



Seminar

on

CHT – REVISITING THE PEACE ACCORD

organised by

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)

Dhaka, 2 October 2012

A Seminar on “**CHT – Revisiting the Peace Accord**” was organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) at the institute’s Auditorium in Dhaka on 2 October 2012. The objectives of the Seminar were to (a) discuss about the progress of the implementation of the CHT Peace Accord and its positive effects on the overall development of the CHT, (b) to bring out the impediments and also find the ways out to overcome the impediments in implementing the Accord and (c) to discuss the role of Bangladesh Government, Bangalee, Tribal and other stakeholders for the implementation of the Peace Accord. **Major General Muhammad Imrul Quayes**, ndc, psc, Director General of BIISS, delivered the Welcome Address. **Syeda Sajeda Choudhury, MP**, Deputy Leader of the Bangladesh Parliament and Chairman of Peace Treaty Implementation Monitoring Committee, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. **Major General Mohammad Ashab Uddin**, ndc, psc, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) was the Keynote Speaker of the Seminar. **Brigadier General Shahedul Anam (Retd.)**, Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*, delivered his Remarks as the Panelist. **Major General Muhammad Imrul Quayes** chaired the Seminar with a lively Open Discussion and also delivered his Closing Remarks. In the Open Discussion, academia, government officials both from military and civilian administrations, media, representatives from the civil society and other concerned professionals actively participated in the Seminar and contributed with their valuable comments, opinions and suggestions.

Address of Welcome

In his Welcome Address, **Major General Muhammad Imrul Quayes**, ndc, psc, Director General of BISS, spoke on the strategic importance of the CHT to Bangladesh. He said that the Peace Accord that was signed in 1997 by the Bangladesh Government and the Partbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) formally ends more than two decades of armed conflict in Bangladesh and it has opened up opportunities to improve the life and livelihood of the citizens of the CHT. Therefore, the CHT Accord has become a milestone for development activities in the region. The implementation of the Accord is on progress with the establishment of the Ministry of CHT Affairs, the CHT Regional Council and the Land Dispute Settlement Commission. The initiatives, however, are interrupted with some impediments: misinterpretations, inadequate and inappropriate information sharing; and unconstructive propaganda. Debate on local people's lands and dislocation of locals from their own lands continue. Therefore, consistent stresses are on settlement of the CHT issues emanating from the land right and the settlement-related disputes. He said that the Peace Accord and its aftermath have again taught us that building peace is not just about arriving at a political settlement to an armed conflict. More important is about creating an environment that will enable the CHT people to live with dignity and in harmony with each other, based on social justice and equal rights. Here comes the essence of dialogue among all the parties and strengthening the role of Bangladesh government, Bangalee, Tribal and other stakeholders for the implementation of the CHT Peace Accord. Finally, he thanked and welcomed all for participating in the Seminar.

Keynote Presentation

In his Keynote Presentation on "Evaluation of Current Situation in CHT, Challenges and Way Forward", **Major General Mohammad Ashab Uddin**, ndc, psc, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) spoke on pre-Peace Accord scenario, path to the Peace Accord, evaluation of current situation in the CHT and pertinent challenges. He stated that genesis of problems dated back to the mid-fifties with the construction of the Kaptai Dam. This resulted in a large scale tribal displacement leading to discontentment. The birth of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) in 1972 gave further momentum to the political aspiration of the tribal people under the leadership of Mr. M N Larma. With this political front of Santi

Bahini, the long desired 'Peace Accord' signed in 1997 was considered internationally as a successful case of conflict resolution as it had brought an end to the insurgency and created a conducive environment for establishing peace in the entire CHT. He informed that in the post Peace Accord Scenario, 'Operation Uttaran' called 'Transition to Peace' had been launched in 2001 in the hill districts of Khagrachari, Rangamati and Bandarban to foster the Peace Accord implementation process.

While assessing the current situation of the CHT, he remarked that except one or two stray incidents, the situation in the area is quite stable under the control of security forces and civil administration. Inter-party rivalries, abductions, killings and communal tensions occurred during that time are local in nature and usually remain within manageable proportion. Though tribal-Bangalee relationship is at times swayed on mutual trust and mistrust but it is not complicated as is portrayed and exploited. He added that despite all the positive outcomes, land dispute has been the most complicated one as the JSS demanded 23 points for the amendment of the Land Dispute Act in 2001. He informed that a good number of international and local organisations are working with community development projects but their activities raise controversy. However, Bangladesh government is paying due attention in this regard. He expressed his concern that in the post-Peace Accord scenario, the security forces are facing a number of challenges including maintenance of a stable security environment, inter-party armed clashes, balancing a communal harmony, lack of integrated approach, influence of media and propaganda by regional tribal political party.

He viewed that to maintain a peaceful security situation in the CHT as well as implement the CHT Peace Accord, certain issues need to be addressed like capacity building of civil administration and para military forces, control over activities of armed groups, enhancing mainstream politics, activation of land commission, election of regional and hill district councils, declaration of 'exclusive development zone' and regulating the activities of international organisations and NGOs. At the end, he lamented that the area of the CHT, one tenth of Bangladesh, has tremendous potentials to contribute to the national economy. Only the commitment and concerted efforts of all stakeholders may bring sustainable peace in this area in

due course of time. Simultaneously, apart from upholding national sovereignty, government should continue to employ the security forces in the CHT to promote sustainable peace, harmony and development of the region.

Panel Remarks

In his Panel Remarks, **Brigadier General Shahedul Anam (Retd.)**, Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*, said that revisiting the Peace Accord is very timely task even fifteen years of the Accord has been passed. He argued that for some reasons the full implementation of the Accord is still unlikely. As the Accord was signed to harmonize the people of the region, it is needed to solve the problems of the Accord. Shantu Larma and some other groups are demanding some issues to be resolved under the Accord. These issues should properly be addressed. He commented that the Accord should not be seen as particular group's interest rather it should meet the demands of all groups living in the region. Hence, it is necessary to accommodate all political parties to discuss the issue and implement the Accord. He said that the Peace Accord is now under the high-court stay order but the government should take initiative to revisit the Accord because the stakeholders should not be deprived from the proper judgment. And the clauses which are inconsistent with the constitution should be reformed. He commented that principles of natural justice should be taken into account to ensure justice for all groups of people living in the CHT.

The government of Bangladesh should take initiative to revisit the Accord otherwise the success of the past will be blurred and threat will be acute in future. Hence, the role of media is very important. Media should be involved with the whole issues, so that all stakeholders can know every development of the Accord. This will eradicate all kinds of misconception and misperception of the Accord. He stated that the most important aspect is the land dispute issue, so this should be addressed well. Shantu Larma, leader of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) raised 23 points to be resolved under the reform work. These should be accommodated. People feel that they have failed to grasp what they expected from the Peace Accord, so the demands should be considered while revisiting the Peace Accord. Then the feeling of deprivation will be eliminated.

Address of the Chief Guest

In her Address, the Chief Guest, **Syeda Sajeda Choudhury, MP**, Deputy Leader of the Bangladesh Parliament and Chairman of Peace Treaty Implementation Monitoring Committee, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, said that the CHT is a great concern for Bangladesh since 1970s. At present, the situation of this area is very much politicised. There are so many political groups who want to achieve their own interests. And hence, peace is a far cry in this region despite having a Peace Accord signed in 1997. She expressed her concern in that the foreigners, although are investing huge amount of money for the hilly people, are making the situation more unstable. She further informed that in the name of development, the foreigners establish school with certain groups of Chakma depriving others and therefore it brings a negative impact in the CHT. She argued that without discussion among all the stakeholders in the CHT, peace and harmony cannot be achieved as each group in the region has individual demands, perceptions and standpoints. She urged that Chittagong is a part of this country and every political group should work for the tranquility of this region. She suggested bringing all the parties together including the tribal people for a meaningful discussion which will ultimately lead the stable situation in this area. She believed that if all the parties sit together the problems can be solved promptly.

Open Discussion

In Open Discussion **Group Captain M Al Ameen**, Director of Personnel, Air Head Quarter, Dhaka Cantonment, **Professor Dr. Syed Anwar Hussain**, Department of History, Dhaka University, **Ambassador Shamim Ahmed**, Director, Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies, **Nazmul Alam Siddiqui**, Former Secretary, **Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury**, Former Commerce Secretary, **Mehadi Hassan Palash**, Assistant Editor, *The Daily Inqilab*, **Lt Gen M Harun Ar Rashid**, BP, rcds, psc (Retd.), Former Chief of Army Staff and **Dr. Mustafizur Rahman**, Chairman, Institute of Development Strategy (IDS) and many others actively participated in the Seminar and contributed with their valuable comments, opinions and suggestions. **Major General Mohammad Ashab Uddin**, ndc, psc, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)

and **Brigadier General Shahedul Anam (Retd.)** responded the remarks, ideas and proposals that came from the floor.

Group Captain M Al Ameen, Director of Personnel, Air Head Quarter, Dhaka Cantonment, asked Major General Mohammad Ashab Uddin, ndc, psc, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) on present demographic situation in the CHT. He also had a question on how about the government's efforts to maintain sustainable ethnic entity in the CHT. He commented that disputes should be immediately addressed.

Professor Dr. Syed Anwar Hussain, Department of History, Dhaka University, commented that there are confusions and contradictions between the English version and Bengali version of the Accord. The Accord may be amended, revised or even changed depending on opinions provided by the concerned parties. Another contradiction is that there is a regional body in the CHT although Article 1 of the Constitution regards Bangladesh as a unitary state. He suggested naming the regional body as *Pahari Parishad*. He urged upon having a clear and convincing census report for the people living in the CHT. He argued that deployment of Army was perfectly constitutional to address insurgency in the CHT. He suggested that there should be two part of the Accord: (i) implementable part to assess how far implementation has taken place, or why there is still some to be implemented and (ii) unimplementable part to be devised or revised. To him, the land dispute issue should be on top and therefore, important task is to have a land survey to substantiate the land document, enhance the role of land commission and an overall, holistic and serious effort to implement the CHT Accord.

Ambassador Shamim Ahmed, Director, Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies, remarked that the CHT problem requires an intensive discussion incorporating the civilian as well as the tribal people. In regards to revisiting the Peace Accord, the major challenges are land dispute settlement and removing discrimination of the people. Also important is to develop an exclusive development zone for the welfare of the CHT people.

Nazmul Alam Siddiqui, Former Secretary, first spoke on the previous efforts in the CHT. Under the decisive factor of land distribution, he remarked that land

belongs to the state whatever the type of land is. Identifying the modes of land and its ownership is important. He then expressed his concern about the presence of large scale operation of the foreign NGOs in this region. Large scale of NGOs operation is alarming. The foreign NGOs' operation in the CHT should be examined. On the other hand, he argued that the dominance of Chakma in various aspects may create discrimination among the CHT community.

Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury, Former Commerce Secretary, said that for many years there are economic suffering, inadequate economic development, insufficient poverty alleviation activity and lack of employment generation in the CHT. He then recommended enhancing economic development in the region.

Mehadi Hassan Palash, Assistant Editor, *The Daily Inqilab*, spoke on discrimination between tribal and non-tribal people and urged that non-tribal people should be named Bangalee in the Peace Accord. About the Land Dispute Act 2001, he informed that 14 points are mutually settled out of 23. The rests should also mutually be fixed. The humanitarian situation of the Bangalee should be considered. How to revisit? How far implementation has taken place? Why are some tasks failed? Whether the unwritten part of the Accord is included in the Constitution? These should be addressed well in implementing the Peace Accord. On the other hand, he spoke on evangelisation issue and also on housing problems in the CHT. The housing issue should immediately be resolved. According to him, for the CHT crisis, certain NGOs and few groups of Chakma are responsible and other tribal people are peace-loving. Working with all peace-loving indigenous people is essential. At the end, he urged upon stopping the illegal activities of the NGOs in the CHT.

Lt Gen M Harun Ar Rashid, BP, rcds, psc (Retd.), former Chief of Army Staff, asked Maj Gen Ahsab on whether the Peace Council is interactive. He informed that the CHT has an international dimension. The role of India and Myanmar is very pertinent to maintain tranquility in this area. Any propaganda regarding the CHT should properly be handled. Investigation of any propaganda should be opened for all and truth or true information must be circulated. Bangladesh's foreign missions are very weak to mitigate foreign propaganda, so they should be active in this regard. Besides, Bangladesh government should

monitor the activities of the foreign organizations as well as NGOs. Also, the role of Army is very important to make the situation under control. He said that the CHT is a concern for Bangladesh. Some people may try to utilize the CHT issue for their own interests. So, it should not be an issue of politics, rather it must be a national issue. He ended saying that the Peace Accord should be revised.

Dr. Mustafizur Rahman, Chairman, Institute of Development Strategy (IDS), urged upon producing and developing human resources in the CHT as well as a precise planning for industrialization, tourism and development in the region. He opined that 'head man system' could continue along with the local government and it would enhance the development process in the CHT. He suggested modernizing the local government so that it can involve the CHT people in voting process. Finally, he requested all concerned to be careful about the IOs' functions.

Responses By

Major General Mohammad Ashab Uddin, ndc, psc, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) responded that there are 1.5 million people in the CHT and considering the tribal people other than the Bangalee, the proportion is 50:50. He added that there are 13 types of tribal people in the region and the Chakma is the most influential. On how to maintain ethnic entity, he commented that peace is a must which will ensure harmony and enhance development. According to him, gradual development should take place; existing mistrust and communal tension should be removed by communal harmony. He informed that Army is officially involved in the CHT in 1976 and since then there are eight major operations took place. About the issue of land dispute, he argued that an intensive survey is crucial to know the real land owners. He replied that declaration of 'exclusive development zone' is essential for developing tourism in and the welfare and prosperity of the CHT. He commented that the CHT is not divided based on 'two nations theory' rather it is geographically divided. He informed that currently more than one hundred NGOs are working in the CHT and if any foreign NGO wants to work for the CHT people they need to take permission either from the MoFA or from the Ministry of Home. He argued that unequal distribution of wealth and financial benefits provided by the IOs is one of the major causes of crisis in the CHT. Most projects related to the

development of the CHT people by the IOs and NGOs are intangible. NGOs should work in a way that ensures transparency. Uneven allocation of economic benefits provided by the IOs should be controlled. Not only Bangladesh government should fully be aware of that, but all other stakeholders also should work together in implementing the Peace Accord.

In his response, **Brigadier General Shahedul Anam (Retd.)**, Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*, said that though the preamble of the Peace Accord articulates the development of people in the CHT, still there are many contradictions in the Accord. It needs to be considered that the CHT is tribal inhabited area, the Accord itself is contradictory and this paradoxical factor needs to be addressed. Contradictions across all the parties should gradually be resolved and the goal should be on implementation of the CHT Accord and development of the region.

Closing Remarks

In his Closing Remarks, **Major General Muhammad Imrul Quayes**, ndc, psc, Director General of BISS, emphasized on working together with the IOs, NGOs and all the stakeholders and developing a positive environment that may facilitate the implementation of the CHT Accord and the development of the region. At the end, he thanked all again for participating in the Seminar and making it lively.