

# Revisiting the Peace Accord

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

TODAY is sixteen years since the CHT Peace Accord was signed and we are still waiting for its full implementation. No doubt, significant steps have been taken towards implementation of the Accord; institutions as stipulated by the accord have been established in the CHT and more than twenty specific subjects transferred to those institutions. That notwithstanding, there is a general feeling that not enough has been done to meet the expectations and aspirations of the tribal people, particularly in respect of devolution of power to the local councils. Shantu Larma has vented his feelings yesterday and indicated the areas which need to be addressed, and that include inter alia, resolution of land dispute, regional council rules of business and election to the Regional and District Councils.

That we are feeling the compulsion to revisit the accord suggests that that there might be lacunae in the Accord that have somehow resisted resolution. It also, regrettably, suggests that there has been lack of commitment of successive governments to address those flaws with any seriousness. And looking at the way things are moving, one cannot be very optimistic that all the provisos of the accord can be fully implemented soon.

In this regard one cannot overlook the warning that Shantu Larma has been sending out every year since the Accord was signed, of taking to the hills and taking up arms should the agreement not be fully implemented quickly. He has not carried out his threats as yet, but the government would be committing a grave error of judgment if it takes the Chakma leader for granted.

Let there be no doubt that the 1997 Accord was a historical agreement, and there were perhaps strategic compulsions for Shantu Larma to abjure the path of violence and seek a settlement through dialogue to put an end to the quarter-century of tribal struggle for autonomy. He settled for an arrangement that fell short of what the PCJSS had initially wanted but which does ensure a measure of devolution of power through the various clauses of the agreement. The CHT Accord had divided the indigenous people of the hills with the opponents of the deal feeling let down by what they felt was the 'sell out' to the government. It did divide the people of the plains too. That notwithstanding, Shantu Larma has put his credentials on the line in signing the Accord because there is still a sizeable segment of the tribal population who are anti-accord.

The moot point is that when all the political parties have accepted the accord, of course after initial dissension by the BNP, addressing the reasons for the accord

still being in a state of partial limbo assumes urgency. There were complicated issues, particularly those that had to do with the devolution of power, but what is unacceptable is the soft-pedaling of the issue by successive regimes, some more than others, in the last sixteen years with a view to hedge the issue.

Let us remind ourselves that it has been the effort of all the political parties including that of the JP under Ershad to seek a political solution to the CHT problems. Talks were held more than once with the Shanti Bahini in 1986 without any positive outcome. During the BNP regime, a nine-member team consisting of members of the parliament was entrusted with negotiating with the PCJSS and as many as thirteen dialogues were held until mid-1994 when perhaps the political problem diverted the attention elsewhere. It was during this period that PCJSS declared unilateral cease-fire on August 10, 1992, following the then PM's expression of the hope that it would be possible to find a solution within the framework of the Constitution. Calling for a ceasefire by Shantu Larma was an act of wisdom motivated by a great degree of realpolitik.

There are two major issues that militate against the full implementation of the Accord. The first is the land issue. And of the 13 amendments to CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act 2001, suggested by the indigenous people, only 8 have been incorporated and two were partially included.

The other issue is that of reconciling some of the proviso of the Accord with the constitution. Some of the clauses are in contradiction of Articles 30, 80, 122, 143 and 144 of the Constitution.

All the impediments notwithstanding, the state has made a commitment to a segment of our population and everything must be done to fulfill that. If there are stumbling blocks those must be addressed taking into confidence all the stakeholders.

The writer is Editor, Op-ED and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

# Peace Accord must not remain on paper only

FARID HOSSAIN

WHEN the Shanti Bahini ended their years of insurgency and surrendered arms to the prime minister at a packed stadium in the sleepy valley town of Khagrachari 16 years ago, I was one of the witnesses. That December 2 in 1997 heralded a new chapter in the insurgency-wracked Chittagong Hill Tracts, a resource-rich region comprising three hill districts -- Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. That was the day when the tribal men, women and children poured into the stadium to celebrate a peace accord the then Awami League government had signed to end the insurgency that claimed thousands of lives of both civilians and military personnel.

Colourful banners, festoons and flags fluttered in the early winter morning as the hill region burst into a festival. That happened during the first term of Sheikh Hasina as the prime minister. She received accolades for the peace treaty from home and abroad. Her supporters had been so excited that they thought the treaty should have brought her the Nobel Prize for peace.

In its immediate outcome the treaty stopped bloodshed in the hills. More than 50,000 indigenous people who were displaced by the conflict returned home from their shelter in neighbouring India. Night-time curfew that was a common phenomenon in the region was lifted. Guards at military checkpoints looked more relaxed. Foreigners who were earlier totally banned from entering the hill towns were allowed to go in with prior permission of local civilian administration.

Most importantly, the treaty led to the disbanding of the Shanti Bahini, the military wing of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), led by the rebel-leader-turned-politician Santu Larma. The treaty also saw the formation of a Regional Council comprising local government councils of the three hill districts. The council is being headed by Santu Larma since its formation.

The council's responsibilities, according to the Peace Treaty, should have covered the following: Law and order, land and land management, forest and environment, social justice, trial laws, overseeing general administration, coordinating disaster

and relief management, issuing licenses for heavy industries and overseeing other development projects. The treaty calls for transfer of at least 33 fields of authority and responsibilities to the special status-enjoying CHT Regional Council. So far, about 20 subjects have been transferred. But it has not been much effective for lack of financing.

The treaty also saw the winding-up of some small military camps from the remote areas deep in the forests. In a major move in implementing a provision in the treaty the government decided to withdraw one full Brigade of troops and 35 temporary camps from the CHT areas. (The Daily Star: July 30, 2009). This was supposed to be the single largest troops pull-out from the area. The move was designed to build confidence among the tribal people. The details of the implementation of the decision are still sketchy.

The post-Peace Accord period witnessed a wave of development work in the hill districts. Foreign funds, especially from the UNDP, European Union and Asian Development Bank, helped build roads, schools, health and sanitary facilities and creation of jobs. The government too has been implementing a number of development works seeking to improve the living standard of the indigenous people. A ban on the use of mobile phones in the CHT has been lifted, bringing the region and hills and forests in the communication network with the rest of the country.

Yet, the tribal people seem to be far from happy. As the nation celebrates the 16th anniversary of the signing of the CHT Peace Treaty the atmosphere in the hills is one of gloom and complaints. A major source of discontent is the long-standing disputes over land between the indigenous people and the Bengali-speaking settlers who were encouraged to go there mainly during the rule of Ziaur Rahman.

Despite repeated promises Sheikh Hasina, even during her second term in the government, has failed to make any headway in resolving the land disputes, much of which is related to communal violence that occurred especially during the insurgency.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act 2001 has yet to be amended to make it consistent with the Peace Treaty of 1997. A draft of the amendment was approved by the cabinet on June 3 this year. On June 16 it was placed before the parliament and then sent to the Standing Committee on land ministry. The standing committee held several hearings, but it never returned to the House for passage.

Raja Debashish Roy, in his book, The Land Question and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, quoted an unnamed Chakma leader as having once said that in the CHT "the land problem is the main problem." Roy argued that peace in the region largely depends on the resolution of the land issue.

He is right.

The writer is a former Bureau Chief, AP.



## CHT- Struggle for peace

A.F. JAGLUL AHMED

THERE are different views about the success or progress of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace process. Some base their claim on the socio-economic development, while some on the cessation of combat. Perceptual mismatch and the plight will perpetuate so long the efforts to implement the process are not vetted against reality.

Does the socio-culture construct of the tribal people welcome development against their sense of traditionalism? Is there a conflict between the notion of indigenous living and economic development? Can nationalism be still viewed from the prism of colonial rule? Can a nation state nurture the idea of nationalism and micro nationalism at the same time? Is there a balance in the demographic growth of different communities to support their respective aspirations? Is there the leadership to carry forward the process of peace keeping with time and reality? Is the road to peace viewed by all actors from a common perspective for a common goal? The measure of progress of the peace process demands investigation in all the above conflicting standpoints of the tribal and non-tribal communities living within the process.

The social construct of the tribal community is greatly influenced by the mythological stories. Economics is not an event of a day, rather planning for long term life management. The rural tribal communities traditionally lack the futuristic vision of life. Though a tiny segment of urban-centric tribal population adjusts to development, the majority, living in the remote areas, are against it.

The religious values of the tribal communities are a mix of Buddhism and Hinduism, which have contributed to their socio-cultural makeup. The religious values strengthened their reclusive social character and prevented any space for people outside their community to integrate.

Irreconcilable socio-cultural makeup, predilection for traditional life style and distaste for development, and conflicting religious values of the two communities prevented a situation where peaceful co-existence was possible as defined in the peace plan.

Apart from the historic socio-cultural differences, there is conflict in the sense of nationalism of the nation state of Bangladesh and 'micro nationalism' borne by the tribal communities. The conflict resists political integration and disrupts peaceful co-existence.

The British Empire promulgated the 1900 Regulation from a political motive to secure the British the interest of the administration, which is even now preferred by the tribal communities. It laid down some harsh provisions for the non-tribal communities under the garb of protection of tribal rights and privileges. It was a double-faced system to permanently seal the prospect of integration between people of the hills and the plains.

Bangladesh has molded its administration as a nation state. But it also respected the spirit of 1900 Regulation to preserve the rights of the tribal people by denying the rights of other citizens to live anywhere in the country with a loose interpretation of Section 36 of the Constitution. Under such arrangement, the spirit of the nation state finds it difficult to accommodate both nationalism and 'micro nation-

alism' of the two communities in its state system. The peace process will perhaps suffer and continue sagging unless there is reconciliation between these two opposing spirits. Thus, what may have been defined as peace for the tribal people is not so viewed by the non-tribal community.

There is unbalanced growth in the demographic sector in CHT. Negative growth is reducing the demographic power of the tribal population from that of the non-tribal. On the other hand, non-tribal population, with upward growth, is causing more demand for land for livelihood. Such unbalanced demographic strength between the two communities finds them in great peril to share land, which is the core issue of the peace process.

Moderate leadership growth depends on the education of youths, who can adjust themselves with the changing realities. There is growth in the tribal education; but the tendency of educated tribal youth to leave the hills for better employment has created a vacuum in the moderate leadership. As the better educated youth don't return to the hills, the poorly educated youth are roped into cadre politics. The few better lots remaining in the hills are lured by the international organisations to serve their goals rather than the peace treaty. Resultantly, the perception and bargain of peace remains in the hands of the old tribal elites, who still carry the idealistic mentality that impedes the peace process.

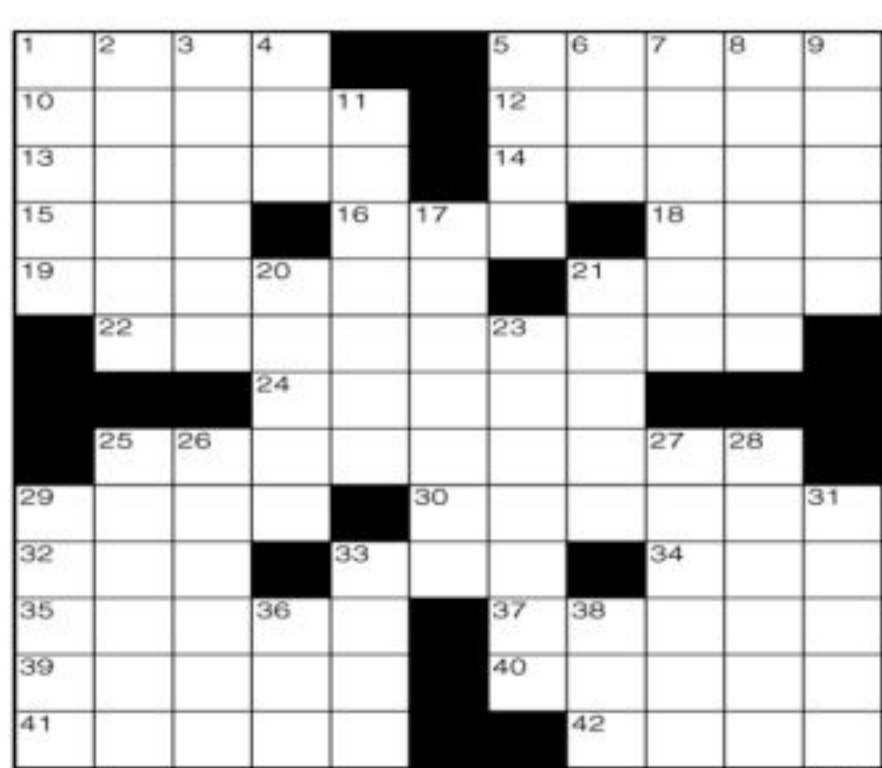


By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Gusted
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  - 38 Opening

LASTS VASES  
EMAIL ISAAC  
SPINE CHITA  
TIEN PREENER  
ART TIC TRY  
TIELL BOBBY  
SWEEP PRINTS  
PER GUM IRA  
OREGANO FAB  
PENAL PEACE  
UNCLE ULCER  
PEELS PIERS

Yesterday's answer



A XYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

Previous Cryptoquote: GOD GAVE US THE GIFT OF LIFE; IT IS UP TO US TO GIVE OURSELVES THE GIFT OF LIVING WELL. -- VOLTAIRE

## QUOTABLE Quote

"Leadership is a privilege to better the lives of others. It is not an opportunity to satisfy personal greed."

Mwai Kibaki

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