisory Committee recommends that Islamic Studies be made a compulsory subject for Muslim students from primary to graduate level.
- 1971** Pakistan severs diplomatic relations with India following New Delhi's recognition of Bangladesh.
- 1975** The Troubles: Fleeing from the police, a Provisional IRA unit takes a couple hostage in Balcombe Street, London, beginning a six-day siege.
- 1991** In Croatia, forces of the Yugoslav People's Army bombard Dubrovnik after laying siege to the city since May.
- 1992** The Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India is demolished, leading to widespread riots causing the death of over 1500 people.