



The 26th Year of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord

Unity and Uniqueness



A Publication of the Bangladesh Centre for Indo-Pacific Affairs
Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka 1342, Bangladesh

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The 26th Year of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Unity and Uniqueness

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Message from the Vice-chancellor

It is with great joy and pride that I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the entire team as we await with anticipation the publication of "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord 1997: Uniqueness and Unity," a significant scholarly initiative led by the Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs (BCIPA), Jahangirnagar University. The center has once again demonstrated an unparalleled commitment to advancing knowledge and fostering intellectual discourse by publishing this monograph. The tireless efforts of the BCIPA team in orchestrating this publication reflects the dedication and passion that characterize their invaluable contributions to our university's academic landscape.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord holds a special place in the history of our nation, and the exploration of its nuances and impact is a commendable endeavor. As we celebrate the 26th anniversary of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, it presents a unique opportunity for us to reflect on its historical significance and the multifaceted impact it has had on Bangladesh's foreign policy, national security, and ethnic diversity. The forthcoming collection of essays is not just a compilation of scholarly works; it is a testament to the collaborative spirit and commitment to academic excellence that define our university. I am confident that the insightful contributions from our esteemed faculty and researchers will not only shed light on the historical significance of the accord but also contribute to a broader understanding of its implications for foreign policy, national security, and ethnic diversity.

As a Vice-Chancellor, I take pride in the intellectual vibrancy that the authors bring to such initiatives. Your collective effort and scholarly pursuits are not just a source of academic pride but a reflection of our commitment to advancing knowledge and contributing meaningfully to societal discourse. I extend my warmest wishes for the success of "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord 1997: Uniqueness and Unity." May this publication serve as a beacon of knowledge, fostering dialogue and understanding within our academic community and beyond. Your achievements contribute significantly to the reputation of Jahangirnagar University, and I am grateful for the privilege of leading such a distinguished and dedicated community of scholars.

Once again, congratulations on this remarkable achievement, and I eagerly anticipate the positive impact this publication will have on our academic legacy.

Professor Dr. Md. Nurul Alam
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Editorial Note

As the sub-editor of this momentous endeavor, I am filled with both anticipation and gratitude as we embark on the final leg of crafting "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord 1997: Uniqueness and Unity." This forthcoming publication, born out of the collective intellectual prowess of our esteemed contributors, is not merely a compendium of essays but a testament to the power of scholarly collaboration and the pursuit of knowledge.

The Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs (BCIPA), housed within the esteemed Department of International Relations at Jahangirnagar University, stands poised to embark on a scholarly journey that transcends boundaries and delves into the intricacies of an agreement that has left an indelible mark on Bangladesh's foreign policy, national security, and ethnic diversity—"The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord 1997." BCIPA, an integral academic center for research, publication, and dialogue, recognizes the Accord as a cornerstone in Bangladesh's history. Through meticulous research and scholarly contributions, this publication aims not only to unravel the layers of the Accord but also to foster a deeper understanding among the international community, civil society, NGOs, media, and the wider public.

Intellectual rigor, careful analysis, and a shared commitment to unraveling the historical tapestry that has shaped this region have all been necessary for navigating the complex landscape of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord. The depth of insight and diversity of perspectives that each of the contributors brings to this publication enriches the discourse and elevates the significance of our collective pursuit. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, signed in 1997, holds a unique place in Bangladesh's narrative. It was a pivotal moment, signaling a commitment to address longstanding issues related to the region's autonomy and the rights of its indigenous populations. This forthcoming collection of essays provides an opportunity to dissect the Accord's intricacies, analyze its implementation, and assess its impact over the past two and a half decades.

I find myself reflecting on the privilege of being part of such a prestigious initiative. The successful culmination of this project will not only mark a milestone in our academic pursuits but will also contribute to the broader narrative surrounding peace, governance, and ethnic diversity in the region. In the spirit of scholarly camaraderie, let us anticipate with joy the moment when "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord 1997: Uniqueness and Unity" takes its place on the shelves of knowledge, inviting readers to delve into the richness of its content. Together, we celebrate the collective achievement of bringing this intellectual vision to fruition, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such an esteemed community.

Professor Nurul Huda Sakib
Editor

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The Historical Origin of the CHT Peace Accord

Mohammad Mozahidul Islam

Introduction

On December 2, 1997, a momentous agreement known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was signed by Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, leader of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS or United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts), and Abul Hasnat Abdullah, MP and convener of the Peace Accord Implementation Committee, on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh, in the presence of Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The Peace Accord is a testament to the resolute political commitment of the government of Bangladesh led by Sheikh Hasina. This significant agreement led to the voluntary surrender of arms by insurgents associated with the PCJSS to government authorities. It marked the end of over two decades of armed struggle by the PCJSS, advocating for the autonomy of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The peace accord that was signed on December 2, 1997, holds significant historical importance as it signals the conclusion of a prolonged period of conflict and marks the commencement of a subsequent era focused on fostering peace and cooperation within the CHT region. In this brief essay, I will begin by recounting the initial cause of the conflict in the CHT and then analyze the circumstances surrounding the signing of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord. Section 4 will address the reaction to the peace agreement and its lasting effects on present-day Bangladesh. The final section will summarize the paper.

The background of the Crisis:

The origin of the conflict in the CHT can be traced to the British colonial period when the colonial government implemented policies, particularly tribalism, to govern the region. The government initially labeled the Jumma people as a "tribe" or "hill man," distinguishing them from the Bangalee population. The concept of "tribal" not only affected their identity but also shaped the governing policies, allowing the colonial administration to control the local political economy. This led to significant changes in the Jumma people's culture and society as the colonial government-initiated land alienation by claiming ownership of land rights in the CHT through the establishment of reserved forests (Schendel, 1992; Uddin, 2010).

The alienation process further intensified during the Pakistan period. Since the birth of the Pakistan state, the Pakistani government has viewed the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts with 'an eye of mistrust and suspicion for being anti-Pakistani during the partition and concern' (cited in Uddin 2010). While during this period, CHT people were deprived of education, jobs, business opportunities, and other means. The building of the Kaptai hydroelectric dam project between 1957 and 1963 was the leading reason that created huge grievances among the Jumma people in the CHT. Thousands of the Jumma people were permanently displaced without any compensation because of this state-led project.

After Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the CHT people in Bangladesh continued to face exclusion and discrimination, concerning their identity and livelihood. The Jumma people sought autonomy, but the then Government of Bangladesh rejected their demands, leading to social, political, and cultural chaos. Manobendra Narayan Larma, the representative of the Hill people in the National Parliament, strongly opposed the constitutional requirement for all people in Bangladesh to be of Banglalee nationality and openly rejected the Constitution when it was enacted in 1972.

Because of the constitutional political measures taken by the Bangladesh state, which were considered a threat to cultural and ethnic identity, the Hill people formed the PCJSS, a political body in March 7, 1972. In January 1973, the PCJSS formed its military wing known as the Shanti Bahini (peace force). In the mid-1980s, the PCJSS started using the term "Jumma" to describe the Hill people, a label they adopted to bring together the various Hill communities and resist the influence of Bangalee/Bangladeshi nationalism. However, the PCJSS couldn't carry out full-blown activities during the era of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The scenario dramatically changed after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, when the Hill People's movement gained the support of India. The headquarters of the Samhiti Samiti was established in Tripura, India, and its personnel were trained and armed by the Indian military. (Subir Bhaumik, 1996). The Shanti Bahini (SB) had begun a full-scale insurgency in the Hills by the mid-1970s.

Since the situation deteriorated further, as part of the military solution, approximately 400,000 Bangalees relocated to the CHT region between 1979 and 1987. This Bangalee settlement scheme, initiated by President Ziaur Rahman, created a risk for the Jumma people to be outnumbered by Bengali settlers. This further escalated the crisis in the CHT.

By the mid-1970s, the SB launched a comprehensive insurgency in the Hills. Between 1978 and 1989, the SB carried out major military operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region. These operations were not limited to engaging with the Bangladeshi military forces, but also involved deliberate targeting of the villages inhabited by Bangalee settlers. These villages were subjected to repeated incidents of arson. Based on official government data, it has been reported that during the period, approximately 4,000 individuals living in the CHT (including both Bangalee settlers and Hill people), were harmed by SB's bomb explosions, shootings, or arson (S. M. Ibrahim, 2001: 118). Consequently, the government had to implement a comprehensive militarization of the CHT. This had significant negative impacts on both the people's well-being and the development of the newly independent Bangladesh.

The Origin of the CHT Peace Accord:

The genesis of the peace accord can be attributed to an extensive and intricate negotiation process that spanned over a decade. Throughout this period of peace efforts, Bangladesh was governed by a variety of regimes, including military, caretaker, and democratically-elected governments. Notably, despite the diverse nature of these governments, each administration

persisted with the peace negotiations and recognized their significance. For instance, a government report published in 1993 highlights that “There is, needless to underscore, a deep sympathy and real commitment to find a peaceful solution for the problems of the tribal people of the Hill Districts of Chittagong.” The report then systematically shows “efforts made by the Government of Bangladesh in this positive direction and on-going efforts to achieve real progress to achieve a solution to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned”.

Numerous factors played crucial roles in the peace initiatives. Initially, it was imperative for the government of Bangladesh to assert its complete authority over the CHT, in order to control access to the region's abundant natural resources, stimulate economic growth, and ensure national security and sovereignty. Additionally, there was increasing pressure from donors and international human rights organizations on the Bangladesh government. For instance, on 11 October 1986, prominent human rights organizations convened a conference in Amsterdam, urging the Bangladesh government to withdraw the army and paramilitary from the CHT, and petitioning for specific conditions to safeguard the rights of the Jumma people in the region. Furthermore, after a prolonged decade of conflict, many military experts, including high-ranking military generals, recognized that relying solely on force was insufficient to quell insurgency, given the evolving geopolitics and international dynamics. Lastly, the SB faced numerous challenges that made it difficult to sustain its conflict, including the changing nature of geopolitics and various on-the-ground obstacles.

The initial peace initiatives efforts began in 1985 during General Ershad's administration, where six meetings were held with the PCJSS in an attempt to address the crisis. After the fall of the autocratic Ershad regime, the democratically elected government under Khaleda Zia continued the negotiation process with the PCJSS, conducting a total of 13 meetings during her tenure to further discussions and work towards a resolution. Ultimately, it was under the leadership of the Hasina government that the breakthrough occurred. After a series of seven meetings with the PCJSS leadership, the Hasina government successfully concluded the negotiations, resulting in a historic peace deal. This comprehensive and protracted negotiation process played a crucial role in paving the way for the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.

The Response in Bangladesh

At the time, the world media widely covered the signing of the agreement. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, leader of the PCJSS were congratulated by the various governments and human rights organizations. This agreement created an opportunity to resolve the disputes, conflicts, and clashes that had been going on for more than two decades in the CHT.

Nevertheless, there was a varied response in Bangladesh. This can be categorized into three groups: the reaction of the Awami League-led government, the response from opposition political parties, primarily the BNP, and the reaction of civil society. First, the Awami

League emphasized the Chittagong Hill Tracts Agreement as a significant achievement, highlighting its potential to promote peaceful national integration and provide access to the region's natural resources, leading to economic growth. On the other hand, the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and right-wing parties strongly opposed the agreement, labeling it as a "black pact" and alleging that it violates the country's sovereignty and constitution. BNP leader Khaleda Zia argued that the agreement would create a parallel government and urged Prime Minister Hasina to revoke it. Additionally, human rights activists, including indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and liberal intellectuals, viewed the Chittagong Hill Tracts agreement as a step towards addressing years of cultural deprivation, military reprisals, and human rights abuses by the Bangladesh government against the hill tribes, including encroachment, rape, and murder.

Concluding Remarks

There were concerns that the peace agreement could weaken the authority of the state in the CHT region, establish a quasi-state with veto power over Bangladesh's sovereignty, fail to provide equal protection to all groups and residents in the CHT, and potentially lead to the collapse of the weakly institutionalized Bangladeshi state due to an ethno-secessionist movement resulting from a significant failure of the CHT accord. Twenty-six years since the signing of the agreement, it is apparent that Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty were not threatened by the signing of the agreement, rather Bangladesh and its citizens benefited from it in all respects.

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CHT Accord: Socio-economic Implications in Retrospect

Sadeka Halim

Introduction

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997 has planted the seed of pluralism in the state persona of independent Bangladesh, where the post-accord state policy, socio-economic progress, and overall developmental initiatives vouch for that. The Accord has been a brave and significant step towards the establishment of peace in a volatile and diverse region. The Accord signed between Bangladesh government and PCJSS (Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti) was welcomed by many at home and abroad. Within just 18 months of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ascent to power in 1996, she resolved one of the most difficult and violent problem plaguing Bangladesh and later she was awarded a UNESCO Peace Prize for bringing stability to that region. Unlike other peace treaties around the world, this accord was unique in the sense that it was done voluntarily without the involvement of any third party, such as the United Nations or any other states (Chowdhury, 2014). The monumental objective of this accord was to recognize the CHT as a ‘tribal inhabited¹’ region and to uphold the conservation and development of societal phenomenon, cultural identity, and ‘development²’ where other segments of the accord reiterated the governing structures. Putting the 26 years of this unique treaty in retrospect, this paper briefly explores the socioeconomic implications on the backdrop of the development of CHT as a positive and powerful consequence of this accord.

CHT Accord: Onset of Harmony in the Hills

The 1997 Accord with PCJSS ended a decade-long spiral of violence and opened the door of harmony and peace in the hills. The treaty signed by the then Awami League-led government responded to the ethnic indigenous peoples’ growing calls for the right to autonomy and self-determination for the local institutions. The Accord provided provisions for separate governing entities for CHT, specific charters, a separate ministry³ dedicated to the affairs of CHT, and legal inclusions⁴ accompanied by the security and stability for non-governmental and international organizations to operate hand-in-hand with the government in various aspects of social, economic, political, and cultural perspectives and good governance (Rashiduzzaman, 1998; Siddiqui, 2016; Chowdhury, 2014; Roy, 2010; Larma, 2003). The Accord aimed to end the land dispute, maintain cultural integrity (officially referred to as “tribal” or “ethnic minorities”), settle refugee claims, demilitarize the area, and transfer power to regional councils (RCs) and hill district councils (HDCs). Moreover, the HDCs and RC have been given jurisdiction over “tribal” customary law (Halim, 2003). Another crucial uniqueness of the historic 1997 Accord is that it recognizes the importance of the 1900 CHT

1. Part A (GENERAL) of the CHT accord narrates that “Both the sides have recognized the need for protecting the characteristics and attaining overall development of the region considering the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a tribal inhabited region.”

2. Ibid

3. Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs

4. Small Ethnic Communities Cultural Institutions Act, 2010

Regulation and emphasizes the role of RC and other relevant civil bodies and the need for consultations and advice from local authorities in case of amendments. One noteworthy example amendment (2003) was the removal of the Regulation's conflicting clauses and the transfer of judicial authority from administrative to judicial officers (District Judges).

Along with modern state procedures, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms related to customary indigenous laws practiced by the three circle chiefs in Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban made the whole legal transition smooth in the post-accord era. There exists more formalized coordination now in CHT between the traditional indigenous structures and other local state apparatuses. The three circle chiefs have formal relationships with the district councils and with the Ministry of CHT Affairs. However, the district administrators consult more with the CHT Ministry and to a lesser extent with RC.

Socioeconomic Implications of the CHT Accord

CHT Accord brought a substantial transformation in the lives of indigenous populations living in those areas regarding primary livelihood and life chances. Schools and colleges have been built to strengthen the human potential among the indigenous peoples living in CHT since 1997. A full-fledged public university and one public medical college have been established in the Rangamati district of CHT. Apart from that, the current government has built several roads and bridges to supply electricity and sanitation throughout the CHT to keep pace with the commitments of the Accord. In addition, the CHT development board has been established to carry out infrastructural and embedded development, and more than 50 projects are currently running, with another 1,500 projects in the pipeline for the CHT region (Chakma, 2023). A massive road of more than a thousand kilometers is under construction in CHT, protecting the citizens from crimes inflicted on the borders and enhancing rapid commutes (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, 2022) to have access to schools, health centers, and markets.

Women in CHT face many challenges and lack political representation, must contend with discrimination and sometimes occurrences of violence make it especially difficult for them to assert their rights and gain access to resources. The accord was termed as a gendered agreement as their roles in the insurgency movement received no formal recognition from their own communities. Nonetheless, the accord has paved the way for indigenous women in skill development activities, education, and empowerment regarding equal inheritance and mobilization against violence, and set up of gender cells in RC and shelter homes for them (Halim, 2003). Constitutionally, Bangladesh is yet to provide people's special rights or cultural individuality adopted in 1972; however, indigenous people are entitled to fundamental rights as enshrined in the constitution of Bangladesh applicable to all its citizens as stated in Article 28 (1) irrespective of race, caste, religion, sex or place of birth (Halim, 2021). Apart from the security and social stability, the CHT accord promised⁵ a land

5. Clause 4, Part D of the CHT Accord of 1997

commission, which came into action for successful land dispute resolution (Roy, 2002). Customary laws in CHT are implicitly taken into account by the CHT Regulation of 1900. However, the amendment of 1900 CHT Regulation 34 (1), which offered a legal framework for the resettlement of non-residents within CHT, facilitated the Bangalee settlement process (1979–1985) (Roy, 1997). Furthermore, the Kaptai Dam’s construction in 1960 resulted in the displacement of almost 100,000 people, which pushed the Hill people to the margins. The mainstream land policies are yet to recognize customary practices of land ownership by indigenous hill people who are entirely disregarded by legislators at federal level and judged as socially backward and stagnant (Halim, 2021). Nevertheless, the brainchild program of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has targeted the ethnic communities in CHT and provided a total of 600 houses till July 2022 under Ashrayan Project (Prime Minister’s Office, 2023).

To address such complex and land ownership matters, the land commission seeks to resolve these intricate ownership issues, by upholding the customary land rights of the indigenous people and fostering communal harmony and peace. Because their means of subsistence, cultural way of life, religious beliefs, and customs are all intricately related to the lands they formerly possessed, the Hill people want the current government to restore their rights to those lands (Halim, 2021). The government has identified 96 tourist spots so far in the CHT (Das, 2022), and tourism has benefited the socioeconomic development and peacekeeping of that whole region (Haider, 2023; Butler et al., 2023). Nonetheless, there are instances where indigenous common land has been taken in the name of development, eco-forests, and tourism for national and international companies, and other vested interests. (Chakma, 2023). For that matter, land disputes need to be addressed immediately and act within the framework of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) 17 goals’ indicators specifically pertinent to indigenous people’s livelihood (indicators 2.3.2 and 4.5.1) and particularly on land rights (indicators 1.4.2, 2.3.2 and 4.5.1) (Halim, 2022).

Way forward

There is no alternative to the complete execution of the accord, and many other important benefits could be acquired beyond establishing peace if constructively materialized. Firstly, it is crucial in establishing peace, national integrity, and post-conflict reconciliation, improving the sustainable human rights situation as mentioned in the SDG targets of reaching the most vulnerable first and leaving no one behind. Because of the Accord’s ability to improve and facilitate human well-being, people’s lives and means of subsistence have already been significantly impacted. Secondly, the progressive elements of the accord need to be used to combat the anti-secular and communal forces to be unable to use the CHT territory to challenge the sovereignty of Bangladesh. Thirdly, the accord has enormous geopolitical significance as CHT has international boundaries with India and Myanmar, and it would be more stable and secure (Roy, 2022). Finally, it could be pointed out that the accord needs to escalate in making CHT a land of harmony as envisioned by the signatories of the CHT Accord. It is advantageous for the people of CHT and Bangladesh that the same government that made such a historical accord possible is currently in power. For that, the

challenges do not appear daunting. Instead, more initiatives are needed to enhance confidence and trust to establish peaceful coexistence between the Hill people and Bangalees.

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CHT Peace Accord 1997: Uniqueness and Unity

Sayed Abdullah Al Mamun Chowdhury

Introduction

The Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) areas are inhabited by a total of eleven tribal groups, namely the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Lushai, Pankho, Bawm, Mro, Khyang, Khumi, and Chak. The majority of inhabitants adhere to Buddhism, while the remaining portion of the population consists of Hindus and Christians. Despite their divergence from the mainstream population, individuals belonging to these groups are currently being incorporated into the nation's mainstream development initiatives, as part of the broader objective of nation-building. The CHT Peace Accord, which was signed on December 2, 1997, represents a notable demonstration of dedication towards addressing the issues faced by ethnic minorities, reconciling historical grievances, fostering socio-economic development, and facilitating the integration of tribal communities into the broader national framework of Bangladesh. Hence, the agreement effectively brought an end to a 25-year-long military confrontation between the Shanti Bahini and the Government of Bangladesh. This particular instance functions as a case study that holds significance on a worldwide scale. It serves as a demonstration of how the field of international relations may serve as a driving force for promoting constructive transformation, by promoting inclusivity and redressing past inequities. The distinctive aspect of this agreement is in its ability to serve as a catalyst for comparable endeavors in many regions across the globe, where indigenous or ethnic populations encounter obstacles in asserting their rights and engaging in nation-building endeavors.

Historical Overview

The tribal people in CHT are mainly the descendants of migrants from bordering countries. Little is known about their ancient past. During Mughal period, these areas were like princely-states under the Mughal Suba. The Mughals did not interfere on their administration. Under British control the Chittagong Hill Tracts were made into a separate district in 1860; by special regulation in 1900 the district was declared an 'excluded area' under direct control of the Provincial Governor of Bengal. From then on, the three administrative subdivisions of the district were controlled by the major 'Tribal Chiefs'— or Rajas.

In 1947 when the Indian sub-continent was divided, this area was included in newly created State of Pakistan. From inception, the Pakistan government took initiatives to turn this area into a Muslim-majority area. For this purpose, thousands of plain-land people were encouraged to settle there. In the 1960s, Pakistan government amended 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Act 1900' and abandoned the definition 'excluded area'. Instead, the phrase 'tribal area' was inserted in the act. Many other regulations of the act were also amended to open the area for new settlers.

As Bangladesh proceeded with the framing of its state constitution, a Hill people's delegation, led by Manobendra Narayan Larma, called on father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the then Prime Minister and demanded autonomy for the CHT with its own legislature which seemed like a threat to the nation-building process of the new-born Bangladesh. Therefore, Bangabandhu rejected the demands. When the constitution of Bangladesh, adopted on November 4, 1972, incorporated the ideals of Bengali Nationalism, M.N. Larma, leader of Hill people's delegation, refused to endorse the constitution. Perhaps, Manobendra was confused with the definition of 'nation' and 'tribe'.

As a State, Bangladesh was the outcome of an intensely nationalist movement, and Bangalee Nationalism was seen by policymakers as all encompassing. Having successfully led the country to independence, the Awami League could perceive the dangers of secession inherent within such demands for autonomy. Besides, Article 1 of the constitution declared Bangladesh to be a unitary state, ruling out any possibility of a separate legislature or autonomy for the CHT. Article 3 specified Bangla as the State language, and Article 6 declared that the citizens of Bangladesh were to be known as 'Bangalees'. These provisions aggrieved the minority communities of CHT. This led the tribal people to form United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (PCJSS), with its military wing, the Shanti Bahini (SB). It is alleged that the SB was actively aided by the neighboring government. However, during the Mujib era, PCJSS did not carry out violent acts against the government, rather Manobendra Narayan Larma along with his fellows joined BAKSAL in 1975.

After the assassination of Bangabandhu, a pro-Pakistani government was established and the situation in CHT deteriorated. The succeeding governments opted for military solution and adopted a counter-insurgency strategy, the Bangalee settlement program, resulted in large-scale land alienation of the Hill people, with far-reaching implications not only for the Hill people themselves, but also for relations between the Hill people and Bangalees . When Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League became Prime Minister in 1996, she promised to end the insurgency. After seven rounds of talks, the PCJSS and the government signed a peace accord in December 1997 to end the two-decade long rebellion that had cost over 25,000 lives.

Uniqueness of the Accord

The CHT Peace Accord is a remarkable achievement. It ensures hill people's unique status and dignity as well as peaceful co-existence of Bangalee settlers. It provides some measure of autonomy for the CHT tribes.

Autonomy and Self-Governance

The accord recognized the need for decentralization of power, granting the Hill District Councils (HDCs) significant authority in local governance. Part-B (A to 1 of 34) of the accord states that police, land management, tribal law and social justice, trade, tourism, utilization of natural resources, Jhum cultivation, local institution etc. will be governed by

HDC. Even any hurtful law passed by the national parliament or any other authority that restricts or refrains HDC governing power must be amended through consultation. This marked a departure from the centralized governance model that had contributed to the longstanding grievances of the tribal people. Article-17 and 18 of Part-D of the accord ensures the employment of tribal people in the local government administration on majority basis. Not only that, they can join any positions of the countrywide government and non-government jobs if they are eligible.

Land Rights and Rehabilitation

Article 2,3,4 of Part-D of the accord ensures the return of land to displaced tribal families by establishing a Land Commission to adjudicate claims. Article 1 of Part-D prioritizes the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) contributing to the restoration of a sense of belonging and stability within the affected community. Article 3 of Part-D gives each landless returnee tribal refugee family two acres of land, exempted them from repayment of loans and interests. Article-10 of Part-D of the accord says, “Until development equals that of other regions of the country the government shall continue reservation of quota system in government services and educational institutions for the tribals.” Here the government promises to grant more scholarships for the tribal students.

Cultural Reservation

Recognizing the rich cultural diversity of the tribal communities, the accord included provisions to safeguard and promote their unique traditions, languages, and customs. This not only acknowledged the importance of cultural identity but also aimed to foster a sense of unity by celebrating the diversity that enriches the social fabric of the CHT. Article-11 of Part-D of the accord mentions, “The government and the elected representatives shall be active to preserve the distinctiveness of the tribal culture and heritage.”

Security Measures

The accord addresses security concerns by calling for the gradual withdrawal of the Bangladesh army from the region, replacing paramilitary force with a significant presence of tribal communities. According to Article-16 of Part-D of the accord, being surrendered, the armed forces of the PCJSS were given general amnesty, paid Taka 50,000 to each family for rehabilitation, released from the jail and exempted from trials. Very few accords of the world provide such liberal conditions to the rebels or the outlaws. It paves the way for a more secure and stable environment.

Economic Development

The accord outlined plans for the equitable distribution of resources and development projects in the region, aiming to uplift the living standards of the tribal population. This inclusive approach sought to bridge the economic gap and promote a shared prosperity that could contribute to overall unity. It’s worth mentioning here that Article-9 of Part-D of the accord emphasizes on the allocation of funds on priority basis for implementation of

increased number of projects in CHT to make necessary infrastructures for facilitating development.

Conclusion

The CHT Peace Accord recognizes the distinction of the tribal people as well as helps to create a secure and harmonious environment for peaceful co-existence for both tribal and Bangalee people. The accord stands as a testament to the potential for unity and harmony in ethnically diverse regions.

Political Dimension of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Agreement

Sajib Bala

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) ethnic conflict that gripped Bangladesh in 1972 predates the independence of the country in 1971. The conflict is, in effect, a pre independence phenomenon finding its roots in British colonial and Pakistani administration that Bangladesh experienced earlier. The primary conflicting parties are the mainstream Bengali political elites and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS)—the political representatives of the CHT of Bangladesh. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, PCJSS initiated a movement demanding for the Hill people’s distinct socio-cultural and political rights in the CHT, which they claimed as their ancestral land. Along with various initiatives, the successive governments of Bangladesh tried to solve the problem militarily. During the protected conflict, to counter the government’s domination, the PCJSS resorted to armed struggle under the banner of Shanti Bahini (SB) (an armed force of the PCJSS). The armed conflict took a heavy toll of lives, including rebels, soldiers and civilians in the CHT. Finally, both the parties came to a realization that the solution to the problem warranted political, and not military means. The earlier governments tried to solve the problem through various measures, but all went in vain. A new hope for resolving the conflict unfolded when the Awami League (AL) formed the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 1996 through the National Parliamentary Elections. During this AL led government, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Agreement (popularly known as, and hereafter, the CHT Peace Agreement) was signed on 2 December 1997 between the representatives of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) (more, specifically, National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts [NCCHT]) and the PCJSS. The CHT Peace Agreement contains of four main parts, including its 72 sections (provisions/clauses). This Agreement aims to uphold the socio-cultural, political, and economic rights of all citizens of the CHT of Bangladesh. Quite dismayingly, after signing the Agreement, new politics evolved regarding the motive of the political parties in signing the Agreement and the politics in implementing it. This is analysed in the subsequent paragraphs.

The AL, the leftist political parties, including the Workers Party of Bangladesh, the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and the like, as well as the centre left parties, for example, the National Awami League, Gonotantry Party and Gono Forum, greeted the Agreement. After signing the Agreement, AL boasted it as a landmark achievement as it would not only tie national integration but also evidently open the door to the region’s abundant natural resources and foster the economic growth of the CHT and other areas of Bangladesh. But, the then main opposition political party, the BNP, and nearly all right-wing parties, the pro Islamic Jamaat e Islami (JI), reacted against the CHT Peace Agreement. Another leading political party, the Jatiya Party (JP), maintained its opposition to the Agreement through parliamentary process. Along with other arguments, the BNP opposed the Agreement, arguing that it contradicted the unitary Constitution of Bangladesh

and the interest of the Bengali settlers settled in the CHT of Bangladesh. However, a group of constitutional experts, lawyers, educators and economists disagreeing with the then opposition parties' claim, supported the Agreement, mentioning that it was consistent with the basic ideas of the Constitution of Bangladesh. And, the CHT Peace Agreement survives under the stay order of the Appellate Division issued in March 2011. Although BNP led opposition had undertaken to struggle against the Agreement, AL led government had continued to resolve decades old conflict through peaceful political means.

After signing the CHT Peace Agreement, there are two scopes for the political parties. On the one hand, the mainstream Bengali political parties' aim of winning National Parliamentary seats in the CHT was attained through winning voters' support in the CHT area. On the other hand, PCJSS leaders could raise their voices about the CHT case in the National Parliament. After signing the Agreement, the mainstream Bengali political parties (primarily, AL and BNP) and the PCJSS are now competitors for parliamentary seats assigned in the CHT of Bangladesh, which were dominated mainly by Bengali political parties earlier. However, in the first national elections after signing the CHT Peace Agreement, PCJSS boycotted the national elections of 2001 for the issue of voter lists, or Bengali settlers' issue, or other issues. In this election, BNP won two seats, and AL won one out of the three constituencies in the CHT of Bangladesh. And, in the 10th parliamentary elections of 2014, two parliamentarians were elected from the Bandarban and Khagrachhari constituencies under the banner of AL nomination. But, in this election, Ushatan Talukder, Vice President of the PCJSS Central Committee, was elected as an independent legislator from the Rangamati constituency. However, in the 11th parliamentary elections of 2018, the AL backed candidates won all the three seats.

At the CHT based local level, after signing the CHT Peace Agreement, a faction of Hill people opposed the Agreement, and formed a CHT-based political party, namely United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), and members of this party promised their movement for full autonomy of the CHT. However, during my personal interview with two leaders/members of UPDF, it was revealed that UPDF is ready to compromise on their former demand for full autonomy. They noted their stance on three demands: land rights, military withdrawal from the CHT, and repatriation of Bengali settlers from the CHT. If we scrutinise all the sections of the Agreement, it is revealed that UPDF's three demands are also significant issues in implementing the Agreement; this will be clear from the analysis noted in the following paragraph. However, the PCJSS, the signatory party, on behalf of the Hill ethnic people, is demanding the full implementation of the CHT Peace Agreement as a way to fulfil the rights/aspirations of the Hill people.

The post Agreement CHT politics is strongly linked with the issue regarding the full implementation of all sections of the CHT Peace Agreement. Of the total 72 sections/clauses of the CHT Peace Agreement, the GoB claimed that 48 were fully implemented, while PCJSS claimed only 25 were fully implemented. Whatever the debate about the number of

implemented sections of the Agreement, there is no doubt that all the peace lovers and researchers about the CHT case will emphasise on the full implementation of all sections of the CHT Peace Agreement. However, in going through the subject matters of the Agreement, it appears that the fixation of land ownership is still the crux of the CHT Peace Agreement's implementation and is highly associated with the complex (also, sensitive in terms of vote bank for the Bengali led political parties) issue of the Bengali settlers in the CHT of Bangladesh. Prothom Alo, one of the leading daily Bangla newspapers of Bangladesh, presented that 80% of the problem of the CHT issue would be solved if the dispute about the land were settled. Likewise, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) noted that, though many of the central issues of the Agreement have been implemented, the critical matters, for example, reclamation of land by returning Hill people and withdrawal of the army from the CHT need to be solved. However, some crucial issues of the Agreement, for example, resolution of land-related disputes, retaining the tribal inhabited characteristics of the CHT, jurisdiction of the Hill District Councils (HDCs), the supervisory functions and prerogatives of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC), rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) and India-returnee refugees, the withdrawal of temporary army camps should be given more priority for implementing the CHT Peace Agreement. Among these, many are interrelated with the land related problem. Though there was a Land Commission to solve the land related disputes, it could not work properly as there were contradictory sections of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act 2001. However, the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission (Amendment) Act 2016 passed during the period of AL led government is a further fillip to deal with the issue.

During and after signing the CHT Peace Agreement, AL was the ruling party, except for an interregnum period of BNP and Caretaker government rule. During my fieldwork, it was evident that the common people of the CHT, including the PCJSS leaders, expected more (or, roadmap) from the AL-led government in implementing the CHT peace Agreement. Though there are some limitations, many interviewees argued that the AL led government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is eager to implement the Agreement. And, we have found some development activities through implementing the Agreement. Considering its volume (10% of the total area of Bangladesh), its natural resources, geo strategic, political and economic importance, peace should be restored in perpetuity for the development of the people living in the CHT, in particular, and of Bangladesh as a whole. After 26 years of its signing, it can be claimed that the CHT Peace Agreement has been fruitful as it has ended decades old armed struggle in the CHT of Bangladesh. More importantly, the Agreement has been acclaimed both at home and abroad. Once all the sections of the CHT Peace Agreement are implemented, a sustainable and durable peace in the area would automatically flow from it.

Source: Bala, S. (2022). *Politics of Peace Agreement Implementation: A Case Study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh*. Palgrave Macmillan.

26 Years of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord: An Eyewitnesses View Through Security Prism

Md Nayeem Ashfaque Chowdhury

Like other parts of Bangladesh, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and its population are integral parts of the country. Territorial integrity and political independence are two core elements of statehood. According to the Oxford Max Planck Encyclopaedias of International Law [MPIL], territorial integrity refers to the territorial ‘oneness’ or ‘wholeness’ of the state, which is an essential foundation of sovereignty. The territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bangladesh were challenged by seeking autonomy for the CHT, the establishment of a special legislative body (after the independence of Bangladesh), and the launch of an insurgency operation by Shanti Bahini in 1977. The Bangladesh government was compelled to deploy the Bangladesh Army and other security forces in CHT to save the country from territorial disintegration. Shanti Bahini was trained, sheltered, and resourced externally. They launched operations in the CHT, dividing the area of operations (CHT) into zones. They attacked Bangalee dwellers, members of law enforcement agencies, government officials and offices, and even the ethnic people believed to be opposing them or supporting the government. The confrontations between the Bangladesh Army and Shanti Bahini often led to casualties on both sides, as well as among ethnic and Bangalee civilians caught in the crossfire or killed after the kidnapping. A sense of extreme insecurity, fear of marginalisation, relative deprivation, and powerlessness that used to prevail amongst all the civilians throughout the region led to the displacement of civilians, who ended up living in despairing conditions. There are underlying causes of conflict, which include ethnic recognition, land disputes, cultural antagonism, civil rights, Bangalee relocation, etc. This conflict affected CHT’s socio-economic development, education, infrastructure, physical security, environment, and tourism. In the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, members of the security forces suffered heavy casualties due to inaccessible, rugged, and unknown terrain with underdeveloped communication infrastructure, a lack of counter-insurgency training, inadequate intelligence arrangements, a lack of resources, including manpower, non-cooperation by the locals, malaria, non-conversation with the local language, habit, culture, etc.

On the other hand, insurgents got operational advantages from known terrain, familiar language, habits, the culture of the locals, external support, etc. Till 1998, about 1,300 people (both ethnic and Bangalee) were killed, more than 850 were injured, and about 750 were kidnapped. More than 300 members of the security forces were killed, and almost a similar number were injured, most of whom were from the Bangladesh Army. Shanti Bahini used to brutally kill innocent Bangalee villagers, irrespective of age and gender. One of the many genocides was the Bhusanchara incident. On May 31, 1984, Shanti Bahini, led by their military wing head, Major Rajesh alias Moni Swapan Dewan, killed more than 400 innocent Bangalee, including women and children, in the Bhushanchhara area of Barkal upazila of

Rangamati district. Besides the casualties, socio-economic activities were stalled. Most importantly, it was a threat to the territorial integrity of Bangladesh. So, the government took appropriate actions like counter-insurgency operations, infrastructure development, enhancement of socio-economic activities, poverty alleviation projects, afforestation, and fulfilment of the basic needs of the local people, besides engaging PCJSS militarily.

Dialogue with PCJSS started, the first of which took place on October 21, 1985, at the Chengi Union Parishad Community Centre of Panchari Upazila under Khagrachari district. There was a pause of almost two years after the first dialogue. By this time, the Priti faction of Shanti Bahini had surrendered to the security forces. In retaliation for this move, Shanti Bahini launched an armed attack on Bangalee villages, carried out the mass killing and abduction of a few hundred, and burned the houses. Bengalis also attacked the ethnic people, including their houses and properties. The PCJSS put forward five demands, including provincial autonomy and the establishment of a special legislative body, during the second dialogue with the National Committee that took place on December 17–18, 1987, which were not accepted as being unconstitutional. The third dialogue took place on January 24 and 25, 1988, where the insurgents were requested to place their demands in consonance with the constitution. The PCJSS again raised unconstitutional demands during the fourth dialogue held on February 17 and 18, 1988. On June 19, 1988, the 5th dialogue took place, with the government delegation continuing to press on something following the constitution. The 6th dialogue took place in Khagrachari Circuit House on 14 and 15 December 1988 where General Officer Commanding, 24 Infantry Division led the government delegation. This time, the insurgents shifted from their demand for provincial autonomy and the establishment of a special legislative body to the establishment of a regional council. The 7th to 13th dialogue took place between November 5, 1992, and October 25, 1995, where a parliamentary committee led the government delegation. Between December 21, 1996, and December 2, 1997, a total of seven dialogues (14th to 20th) took place, which were led by Parliament Chief Whip Mr. Abul Hasnat Abdullah, and finally, the historic peace treaty was signed between the National Committee and the PCJSS in the presence of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Shantibahini surrendered their arms on February 19, 1998. A group of tribal activists who did not agree with the peace treaty and declared to continue the struggle for ‘full autonomy’ launched a new political party named the United Peoples’ Democratic Front (UPDF) on December 26, 1998.

So, the Bangladesh government, security forces, and administration throughout the process addressed an abortive attempt by the PCJSS to disintegrate the constitution and the country. Security forces could save the territorial integrity of Bangladesh with the least possible collateral damage (in comparison to the separatist movement in other countries), as every life is important and precious. Simultaneously, the government continued with socioeconomic and infrastructure development throughout the CHT.

As we all know, the historical treaty consists of four main parts. Part A, namely "General," recognises the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a tribal-inhabited region and other issues. Part B, under the heading "Chittagong Hill Tracts Local Government Council (LGC)/Hill District Council (HDC)" Part C, titled "CHT Regional Council," includes the formation of a regional council in coordination with three HDCs. Part D, entitled "Rehabilitation, General Amnesty, and Other Subjects," There are 99 clauses (72 sections and 27 sub-sections) under the main four parts. Out of these clauses, the Ministry of CHT Affairs (MOCHTA) claims (till December 22) to fulfil 86 completely, 4 partially, and 8 under implementation (Part C, 8b not included). Whereas PCJSS claims 32 are completely implemented, 24 are partially implemented, and 43 are under implementation (total of 99). By this time, a separate ministry (MOCHTA) for CHT with an ethnic minority minister was formed to look after all the well-being and demands of the people in CHT. A 22-member Regional Council (RC) combining three hill district councils headed by Mr. Shantu Larma was formed with special power. The CHT Regional Council Act 1998 and the Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban Hill District Council Amendment Acts of 1998 were challenged as unconstitutional in two writ petitions, arguing that the arrangements made through the Accord and implementing legislation are inconsistent with the unitary character of the republic and that the Accord violates the rights of the other citizens of Bangladesh to be treated equally before the law.

Apparently, the government cannot acquire, sell, transfer, or dispose of Khas (government-owned) land without the prior permission of the Hill District Councils. On the other hand, the ethnic people are occupying lands in the name of Kiang, Oronno Kuthir, etc. as religious centres, considering the government will hesitate to ask even about the authenticity of the land, let alone eviction. On the socio-economic side, the government has done phenomenal development work throughout the duration. The number of high schools and colleges is now 404 and 26, respectively, compared to 196 and 25 before the peace treaty. Three science and technology universities and one medical college have been established. There are now 121 hospitals, 27 industries, 5033 cottage industries, 723 mosques, 189 temples, 590 kiangs, and 398 churches in CHT. There were hardly any pucca (metalled) roads in CHT after the Liberation War. Today, the total road constructed is 3,590.5 km across the whole CHT. We don't have any road communication along the border in CHT, which is an essential requirement for border security and preventing arms, drug, illicit trade, and human trafficking. The government has planned for 1,036 km of border road construction, of which 317 km will be constructed in phase 1. By 2023, a 174-kilometre road (of Phase 1) along the extremely difficult terrain will have been completed. The remaining 143 km will be completed by June 2024.

The question remains: have we achieved complete peace in CHT? The answer could be that we have progressed a lot but have yet to reach the word 'complete'. The existing security situation has become increasingly challenging because of various issues, ranging from

tensions over land disputes and discrimination amongst the population in CHT to the slow emergence of a security vacuum. The spectrum of stable security, which generally consists of a stable law and order situation, socio-economic development, education, political stability, freedom of choice, freedom of movement, absence of intimidation, equal rights, and human rights for all, could not be ensured. Still, ethnic miscreants are roaming around with arms. Extortion, toll collection, kidnapping, and killing of innocent civilians by such miscreants are widespread. Institutional, office-based, tender-based, and project-based silent toll collection by these elements continues almost at every tier of development initiatives. Besides, these lawless characters resorted to pre-paid toll collection and extortion through bKash and other online banking systems as spot toll collection, making it difficult to counter by security forces. It is alleged that the main source of income for the regional political parties is based on this toll collection. The regional parties have been split into a number of factions, like UPDF (Main), UPDF (Democratic), JSS (Main), and JSS (Reformist), and continue to confront each other politically, militarily, and socially. These regional political parties have earmarked their area of influence and operation through their armed cadres, mainly for toll collection. Often, they engage in fratricidal killing by entering the opponent's area.

Surprisingly, the total number of deaths (about 1,400+) after the peace treaty is higher than the death toll before the peace treaty. Factional clashes among the ethnic regional parties have created a region of intimidation, fear, and terror. Security forces need to focus on creating a conducive environment by keeping no space without surveillance and allowing government machinery to function for the development of the citizens in CHT. Cyber activists from regional parties and their associated groups are often found to be active on social media. They post fabricated news of any incident in CHT to gain sympathy in their favour and to tarnish the image of the government as well as security forces at national and international forums. Even the ethnic community leaders dared to do anti-state activities by raising the unconstitutional 'Adivasi' issue to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues with fabricated historical documents and evidence. Surprisingly, some of the vested quarters are continuing to instigate and ignite the tribals. Vested groups are propagating fabricated and misleading information through seminars, talk shows, social media, etc. and disrupting the desired communal harmony. It should be addressed by regularly circulating the facts to a national and international audience by appropriate government authorities. Academia, think tanks, and all related stakeholders need to be engaged by making appropriate platforms.

Community harmony is often disrupted mainly by land disputes. The Land Dispute Resolution Commission was established in 1999. The government enacted the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act in 2001, and some provisions of the Act were amended in October 2016 (Land Commission Amendment Act-2016). This amendment has brought changes in the authority of the chairman, the method of resolving land disputes, and the

resettlement of the recorded land. Over 22,000 cases are pending with the commission. The Chairman of the CHT Land Dispute Settlement Commission, Justice Khademul Islam, lamented in 2010 by saying that lack of proper documentation is the major hurdle to resolving decades-long land disputes in CHT. The rules of business of the commission have yet to be formulated by the government. The pedestal survey, which is the basic requirement for resolving any land dispute, could not be done in CHT due to protests and the non-cooperation of the ethnic leaders, though the government could complete the survey of land for the rest of the country. This is creating dissatisfaction and resentment amongst both the ethnic and Bangalee populations living in CHT.

Self-centric views, activities, and non-cooperation of the main ethnic community leaders are hindering the government's initiative for poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, socio-economic development, education, tourism, etc. We witnessed the regional party's political move against the establishment of a medical college and a Science and Technology University in Rangamati. Recently, incidents have taken place like the burning of tourist vehicles and the abduction of tourists from different places in CHT. The whole nation is surprised to see the protest against the initiative of constructing a five-star hotel in Chandrapahar, Bandarban. Due to feelings of deprivation, Kuki-Chin took up arms against the government. It is alleged that PCJSS or the dominating ethnic communities like Chakma did not take their (Kuki-Chin) points into consideration while negotiating with the government. There is a danger of connectivity between Kuki-chin of Bandarban and the armed groups in India and Myanmar. The good thing is that on November 5, 2023, Kuki-Chin sat down with the government and the security forces for peace talks and agreed on a ceasefire until December 20, 2023.

We are a resilient nation. We need the homogeneous development of all the citizens of Bangladesh. We don't want to see some of the dominant ethnic communities take advantage of the maximum advantages of quotas or stipends for education and jobs while others like the Bawm, Pangkhua, Lusai, Khumi, Mro, Khiang, Bengali, etc. are left behind. We want to see education for all in CHT, irrespective of caste and creed. We want to see the implementation of the projects of international NGOs on a need basis, with priority given to the marginalised population, irrespective of their identity as tribal or Bangalee. We don't want to see the Bangalee population living in CHT as second-class citizens. They should have equal rights to obtain citizenship certificates, bank loans, own land property, or vote like other population segments. If we want to prosper and expect a stable security situation in CHT, it is critical to promote policies of accommodation and inclusion rather than disintegration and exclusion.

CHT Accord's Implication on Regional Security

Sabbir Ahmed

Introduction

A hill intensive area of Bangladesh spanning 13,295 square km is inhabited by 13 different tribes. Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) constitutes one-tenth of the total area of Bangladesh and borders with Myanmar on the south-east, the Indian state of Tripura on the north, Mizoram on the east and Chattogram on the west. The area is inhabited by 18,42,815 people where 49.94% is tribal and 50.06% is non-tribals (2022). The situation in CHT was always turbulent and lasting peace could not be attained being under the rule of British, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In every era different tension arose to make the environment challenging. Lastly, a Peace Accord was signed by PCJSS and Government of Bangladesh on 02 December 1997 to uphold the political, social, cultural, educational and economic rights of the people of CHT and to expedite socio-economic development process and to preserve and respect the rights of all the citizens living in CHT, The Accord has its uniqueness and looked to bring about amity among all peoples, ethnic and non-ethnic. After 26 years of signing the Accord, there are conditions in the area that pose challenges on security, harmony, development even on territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country.

Present Environment Analysis

Although many actions have been taken to meet the provisions of Peace Accord, demands to do more remain. United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) is continuously voicing their demand for autonomy. Both Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and UPDF are maintaining armed wings. This is a manifestation of misgivings towards good intention of government. Conflicts in various form take place inside the region. Ethnic students and diaspora air their grievances on special days. Clashes with ethnic and non-ethnic groups take place in public places, in villages and in communities. Many a time altercation between two people flare up and expand to engulf entire communities. So, riots, burning houses, burning agricultural field, cutting timber garden, street fighting, looting, etc are common phenomenon. Once security forces left camps (241) after Peace Accord, immediately these were occupied by locals. Making of places of worship is on the rise.

Ethnic people bar their family member to mix with non-ethnic people, even cross-religion marriage is forbidden. Ethnic people are very strict about maintaining their uniqueness of culture. Non-ethnic people demonstrate grievances for the special arrangement that is being given to ethnic communities like, quota in university, government job, etc. Chakma tribe being the dominant ethnic community has a tendency to rule over other smaller groups. Their presence is more in all spheres of decision making. PCJSS surrendered and deposited arms (but not all). This is evidenced from the use of arms in extortion, abduction and fighting with UPDF. For UPDF, Peace Accord has not fulfilled demand of the Hill people. UPDF very often shows its muscle against PCJSS, as it stands against the Accord. Both the parties

collect money and tax by illegal means and even business houses are not out of their clutches. If an area is dominated by PCJSS, UPDF has no entry and vice versa. Domination of area is maintained by continuous patrolling and observation to identify any intruder into the area who belonging to the opposite camp.

Shantu Larma is the head of Regional Council, and he has held the position since long and not elected. He does not want to lose his domination by letting different groups flourish. In the competition between PCJSS and UPDF, people tend to side with the dominant force. The Hill people are more divided than united. In effect, people are disillusioned and bewildered on the performance of PCJSS and UPDF. The Bangalees in the area represent a little over half the population. *Samo Adhikar Andolon* (equal rights movement) is a prominent political platform of theirs along with few other platforms. They contest in the region on the issue of injustices and discrimination done to Bangalees. Most of the clashes between Bangalee and Hill people occur over economic and land-related issues. Although amended Land Dispute Act 2001 is in place, Land Commission is yet to solve many cases. The issue is very complicated and root of most of the incidents. In terms of equal treatment to all citizens, Bangalees feel they are being deprived.

In recent years, large numbers of tourists are flocking in CHT to enjoy the beauty of lake, hills and nature, during vacation and holidays. Movement of these people are taken with caution to some extent under security cover of law enforcement forces. There were cases of abduction of tourists in the area. With the emergence of Kuki National Front (KNF), terror acts are prevalent. They engage in fights with security forces and ethnic organizations and abduct opposite minded people; causing disruption in tourism for a long time. KNF also trains terrorist organization that operate in CHT, Bangladesh and nonborder countries. It is good that KNF is engaged in dialogue and tourism got back on track.

The Rohingya crisis has forced Bangladesh government to accommodate 1.1 million displaced people. The camps harbor insurgents like RSO and ARSA, and they carry out military operations against Myanmar Army and move about in CHT as well. They even have hideouts in the area. These groups are also involved in producing illegal drugs in deep forests of CHT. Due to the spillover of refugees in CHT, it has created economic and social challenges for the local communities leading to religious tensions.

Cross Border Dynamics.

The cross-border dynamics of the region play a significant role in shaping the milieu in the area. The area shares border with India's north eastern state of Tripura and Mizoram as well as Myanmar's Rakhaine state. On the positive side, cross border dynamics allow for cultural exchange and trade opportunities. The ethnic communities of the CHT have historical ties with ethnic groups in the neighboring state of India and Myanmar.

Trade is an important aspect of cross border dynamics. The border facilitates movement of goods and people providing economic opportunities for the locals. With the positives there are challenges; the porous nature of the border has been exploited by various actors, including insurgent and criminal networks. They take advantage of the open border to carry out illegal activities, such as smuggling of weapons, drugs, human trafficking etc. There is also ample evidence of establishment of training camps on the border line of neighboring countries. These pose significant security concern for the region thereby calls for increased border surveillance and cooperation among neighboring countries.

Moreover, activities of insurgent groups in India and Myanmar spillover into CHT, impacting the security situation in the region. Many of the ethnic groups have historical ties with similar groups across the borders, and this connection sometimes is used to mobilize cross-border support, create unrest and challenge government authority. The recent activities of KNF is considered to be a threat to regional security. They not only engage with government forces; they also fight with the local political parties even they provide training to other terrorist outfits. The resolution of CHT affairs could play a role in maintaining regional stability in terms of ethnic and communal harmony. CHT affairs has the potential to impact trans-border relations, a peaceful and beneficial resolution can contribute stronger relations while protracted and unresolved affairs may lead to tensions and complicated dynamics among these countries.

Implications

The CHT region has been historically plagued by ethnic tensions. The Peace Accord helped address these tensions by recognizing the rights of the Hill people and ensuring their representation in local governance. This reduced the potential for violent conflicts and improved the overall security condition in the region. The Accord is aimed at protecting their cultural, linguistic, and land rights. This has improved the social and economic state of the communities and reduced the grievances that were often exploited by different militant and separatist groups. One of the key provisions of the accord was the disarmament and demobilization of the PCJSS and its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini. This helped to remove a major source of armed violence from the region, leading to enhanced security for both the hill people and the Bengali settlers. The resolution of the CHT conflict has also improved Bangladesh's relations with its neighboring countries, primarily India. The region is strategically important, with borders that are prone to cross-border criminal activities and insurgencies.

The peace in CHT has contributed to broader regional stability and enhanced cooperation between countries. The CHT Peace Accord has also contributed to the counter-terrorism efforts in the region. The conditions of accord have limited space for militant and extremist groups to find refuge and support in the area, resulted in improved security and reduced the scope for radicalization and recruitment of the local populace. The accord has created an atmosphere of stability, fostering economic development in the region. The improved

security situation has opened up opportunities for infrastructure development, tourism, trade, and investment. This, in turn, has contributed to regional connectivity and economic cooperation among neighboring countries

The CHT region shares borders with India and Myanmar, and the Peace Accord also aimed to improve cross-border relations. By resolving internal conflicts and promoting stability, the accord has a positive impact on regional security dynamics. It helped in reducing the risk of cross-border insurgency, terrorist activities, and smuggling. Thereby enhancing regional security. Had The peace accord promoted the establishment of democratic institutions and local governance structures in the CHT region. This created a platform for the hill people to participate in decision-making processes and address their socio-political grievances through peaceful means. Strengthened democratic institutions contributes to the overall stability and security of the region.

Conclusion

The CHT Accord is a historic agreement between the government of Bangladesh and the ethnic communities of the region. The accord established a framework for addressing the long-standing grievances and conflicts in the CHT region. The accord has been a crucial step towards recognizing and protecting the rights of the tribal people in Bangladesh. It ensures the implementation of measures to maintain the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the area. Furthermore, the accord has paved the way for social and economic development in the CHT region. It promotes the welfare and sustainable livelihoods of ethnic people, emphasizing the need for their participation in development initiatives. Its successful implementation requires continued commitment, collaboration, and vigilance from all parties involved.

Beyond Customary Laws: Reimagining Legal Landscapes for Gender Justice in CHT

Arju Afrin Kathy

The eagerly anticipated Peace Accord, inked in 1997, aimed at securing the autonomy and perpetuation of the distinctiveness and diversity of the indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh explicitly acknowledges the unique cultural identity of these ethnic groups. Article 23(A) of the constitution mandates the State to protect and develop the singular traditions and cultures of minor races, tribes, ethnic sects, and communities.

The CHT region diverges from the general legislative framework in pursuing autonomy. Instead, it is governed by customary laws and ancient practices specific to this area, signaling the emergence of legal pluralism. Notably, family laws within this context are dictated by customary laws governing their 'private life,' extending beyond the scope of equal protection outlined in Article 28(2) of the Bangladesh Constitution. To honor the cultural practices of the CHT, the prevailing Family Courts Ordinance which is the general law governing family matters, remains inapplicable in this region. This deliberate exclusion is not merely a nod to the cultural values of the indigenous people but also a commitment to the implementation of the peace accord.

The rights of indigenous people are often perceived as collective rights, with mainstream development discourse emphasizing the preservation of distinct cultures under the banner of cultural relativism. The key figures in managing both inter- and intra-household disputes, as well as land disputes, are the headmen and karbaris, who conduct salish (local / community arbitration) within their respective areas. However, this cultural flexibility sometimes leads to the tacit acceptance of inherently discriminatory practices. A close examination of ethnic personal laws and customary practices in the CHT reveals that the valorization of indigenous collective cultural rights often undermines individual rights, mainly targeting women.

For instance, in communities such as Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tongchangya, Munda, and Garo, the formal consent of parents is a prerequisite for marriage, but the bride's consent is systematically denied. This practice erodes the agency of the bride, negating her role as a free agent with the right to consent in forming a social institution like marriage. Additionally, the lack of a requirement for formal written registration in marriages makes it susceptible to denial, allowing the refusal of any marital obligation towards women. Societal accountability is often evaded when a Chakma man takes a second wife. According to Bangladeshi laws, taking a second wife without the consent of the previous wife is punishable under the Penal Code (494, 495 section). Again, in divorce cases, custody typically goes to the mother, but traditional courts retain the authority to decide otherwise. If the son remains with the mother, he is denied a share in the father's property. In Mro society,

only sons receive a share in the property; if the deceased has no son, the daughter inherits half of the property. In the Tongchangya community, sons inherit property equally, but daughters cannot claim property from their parents.

Furthermore, explicit patriarchal hegemony is discernible in some instances. For example, in the Marma community, forcible abduction of a girl by a young man is condoned if the accused arranges a meal resembling a wedding, inviting circle chiefs and headmen; he is absolved of guilt. In such cases, the community appears indifferent to the girl's consent. These instances underscore the prevailing cultural practices and their impact on individual rights within indigenous communities, particularly those of women.

Navigating the intricate terrain of whether the pervasive gender-based violence in the CHT is attributed to judicial pluralism or the predominance of discriminatory customary laws pose a formidable challenge. This ambiguity contributes to the persistently escalating nature of violence against women. A survey conducted by the Manusher Jonno Foundation in February 2020 sheds light on the alarming prevalence, revealing that approximately 44 percent of women from ethnic minority communities in the CHT have encountered violence within their homes at least once in their lives. The study, encompassing 1,155 women from Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban districts, disclosed distressing statistics: 38 percent experienced psychological torture, 33 percent faced physical abuse, nineteen percent endured economic oppression, and 5 percent suffered sexual violence.

Interestingly, the study illuminated the dynamics of seeking legal redress among women from ethnic communities. Legal aid from the formal justice system was predominantly pursued in cases of rape and severe physical torture, with a mere 3 percent opting for court intervention. In contrast, 35 percent of survivors and their families turned to the traditional justice system, 28 percent sought recourse through Union Parishad, and 14 percent pursued justice via local or community *salish*. The majority of victims gravitating towards the traditional justice system, however, raises concerns as it may not offer a non-discriminatory solution to their multifaceted sufferings since some customary laws are inherently discriminatory. The Victim Support Center of Rangamati Hill District is also evident in the upswing in domestic violence within the hill tracts area. In a power structure driven by masculinity, particularly among indigenous *Karbaris*, women's rights are often seen as subjugated, and their voices go unheard. This underscores the imperative for a judicious and discerning judicial system tailored to the region's unique challenges.

The enactment of the Family Court Ordinance in 1985 aimed at establishing Family Courts and addressing associated matters within the legal framework. However, the ordinance's jurisdiction extends to the entirety of Bangladesh, excluding the CHT area. This exclusion significantly restricts the potential for judicial scrutiny for a couple of crucial reasons. Primarily, the absence of a formal and comprehensive adjudication framework within CHT exacerbates the predicament of victims facing discriminatory practices. Without a structured

mechanism, the voices of these victims often go unheard within the prevailing patriarchal power dynamics. Secondly, the likelihood of intervention by the Supreme Court through its constitutional power of judicial review under Article 102 becomes extremely improbable in cases involving the CHT.

Despite this exclusion, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh has intervened in family lawsuits on multiple occasions. Notably, the court has scrutinized the constitutionality of various aspects, including the restitution of conjugal rights. In the case of *Nelly Zaman vs Gias Uddin Khan* (34 DLR 421), the court held that enforcing marriage restitution upon an unwilling wife violates the laws of the State. Similarly, in *Sherin Akhter vs Md. Ismail* (51 DLR 512) and other decisions, the court reiterated that the tool of enforcing restitution of conjugal life could be deemed violative of the constitution. This underscores the Supreme Court's active role in ensuring the constitutionality of legal provisions, even in family-related matters. The exclusion of the legal framework concerning family disputes in the CHT area from constitutional oversight through judicial review has left the voices of its inhabitants unheard and largely unaddressed. Additionally, the substantial presence of non-indigenous people in the CHT area exacerbates the situation, creating a notable legal vacuum due to the non-application of personal laws in these regions.

In response, there is a compelling need to mainstream legal frameworks to intervene and counteract the adverse effects of discriminatory laws and practices. Considering this imperative, the adjudication forum of the CHT laws should be integrated into mainstream legal practice by allowing the application of general laws. While preserving space for appreciating essential differences, this approach aligns with existing frameworks where religious diversity is accommodated to a certain extent.

The second article of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People mandates the rights of indigenous peoples and individuals to be free from any form of discrimination, particularly on the basis of their indigenous origin or identity. The CHT, characterized by diverse cultures and practices, require a delicate balance between the competing rights at play. However, entrusting crucial issues solely to communities, with the potential for human rights violations in the name of religious and cultural practices, does not guarantee a secure protection regime for individual rights.

To address these challenges, a proposed solution involves establishing a uniform family code. This code would regulate fundamental aspects such as marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, and guardianship through a common set of rules aligned with international human rights laws and the constitutional framework. Such an approach not only respects the region's cultural diversity but also adheres to the principles outlined in international human rights instruments, ensuring a more equitable and just adjudication system.

পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তির তাৎপর্য

ড. আনন্দ বিকাশ চাকমা

দেশের একটি অঞ্চলে ২৫ বছর ধরে বিরাজমান জটিল রাজনৈতিক সমস্যা সমাধানের লক্ষ্যে গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার ও উক্ত অঞ্চলের অধিবাসীদের মধ্যে স্বাক্ষরিত চুক্তির নাম পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি। আজ থেকে ২৬ বছর আগে ১৯৯৭ সালের ২রা ডিসেম্বর বাংলাদেশের রাজধানী ঢাকায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কার্যালয়ের আন্তর্জাতিক সম্মেলন কেন্দ্রে মাননীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা, বিদেশি কূটনীতিকবৃন্দ, সরকারের সামরিক-বেসামরিক প্রশাসনের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ব্যক্তি ও সাংবাদিকদের উপস্থিতিতে উক্ত চুক্তি স্বাক্ষর অনুষ্ঠান সম্পন্ন হয়। ব্যাপক উৎসাহ, উদ্দীপনা, তুমুল হর্ষধ্বনি ও মুহূর্মুহ করতালির মধ্যে দুই পক্ষের দু'জন চুক্তিতে স্বাক্ষর করেন। গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের পক্ষে স্বাক্ষর করেন পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম বিষয়ক জাতীয় কমিটির আহ্বায়ক আবুল হাসনাত আবদুল্লাহ্ এবং পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের অধিবাসীদের পক্ষে স্বাক্ষর করেন পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম জন সংহতি সমিতির সভাপতি জ্যোতিরিন্দ্র বোধিপ্রিয় লারমা। চার খণ্ডে বিভক্ত ৭২টি ধারা সম্বলিত চুক্তির ক-৪ ধারায় 'স্বাক্ষরের তারিখ থেকে পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি কার্যকর হয় এবং 'উভয় পক্ষ হতে সম্পাদনীয় সকল পদক্ষেপ সম্পন্ন না পর্যন্ত চুক্তি বলবৎ থাকবে' বলে উল্লেখ করা হয়। যেহেতু সকল বিষয় এখনো সম্পন্ন হয়নি তাই চুক্তিটি এখনো কার্যকর আছে। পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরিত হওয়ার পূর্বে দীর্ঘ দুই দশক ধরে উক্ত অঞ্চলে শান্তি বাহিনী ও নিরাপত্তাবাহিনীর মধ্যে যুদ্ধ ও সংঘাত, পুনর্বাসিত বাঙালিদের সাথে স্থানীয় পাহাড়িদের দ্বন্দ্ব-সংঘাত প্রভৃতি কারণে মানুষের জীবনযাত্রা ছিল অনিরাপদ, অস্বস্তিকর ও অস্বাভাবিক। সামাজিক পরিবেশ ছিল আতঙ্কিত, মানবাধিকার ছিল উপেক্ষিত, মানুষের চলাচল ছিল অবরুদ্ধ। জনজীবনের এই অনিশ্চিত ও অশান্তিপূর্ণ অবস্থার অবসান ঘটিয়ে স্থায়ী শান্তি প্রতিষ্ঠার মহৎ উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে চুক্তিটি স্বাক্ষরিত হয়েছে বলে সাধারণের নিকট এটি 'শান্তিচুক্তি' নামে পরিচিতি পায়। নিঃসন্দেহে চুক্তি সম্পাদন ছিল দেশ ও জাতির ঐক্য ও সংহতি সাধন, মানবাধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা এবং আন্দোলনকারী পক্ষসহ সামগ্রিক কল্যাণ সাধনের জন্য একটি অপরিহার্য রাষ্ট্রীয় পদক্ষেপ। তাই শান্তিচুক্তি স্বাক্ষরের পর সারা বিশ্বে এক অভূতপূর্ব আলোড়ন সৃষ্টি হয় এবং চুক্তিটি দেশ-বিদেশের সংবাদ মাধ্যমের প্রধান আলোচ্যবিষয় হয়ে ওঠে। এই অসম্ভব ও দুরূহ কাজটি সম্ভব ও সফল করার পেছনে মূখ্য উদ্যোক্তা ছিলেন তৎকালীন মাননীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা। মূলত তাঁর রাষ্ট্রনায়কোচিত দূরদর্শিতা ও দৃঢ়তার ফসল এ চুক্তি। এ প্রসঙ্গে অধ্যাপক সৈয়দ আনোয়ার হোসেন মূল্যায়নটি প্রণিধানযোগ্য: If the sequence of events linked with the negotiations were compared to an opera the finale showed that the prima dona was Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister. It was her tenacity and resolution that goaded the negotiations to such a rewarding end.^৭ শান্তিচুক্তি স্বাক্ষরের পর এক তাৎক্ষণিক প্রতিক্রিয়ায় তাঁর অভিব্যক্তি ছিল: "আমি দারুণ খুশী হইয়াছি, আমরা চেষ্টা করিয়াছি, আমরা সাফল্য অর্জন করিয়াছি।"

শুধু তিনি নন পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের জনগণ, দেশ ও বিদেশের সকল শান্তিকামী মানুষ এতে সন্তোষ প্রকাশ করে। তাঁর এই সাহসী ও কল্যাণকর উদ্যোগটি বিশ্বব্যাপী প্রশংসিত হয় এবং তিনি ইউনেস্কো শান্তি পুরস্কার লাভ করেন।

আপাত দৃষ্টিতে শান্তিচুক্তি সম্পাদন হলো দেশের মধ্যে বিরাজমান একটি দীর্ঘমেয়াদি ও বহুমাত্রিক সমস্যার সফল রাজনৈতিক মীমাংসা বা সমাধান। কিন্তু চুক্তির গুরুত্ব বা তাৎপর্য এতটুকুর মধ্যে সীমাবদ্ধ নয়। একটু গভীরভাবে

৬. Syed Anwar Hussain, *War and Peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Retrospect and Prospect* (Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, 1999), P. 62.

বিশ্লেষণ করলে আমরা এর অন্তর্নিহিত তাৎপর্য অনুধাবন করতে পারি। শান্তিচুক্তি স্বাক্ষরের ঘটনা থেকে অনেক কিছু শিক্ষণীয় আছে যা দেশের সামগ্রিক স্বার্থে স্মরণ ও পালন করা দরকার। যেমন-

১. সমস্যাকে সঠিকভাবে চিহ্নিত করে তদনুযায়ী ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণের শিক্ষা : যে কোনো সমস্যা সমাধানের প্রথম শর্ত হলো আগে সমস্যার প্রকৃতি নির্ণয় করা তারপর তদনুযায়ী সমাধানের উপায় বের করা। ১৯৯৬ সালে দেশের স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রামে নেতৃত্বদানকারী দল বাংলাদেশ আওয়ামী লীগ দীর্ঘ একুশ বছর পর রাষ্ট্র পরিচালনার দায়িত্বভার গ্রহণ করে। ক্ষমতা গ্রহণের পর প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা দেশের মধ্যে বিরাজমান সেই সব রাজনৈতিক সমস্যা সমাধানের দিকে নজর দেন যেগুলো নিরসনে পূর্বের সরকারগুলো চরম রাজনৈতিক ও কূটনৈতিক ব্যর্থতার পরিচয় দেয়। এসব জটিল ও বহুমাত্রিক সমস্যার মধ্যে অন্যতম ছিল পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম সমস্যা। শেখ হাসিনা পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম সমস্যাটির দিকে তীক্ষ্ণ নজর রাখেন এবং এর সঠিক প্রকৃতি অনুধাবন করেন। তাঁর মতে, All that I can say is that it was a complex problem and that, as time passed by, it became all the more complicated. Eventually, however, it boiled down, in my view, to one basic question: the right of an indigenous people, an ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and social minority; to preserve their own identity culture, tradition and values and to lead their own life in their own way in an area where they have lived for ages. When we tried to resolve the problem, we tried to keep this in mind.^৭ তিনি ক্ষমতায় আসার মাত্র তিন মাসের মধ্যে এ সমস্যা সমাধানের জন্য একটি জাতীয় কমিটি গঠন করেন। নবগঠিত কমিটির জন্য তিনি তিনটি ‘অনুসরণীয় শর্ত’ নির্ধারণ করে দেন: প্রথমত, সমাধানের ধরন হতে হবে রাজনৈতিক; দ্বিতীয়ত, সমাধানটি হতে হবে স্থায়ী এবং তৃতীয়ত, সমাধান বের করতে হবে দেশের সার্বভৌমত্বকে অক্ষুণ্ণ রেখে। এর আলোকে আন্দোলনকারী পক্ষকে আস্থায় এনে মাত্র দেড় বছরের মাথায় সরকার আন্দোলনরত জনগণের সঙ্গে শান্তিচুক্তি সম্পাদন করতে সক্ষম হয়। সুতরাং পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি সম্পাদন ছিল বিরোধ মীমাংসায় বাংলাদেশ সরকারের সক্ষমতা ও দক্ষতার পরিচায়ক।
২. সমস্যা সমাধানে সরকারের রাজনৈতিক সদিচ্ছার অপরিহার্যতা : পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি ক্ষমতাসীন সরকারের রাজনৈতিক সদিচ্ছার ফসল। বাংলাদেশ সরকার স্বাধীনতার পঞ্চাশ বছরে মধ্যে দেশের সংহতি, স্থিতিশীলতা ও সমৃদ্ধির লক্ষ্যে যে-কয়টি তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ কার্য সম্পাদন করেছে পার্বত্য এলাকায় স্বাভাবিক জীবনযাত্রা পুনঃপ্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য চুক্তি সম্পাদন ছিল তারমধ্যে অন্যতম। এজন্য প্রয়োজন ছিল সরকারের রাজনৈতিক সদিচ্ছা ও অঙ্গীকার। তৎকালীন শেখ হাসিনা সরকার প্রতিপক্ষের সকল সমালোচনা, অপপ্রচার, ষড়যন্ত্র-চক্রান্ত, ঝুঁকি, হুমকি, বিরোধিতা ও প্রতিবন্ধতা সত্ত্বেও কেবলমাত্র দেশ ও সংশ্লিষ্ট জনগণের প্রতি সুদৃঢ় রাজনৈতিক অঙ্গীকারের কারণে চুক্তি স্বাক্ষর থেকে পিছপা হয়নি এবং অবশেষে তৃতীয় পক্ষের মধ্যস্থতা ছাড়াই চুক্তি স্বাক্ষর করতে সমর্থ হয়েছে।
৩. অসাম্প্রদায়িক আদর্শ ও দেশপ্রেমের চেতনার বিজয়: বাংলাদেশ আওয়ামী লীগের অন্যতম রাজনৈতিক আদর্শ অসাম্প্রদায়িকতা ও ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতা। আওয়ামী লীগের নেতৃত্বে দেশ স্বাধীন হয়েছে এবং দেশ ও মানুষের প্রতি দলটির মমত্ববোধ অকৃত্রিম। সুতরাং দেশের একটি অঞ্চলে বিরামহীনভাবে রক্ত ঝরবে, সংঘাত জিইয়ে

৭. Inaugural Speech by Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at International Conference on 'Peace and Chittagong Hill Tracts on 20 June 1998. Reprinted in Naba Bikram Kishore Tripura, Chittagong Hill Tracts: Journey towards Peace and Prosperity (Dhaka: Ministry of Cht Affairs, 2017), p.122-26.

থাকবে এটা কোনো দেশপ্রেমিক শাসকের কাম্য হতে পারে না। দেশের সকল সম্প্রদায় ও প্রত্যেক নাগরিকের মৌলিক মানবাধিকার, স্বাভাবিক চলাচল ও জানমালের নিরাপত্তা ও সুযোগের সমতা বিধান করা রাষ্ট্রের সাংবিধানিক দায়িত্ব। কারণ নাগরিকদের ধর্ম, বর্ণ, গোষ্ঠী বা জন্মস্থানের কারণে কোনো নাগরিকের প্রতি বৈষম্যকে সংবিধান ন্যায্যতা দেয় না। সুতরাং দেশপ্রেমিক শাসক সে-দায়িত্ব কোনোমতেই এড়িয়ে যেতে পারে না। দেশের সীমান্তবর্তী তিনটি জেলায় শান্তি স্থাপন, মানবাধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা ও নিরাপত্তা বিধান করা সরকারের দায়িত্ব। শান্তিচুক্তি সম্পাদন করে শান্তি পুনপ্রতিষ্ঠা ছিল শাসকদলের অসাম্প্রদায়িক আদর্শ ও গভীর দেশপ্রেমের পরিচায়ক।

৪. দেশ, মাটি ও মানুষের স্বার্থে নমনীয়তার শিক্ষা : পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম জন সংহতির ১৯৮৫ সালে সরকারের কাছে পেশকৃত পাঁচ দফা দাবিনামা আর ১৯৯১ ও ১৯৯৬ সালের সংশোধিত পাঁচ দফা দাবিনামার মধ্যে অনেক তফাৎ পরিলক্ষিত হয়। বাংলাদেশের সংবিধান, সার্বভৌমত্ব, সরকারের সীমাবদ্ধতা ও বৈশ্বিক পরিস্থিতিকে বিবেচনায় নিয়ে জন সংহতি সমিতি সামরিকায়ন, পুনর্বাসিত বাঙালিদের অন্যত্র পুনর্বাসন, সাংবিধানিক স্বীকৃতি প্রভৃতি বিষয়ে তাদের পূর্বের কঠোর অবস্থান থেকে অনেক নমনীয় হয়। সংখ্যাগুরু বনাম সংখ্যালঘুর সম্পর্কে নমনীয়তা যেমন রাজনৈতিক গুণ তেমনি পরিস্থিতির সাথে অভিযোজনের ক্ষমতাও মানবিক গুণ। শান্তিচুক্তিতে উভয়পক্ষের মধ্যে দেশের বৃহত্তর স্বার্থে নমনীয়তা প্রদর্শনের সদিচ্ছা প্রতিফলিত হয়েছে। চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরের দিন জেএসএস সভাপতি দুদুকছড়ায় ফিরে তার অনুভূতি ব্যক্ত করেন: “চুক্তিতে পাহাড়ি জনগণের দাবি যথেষ্ট আদায় হয়েছে। দেশ ও আন্তর্জাতিক বাস্তবতার নিরিখেই আমরা চুক্তি সই করেছি।”^৮

৫. অস্ত্র ও বলপ্রয়োগের পরিবর্তে পারস্পরিক আস্থা ও শ্রদ্ধাবোধের প্রতিফলন: শান্তিচুক্তি সম্পাদনের মাধ্যমে উভয় পক্ষের মধ্যে পারস্পরিক আস্থা ও শ্রদ্ধাবোধের প্রতিফলন ঘটেছে। পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম সমস্যা দীর্ঘদিনের পূঞ্জীভূত সমস্যা। সমাধানের চেষ্টাও বহু পুরনো। ভূমিত্র চাকমা যথার্থই বলেছেন যে, ‘Attempts at a negotiated settlement of the conflict are almost as old as the conflict. From the 1970s onward, different governments attempted to resolve the conflict through negotiations, notwithstanding the adoption of a military-focused’ approach by the GOB to counter the insurgency.’^৯

কিন্তু সমস্যার প্রকৃতি ও ধরন অনুসারে সমাধানের পথ-প্রক্রিয়া সন্তোষজনক না হওয়া অতীতের সামরিক সরকারগুলোর সাথে জনসংহতি সমিতির সমঝোতা হয়নি। উভয়পক্ষ আলোচনার মাঝপথে বৈঠক থেকে সরে গিয়ে পুনরায় শক্তি প্রয়োগের কৌশল অবলম্বন করে। কিন্তু নব্বই দশকে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের পতনের পর স্নায়ুযুদ্ধের অবসান হলে বিশ্ব রাজনীতি বদলে যায়। দেশগুলো শান্তিচুক্তির মাধ্যমে নিজেদের অভ্যন্তরীণ সমস্যা নিজেরা সমাধান করার পথ বেছে নেয়। বাংলাদেশ সরকারও সামরিক ও বলপ্রয়োগের নীতি থেকে সরে এসে রাজনৈতিক ও কূটনৈতিক প্রক্রিয়ায় পারস্পরিক আস্থা ও শ্রদ্ধাবোধের মাধ্যমে সমস্যা সমাধানের উদ্যোগ নেয়। জন সংহতি সমিতিও আওয়ামী লীগ সরকারের গঠিত জাতীয় কমিটির সদস্যদের সৌহার্দপূর্ণ ব্যবহার, পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম সমস্যার প্রতি উদার দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি এবং রাজনৈতিক সমাধানে আন্তরিকতা, অগ্রহ ও সুস্পষ্ট অঙ্গীকার উপলব্ধি করে তাদের সাথে ঐক্যমত্যে পৌঁছাতে আস্থাভাজন হয়। এজন্য সন্ত লারমা সখেদে বলেছেন, ‘ইতোপূর্বে বিগত সরকারের প্রতিনিধিদের সঙ্গে বৈঠক করেও সমস্যার সমাধান পাওয়া যায়নি। আমাদের

৮. মাহাম্মদ জুলফিকার আলী, পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম: প্রথাগত ব্যবস্থা থেকে আঞ্চলিক পরিষদ (ঢাকা: অরুন্ধতী পাবলিকেশন, ২০১৯), পৃ. ১৮৮।

৯. Bhumitra Chakma 11 Feb 2016, “The CHT and Peace Process” from *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh*, Access on 8 May 2018.

বিজাতীয় দৃষ্টিতে দেখা হয়েছে।^{১০} কিন্তু আওয়ামী লীগ সরকারের জাতীয় কমিটির সঙ্গে আলোচনায় তারা আশান্বিত হন এবং তারই প্রতিফলন হিসেবে পরবর্তী সকল বৈঠক খাগড়াছড়ির পরিবর্তে রাজধানী ঢাকায় গিয়ে করতে সম্মত হয়।

৬. শান্তিচুক্তিতে পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের ঐতিহাসিক বাস্তবতার স্বীকৃতি মিলেছে: শান্তিচুক্তির আরেকটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিশেষত্ব হলো ‘পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামকে উপজাতি অধ্যুষিত অঞ্চল’ হিসেবে ঘোষণা। পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের পাহাড়ি জনগোষ্ঠীর পৃথক শাসনতান্ত্রিক ঐতিহ্য আছে। মুঘল আমলে চাকমা রাজারা ১৭১৫ সালে মুঘল সরকারের সাথে চুক্তি সম্পাদন করে অভ্যন্তরীণ স্বাধীনতা বজায় রেখেছিল। চাকমা রাজা জান বণ্ড খাঁ ১৭৮৭ সালে গভর্নর জেনারেল লর্ড কর্ণওয়ালিসের সঙ্গে শান্তিচুক্তি করে পার্বত্য অঞ্চলে নিজের স্বশাসনের অধিকার অক্ষুণ্ণ রেখেছিলেন। ব্রিটিশ সরকার ১৮৬০ সালে পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম অঞ্চলকে পৃথক জেলা ঘোষণা করেছিল। ১৮৮১ সালে পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামে পাহাড়িদের নিয়ে স্বতন্ত্র পুলিশ বাহিনী গঠন করেছিল। ১৯০০ সালে হিল ট্র্যাক্টস রেগুলেশন ঘোষণা করে পাহাড়িদের ঐতিহ্যবাহী প্রশাসনকে স্বীকৃতি দিয়েছিল। এরপর ১৯১৯ ও ১৯৩৫ সালের ভারত শাসন আইনে পার্বত্য অঞ্চলকে যথাক্রমে ‘ব্যাকওয়ার্ড ট্র্যাক্টস’ ও টোট্যালি এজুকুডেড এরিয়া’ ঘোষণা করে পৃথক আইন ও পদ্ধতিতে শাসন করেছিল। উল্লেখ্য যে ব্রিটিশ সরকার ১৮৭২ থেকে ১৯২১ সাল পর্যন্ত আদমশুমারির জন্য তথ্যসংগ্রহসহ স্থানীয় সরকারের ভূমি ব্যবস্থাপনা, খাজনা উত্তোলন প্রভৃতি দায়িত্ব সার্কেল চিফ ও হেডম্যানদের ওপর ন্যস্ত করেছিল। পাকিস্তান আমলে ১৯৫৬ ও ১৯৬২ সালের শাসনতন্ত্রেও পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামকে যথাক্রমে ‘এজুকুডেড এরিয়া’ ও ‘ট্রাইবেল এরিয়া’ মর্যাদা বহাল রাখা হয়। অধ্যাপক পিয়েরে বেসেইনে পাকিস্তান আমলের পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম জেলার প্রশাসনিক ব্যবস্থাকে ‘পিক্যুলিয়ারিটি অব হিল ট্র্যাক্টস’ হিসেবে বর্ণনা করেছেন। তাঁর ভাষায়, “East Pakistan is subdivided into three divisions: Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong. But outside these divisions though under Chittagong stands the special territory of the Hill Tracts which, being a tribal area, has a special status. Lying east of the division of Chittagong, it does not fall under the ordinary rules of administration applicable to the rest of East Pakistan.”^{১১} তিনি আরো বলেন, The Chittagong Hill Tracts form a special district, with its headquarters at Rangamati. It is under the jurisdiction of a Deputy Commissioner (D.C. for short). ... In its turn the district is subdivided into three subdivisions with headquarters at Rangamati, Ramgarh and Bandarban. Each of them is under a subdivision officer, or S.D.O. ... But the fact is that, side by side with it, and developing parallel to it, (in fact coinciding with it) is another structure through which the hillmen come to fit into this general frame work, It is the juxtaposition of these two, which marks the peculiarity of the Hill Tracts.^{১২}

অতঃপর স্বাধীন বাংলাদেশে বঙ্গবন্ধু সরকারের প্রণীত বাকশাল ব্যবস্থায়ও পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামকে তিনটি প্রশাসনিক জেলায় বিভক্ত করে ওই তিন জেলার অ্যাডমিনিস্ট্রিটিভ কাউন্সিলে গভর্নর, সচিব, যুগ্মসচিব ও সদস্য হিসেবে পাহাড়িদের নিযুক্ত করা হয়।^{১৩} সুতরাং এমন ঐতিহাসিক প্রেক্ষাপটে বিবেচনা করলে শান্তিচুক্তির মাধ্যমে স্বীকৃত ‘বিশেষ আঞ্চলিক শাসন ব্যবস্থা’ ঐ অঞ্চলের প্রশাসনিক ইতিহাসের সাথে সঙ্গতিপূর্ণ।

১০. মোহাম্মদ জুলফিকার আলী, *পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম: প্রথাগত ব্যবস্থা থেকে আঞ্চলিক পরিষদ*, পৃ. ১৫২।

১১. Prof. Pierre Bessagnet, *Tribesmen of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1958), pp.19.

১২. Ibid, p. 19-20.

১৩. আনন্দ বিকাশ চাকমা, *কার্পাস মহল থেকে শান্তিচুক্তি: পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামে রাষ্ট্রীয় নীতির ইতিহাস* (ঢাকা: দি ইউনিভার্সিটি প্রেস লিমিটেড, ২০২১), পৃ. ৩৩৬-৩৩৭।

৭. পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের পাহাড়ি জনগোষ্ঠীর অধিকারের প্রতি নীতিগত স্বীকৃতি প্রদান: শান্তিচুক্তির মাধ্যমে সরকার পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের পাহাড়ীদের স্বতন্ত্র পরিচিতির স্বীকৃতি এবং রাজনৈতিক, সাংস্কৃতিক ও ভূমি অধিকারের দাবিকে নীতিগতভাবে মেনে নিয়েছে।
৮. স্বাভাবিক জীবনযাত্রার পুনঃপ্রতিষ্ঠা ও উন্নয়নের নতুন দিগন্তের উন্মোচন: পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তির মাধ্যমে ওই অঞ্চলে জীবনযাত্রায় প্রাণচাঞ্চল্য দেখা দেয়। ফলে বাংলাদেশ সরকার এবং জাতীয় ও আন্তর্জাতিক বিভিন্ন সংস্থা সেখানে মিলিয়ন মিলিয়ন ডলার অনুদান দিয়ে আর্থ-সামাজিক উন্নয়ন প্রকল্প বাস্তবায়ন করেছে। এ উন্নয়নের সুফল তৃণমূল পর্যায়ের মানুষ পেতে শুরু করেছে।

সুপারিশ:

বিগত ২৬ বছরে দেশের এবং পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের পরিস্থিতি অনেক বদলে গেছে। শান্তিচুক্তি সম্পাদনের প্রথম চার বছরে চুক্তিতে প্রস্তাবিত ৭টি প্রতিষ্ঠান গঠনের লক্ষ্যে প্রয়োজনীয় আইন প্রণীত হয়েছে এবং তদনুসারে প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলো গঠিত ও পুনর্গঠিত হয়েছে। পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম জনসংহতি সমিতির নেতৃত্বদ ও শান্তিবাহিনীর সদস্যবৃন্দ চুক্তি মোতাবেক অস্ত্র জমা দিয়ে স্বাভাবিক জীবনে ফিরেছে এবং সমিতি একটি গণতান্ত্রিক রাজনৈতিক দল হিসেবে আত্মপ্রকাশ করেছে। আঞ্চলিক পরিষদ গঠিত হলে তাতে জনসংহতি সমিতির নেতৃত্বদ দায়িত্বপূর্ণ পদে নিযুক্ত হয়েছে। ভারত থেকে শরণার্থীরা দেশে ফেরত এসেছে। পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামে মানুষের স্বাভাবিক চলাচলের পরিবেশ উন্নত হয়েছে, মানুষের আত্মবিশ্বাস বেড়েছে এবং আত্মবিকাশের চেতনার উন্মেষ ঘটেছে। তবে বিগত এক দশকে পাহাড়ীদের মধ্যে আন্তঃদলীয়, উপদলীয় রাজনৈতিক বিরোধ ও রক্তক্ষয়ী সংঘর্ষ পরিলক্ষিত হয়েছে। মাঝেমাঝে নাম-পরিচয়হীন কথিত 'দুর্বৃত্ত'দের আগ্নেয়াস্ত্র হামলায় মানুষের অস্বাভাবিক মৃত্যুর ঘটনা জনমনে আতঙ্ক সৃষ্টি করেছে। চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরকারী পক্ষ থেকে শান্তিচুক্তি বাস্তবায়নের গতি-প্রকৃতি নিয়ে হতাশা ব্যক্ত হয়েছে এবং চুক্তির পূর্ণ বাস্তবায়নের জন্য একটি সময়সূচিভিত্তিক কর্মপরিকল্পনা প্রণয়নের দাবি উঠেছে। এমন বাস্তবতায় দাঁড়িয়ে চুক্তি থেকে অর্জিত অগ্রগতি ও প্রগতির ধারা অব্যাহত রাখার জন্য কিছু বিষয় বিবেচনায় নেয়া নেতে পারে।

- ক. পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি-প্রসূত প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলোকে গণতান্ত্রিক, জনপ্রতিধিত্বশীল ও জবাবদিহিমূলক কার্যকর প্রতিষ্ঠানে রূপান্তরের আশু পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করা।
- খ. নির্বাচিত পরিষদ গঠিত না-হওয়া পর্যন্ত অন্তর্বর্তীকালীন জেলা পরিষদগুলোতে দক্ষ ও অভিজ্ঞ টেকনোক্রেড্যাট সদস্য নিয়োগ করার বিষয় চিন্তা করা যেতে পারে।
- গ. পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি-সৃষ্ট প্রতিষ্ঠান ও অন্যান্য প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলোর মধ্যে আন্তঃপ্রাতিষ্ঠানিক সংযোগ, সমন্বয় ও সহযোগিতা বৃদ্ধি করা।
- ঘ. পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম চুক্তি বা তার আলোকে প্রণীত আঞ্চলিক পরিষদ আইন নিয়ে কোনো আইনগত বাঁক থাকলে দ্রুত নিষ্পত্তি করে এর সুরক্ষা নিশ্চিত করা।
- ঙ. পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম বিষয়ক বিভিন্ন ইস্যুগুলোকে একমাত্রিক প্রেক্ষাপট ও দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি থেকে বিবেচনা না-করে বহুমাত্রিক প্রেক্ষাপট ও দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি থেকে মূল্যায়ন করা।
- চ. ঐতিহ্যবাহী প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলোর প্রশাসনিক ও আর্থিক সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধি করা।
- ছ. পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামে বহুত্যাগের বিনিময়ে অর্জিত শান্তি ও সম্প্রীতি বিনষ্ট করে এমন অনভিপ্রেত, উস্কানিমূলক বক্তব্য-বিবৃতি ও কর্মকাণ্ড পরিহার করা।

উপসংহার:

উপর্যুক্ত আলোচনায় দেখা যায় শান্তিচুক্তি শুধু কাগজে কলমে লিখিত একটি দলিল বা রাজনৈতিক প্রপঞ্চ নয়। এটি তার চেয়ে ঢেড় বেশি। দেশ ও জাতির প্রয়োজনে এটি সম্পাদিত হয়েছে। দেশের বহু অর্থ, শ্রম, সময়, রক্ত ও ত্যাগের বিনিময়ে এই রাজনৈতিক সম্পদ অর্জিত হয়েছে। এর পূর্বের গল্প অন্ধকারাচ্ছন্ন। আলোর পথের সন্ধান পেতে ২৫ বছর লেগেছে। আমরা আর অন্ধকার যুগে ফিরে যেতে চাই না। আলোর পথের অভিযাত্রী হয়ে দেশের শান্তি ও সমৃদ্ধি আনতে চাই। সাতানব্বই-এর শান্তিচুক্তি যে জাতীয় সংহতি, পারস্পরিক সম্প্রীতি ও আস্থার চেতনা প্রজ্জ্বলিত করেছে সে চেতনা যাতে নিভে না যায় সে-লক্ষ্যে সম্মিলিত প্রচেষ্টা আবশ্যিক। দেশটা সকলের। সুতরাং কাউকে কটাক্ষ বা বধিগত রেখে নয় বরং সকলে মিলেমিশে সৌহার্দ ও সৌভ্রাতৃত্বের বন্ধনে দেশ মাতৃকার উন্নয়নে আত্মনিয়োগ করতে হবে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনার শান্তির দর্শন হলো : We see peace as a fundamental human right. And we are committed to attain, sustain, promote and strengthen peace at all cost.^{১৪} এটাকে পাথেয় করে এগুতে হবে। একযোগে ক্ষুধা-দারিদ্র-নিরক্ষরতা মুক্ত উন্নত সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ প্রতিষ্ঠা করতে হবে। তখন শান্তির সুবাতাসে সবার দেহ-মন জুড়িয়ে যাবে।

১৪. Inaugural Speech by Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at International Conference on 'Peace and Chittagong Hill Tracts' on 20 June 1998.

About the Centre

The Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs (BCIPA) is a multidisciplinary international affairs research and academic platform devoted to studying and analyzing the Indo-Pacific region. BCIPA has been founded by Professor Shahab Enam Khan, PhD, one of the esteemed faculty members of the Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh.

Jahangirnagar University, founded in 1970 and situated in Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Currently ranked among 800-1000 in the Time Higher Education), is a public research institution with very strong research facilities. It stands as the fourth largest university campus in the country, covering an area of approximately 697.56 acres. Remarkably, it is the sole fully residential university in Bangladesh and is renowned for its stunning beauty.

Our vision is to promote the idea of an inclusive and open Indo-Pacific that has been established in our Indo-Pacific Outlook, announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh on 24th April, 2023. We accommodate our vision in congruence with that of the Bangladesh Government in promoting a free, open, peaceful, secure, inclusive and diverse Indo-Pacific for the shared prosperity for all. To maintain that vision, our mission is to actively engage in scholarly discussions and public policy deliberations, addressing intricate geopolitical challenges and tensions among countries in the region. This involves conducting thorough research, fostering dialogues and meaningful interactions with key stakeholders, as well as offering training to both researchers and practitioners in public policy. Furthermore, BCIPA advocates for gender equality within its team by maintaining an equivalent balance of male and female members among its staff and interns.



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