

CHT Accord: 22 years of promises not kept



JOHN TRIPURA

IN the Chittagong Hill Tracts, clashes between Bangladeshi military and Shanti Bahini continued for more than two decades. The armed struggle ended through the signing of an agreement (known as CHT Accord) between Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and the Bangladesh government on December 2, 1997. As a result, it has been widely known as "Peace Accord".

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina signed the agreement with great courage and prudence. The agreement was signed in accordance with the constitution of Bangladesh by the undisputed leader of the hill people, Jyotirindra Bodipriya Larma (Santu Larma), on behalf of the indigenous Jumma people, and Abul Hasnat Abdullah, MP and Convener of the National Committee, on behalf of the Bangladesh government. The agreement promised to bring stability in the region. But even after 22 years of its signing, the Accord has yet to bear fruit. CHT is still the most unstable region in the country and resentment among the indigenous Jumma people is increasing day by day due to delays in the full implementation of the Accord.

The government and the Jana Samhati Samiti give a statement every year on the occasion of the anniversary of the CHT Accord. The government says almost all the provisions of the Accord have been implemented—and the rest too will eventually be implemented. But the Jana Samhati Samiti claims that none of the fundamental issues of the CHT Accord have yet been implemented. And the language of political discourse in the CHT is becoming more and more restless.

The signing of the Peace Accord kindled a glimmer of hope among the Jumma people that they will eventually live in peace and with dignity. But their hope has not materialised in the last 22 years. Violent clashes between Jumma and Bengali people over land rights are still a regular affair in the region. The Jumma people expected that the present government of Sheikh Hasina—whose first government signed the Accord—would take steps toward the full implementation of the Accord. But this has not happened even after two decades of its signing.

Successive governments implemented a few provisions, including enactment of laws as per the CHT Accord. Among them, the passing of CHT Regional Council Act 1998, three Hill District Council Act 1998 and CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act 2001 (amended in 2016) in parliament; establishment of CHT Affairs Ministry and CHT Regional Council; reconstitution of interim Hill District Councils and transfer of 7 subjects and 7 offices to these councils; repatriation of Jumma refugees from the Indian State of Tripura, withdrawal of around 100 temporary camps, formation of CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission, Task Force and CHT Accord Implementation Monitoring Committee; rehabilitation of ex-combatants, etc., are the most remarkable.

But even if all the provisions of the CHT Accord are implemented, without a solution to the "land problems", everything else will become meaningless. Land problems are the main issues in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. As a result, the situation must be considered with great care, before talking about the implementation of the Accord.

Consider the position of a child who was born in 1997, he or she is now a 22-year-old adult. In 1997, the guerrillas who returned to normal life after surrendering their arms were 35

or 40 years old, now they are 57 or 67 years old. Some might be even older. Before joining the Shanti Bahini, all of them had their own houses and land for cultivation. But now most of them do not have anything. According to the Accord, they were supposed to have been given back their homes and land. But that did not happen.

The houses and land of the hill people have been occupied by the state-sponsored Bengali settlers who were taken from the plain land after 1971. According to the CHT Accord, one of the major priorities was to resolve

On the other hand, the government is still following the previous policy of rehabilitating Bengali settlers in CHT, identifying them as IDP (internally displaced persons) which is contradictory to the CHT Accord. As a result, the rehabilitation process of the indigenous IDPs has ended in a standstill.

Unreliable data is being brought forward without taking the proper initiative to implement the basic provisions of the CHT Accord. It is said that 48 out of 72 provisions have been implemented. But, only 25 were

returning of dispossessed land to the indigenous owners in resolving disputes through Land Commission; rehabilitation of the returnee refugees and internally displaced indigenous families; withdrawal of all temporary camps including Operation Uttoron (Operation Upliftment); cancellation of land leases given to non-residents; etc., have either been left unimplemented or have been partially implemented.

The agreement was signed to establish peace in the region, but peace is still elusive due to the political unwillingness to resolve the problems of the indigenous Jumma people of CHT. The government should not forget that the problem of Chittagong Hill Tracts was not solved through military means; the solution was initiated by political means in 1997. I would like to say now is the right time for the Bangladesh government to rebuild the nation in an inclusive, productive and prosperous manner, ensuring the safety of all.

The present situation in the CHT proves that the CHT Accord has failed to bring peace in the region. The state's failure to implement all the provisions of the Accord in a timely manner is leading to an increasing sense of frustration and disillusionment among the Jumma people, which is enhancing the possibility of renewed unrest and possible revival of the old situation in the region, the effect of which will be devastating. Therefore, in the interest of the overall peace and security of the country, the present government should consider the matter as a critical national security issue and endeavour to build a nationwide consensus in favour of the treaty, and implement at least the provisions of resolution of land dispute, rehabilitation of internally displaced persons and demilitarisation, in the remaining period of its tenure.

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The CHT Peace Accord was signed on December 2, 1997. PHOTO: STAR

the land problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts—the hills areas which are occupied by the Bengali settlers should be given back to the indigenous Jumma peoples. In the last 22 years, nothing has happened.

Without solving the land problems, government agencies have undertaken various "development" activities by acquiring thousands of acres of land in different areas of the CHT. Though it is said that the "development" is for the hill people, in reality, it has spelt disaster for the indigenous Jumma people.

implemented and 34 clauses remain totally unimplemented, while 13 have been partially implemented.

Besides, the core issues, such as legal and administrative measures for preservation of tribal-inhabited characteristics of CHT; transfer of powers and functions including general administration, law and order, police (local), land and land management, forest and environment, communication system and so on to the CHT Regional Council and Hill District Councils and holding elections of these councils;

A daydreamer's guide to a futuristic Bangladesh

CYBERNAUTIC RUMINATIONS

HABIBULLAH N KARIM

LATE Chief Justice Habibur Rahman traced the origin of Bangladesh as a land that was referred to as "Gangaridai" in Greek travel lore of pre-Christian era known for its untold riches and easy living. Fast forward to the era of awakening when a post-renaissance Europe was in the thralls of science and secular philosophy, Bangladesh or rather its predecessor, Banga Desh, was the crown jewel of the Mughal Empire, still famed for its affluence.

Academic estimates put 17th-century "Bangala" as one of the richest habitats of the world. Bangla was the seat of power for the kingdom of Nawab Sirajuddaula spanning across Bangladesh and the Indian provinces of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa even as late as the second half of the 18th-century before the fate of Bangla was inexorably changed with the mercenaries of East India Company usurping the governance of our land and gradually encroaching into the rest of the Indian subcontinent. The very land that was the envy of the world as the richest habitat in the 17th-century was reduced to a poor territory

suffering the worst famine of the 20th-century during the Second World War due to two centuries of plunder by the foreign rulers.

Now that we are in charge of our own lot since we became independent 48 years ago, our star has been on steady ascension. The country that was reduced to rubble during nine months of war in 1971 and suffered the worst human casualty from a devastating cyclone and tsunami the year before, has now become the second largest producer of apparels and the second biggest source of freelance IT service providers in the world. The least developed country of four decades ago is now a stout developing economy soon to join the band of middle-income countries—the foundation is set and plans are afoot to join the ranks of the developed economies in two more decades, give or take a couple years.

In this backdrop, it does not take a huge stretch of the imagination to dream of a day in the not too distant future when we can rub shoulders with the most affluent nations of the world as equals. To a little boy who was starting his primary level education at the birth of Bangladesh, the future looked despondent being born in a war-torn nation burdened with the eighth largest population confined in an area that ranked 92nd in the world and was bereft of any major natural



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

resource. That little boy may one day during his lifetime stake a claim as a citizen of a developed country, which is stupendous and defines what has now become known as the "Bangladesh miracle".

As we live through that miracle, what can we dream of for the future of Bangladesh, what would be the shape of Bongobondhu's Sonar Bangla, what would be the nature of social justice advocated by Maulana Bhashani and what would be the fate of farmers,

workers and the landless promoted by Sher-e-Bangla?

I dream of a Bangladesh within my lifetime where we regain the mantle of a wealthy nation; where every man and woman is at least a high-school diploma holder; where every able-bodied and able-minded person has a meaningful profession; where there are no destitute and poor people; where everyone has access to affordable education, healthcare, civic amenities irrespective of location,

faith, or ethnicity; where the state adequately provides for all socially, physically or mentally handicapped persons; where urban, suburban and rural areas are aesthetically and efficiently laid out for a high quality of life for everyone; where the rule of law and justice dispensation protect the rights and interests of the socially and economically weak; where our lands, rivers and forests are preserved in pristine condition for all of posterity; and where our carbon footprint is zero and our air is as fresh as the southern breeze from the tallest mountains of the world.

This day-dream, nay my prayer, for the future of Bangladesh does not have to remain a pipe dream. We can really make it happen through our concerted efforts in realising the goals of Bangladesh 2041 and implementing the plans and guidelines outlined in the Delta Plan envisioning a rich and vibrant Bangladesh in 2100. In other word, our long-cherished dreams are already finding expressions in our long-term national plans that delineate a Bangladesh marching ahead and at the same time promoting amity and fellowship among nations.

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QUOTABLE Quote

RABINDRANATH TAGORE
(1861-1941)
Bengali poet, musician and Nobel Prize winner

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Marina sight
6 Pilgrimage site
11 Different
12 Hammerin' Hank
13 Stable animal
14 Check the fit of
15 Music's Yoko
16 Mark with dots
18 Rooster's mate
19 Solar system center
20 Cowboy nickname
21 Freshener target
23 Met performer
25 French article
27 Snaky fish
28 Eccentric ones

30 First-rate
33 Do a checkout job
34 Kanye's music
36 Opening
37 Copy
39 Lyricist Gershwin
40 News summary
41 Sprinted
43 Rival of Harry
44 Shop tool
45 Stylist's spot
46 Mariners

DOWN

1 Pirate chant
2 Made amends
3 In time order
4 "— So Fine"
5 Lock of hair

6 Afternoon show
7 Tombstone
8 Code-based
9 Wine drink
10 Building wing
17 Chiding sound
22 Old roadster
24 Pay stub line
26 Attach, in a way
28 Phone feature
29 Was inactive
31 Pop, e.g.
32 Black suit
33 Flock makeup
35 Criminals, in cop slang
38 Folded food
42 Copying

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	H	A	G		C	A	R	O	L
H	A	L	E		A	L	G	O	R
A	S	S	T		S	E	A	B	E
W	H	O	S	T	H	A	T		
S	P	R	E	E	S		R	E	A
L	A	I	T	Y		C	H	E	V
O	T	T	A	T	T	H	E	N	
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M	E	D	I	U	M		R	O	U
A	V	E	N	G	E		E	D	N
P	A	N	E	S			D	E	E

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

CAPTAIN TUSSLE RETIRED AND BOUGHT THAT HOUSE LOOKING OVER THE CAMP?

I GUESS HE LIKED HIS LIFE AT THE CAMP

NO, HE JUST WANTS TO KEEP THUMBING HIS NOSE AT YOU

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

DAD, HAVE YOU SEEN YOUR DRILL?

IT SHOULD BE ON MY WORKBENCH.

BUT HAVE YOU SEEN IT?

NOT RECENTLY.

THAT'S GOOD.

NOW I HAVE A QUESTION!