

**PEACEBUILDING IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS  
(CHT): AN INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH\***

Ananda Bikash Chakma\*\*

**Abstract**

The ethnic tensions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts originated from the hill-men's demands for autonomy and recognition of distinct identity in the newly adopted constitution of Bangladesh in 1972. While successive governments have neglected both demands, they have also established a host of political institutions to address the grievances of the tribal people and to establish peace and security in the CHT. The formation of the Tribal Cultural Institutes and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, the creation of three administrative districts splitting the old CHT district are just a few examples. The foundation of three Hill Local Government Councils and the CHT Regional council, and of late, the Ministry of CHT Affairs are also notable developments. This paper argues that the evolving political institutions created both before and after the 1997 CHT Peace Accord have played varied level of role toward the process of peace-building. The evolution of these political-administrative institutions and their performance are analyzed in this paper. In the end, the author identifies a few challenges toward the full implementation of the CHT Accord in general and the democratic governance of local institutions in particular.

**Introduction**

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the ethnic problem in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) has drawn sustained attention from the successive governments, regardless of their political ideology and proximity to the civilian or military leaderships. The problem in the CHT region originated with the demand for special ethnic identity by the hill people and the denial of such special identity by the government of Bangladesh's independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore no surprise that the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh neither included any provisions for recognizing the distinct identity of the indigenous hill people nor accorded the CHT any special administrative

---

\* The paper was presented at the National Seminar on "Bangladesh at 40: Achievements and Challenges" organized by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh in Dhaka during 14-15 March 2013.

\*\* Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh.

status. In response to such utter neglect of the hill people and their demands, Manobendra Narayan Larma (subsequently M.N. Larma), Member of the Parliament for the Chittagong Hill Tracts North constituency, declined to endorse the new constitution. Rajkumari Chandra Roy notes that, Larma's decision was based on the ground that the 1972 Constitution did not include any provisions for safeguarding the indigenous interests; instead it allowed government officials to exercise discretionary powers in the CHT compared to such powers in other administrative districts.<sup>1</sup>

It was not only the Chakmas and other hill people in the CHT but the Garos, the Santals and other tribal communities living in the plains and forestlands, who have been denied special ethnic identity in the 1972 Constitution. As revealed in this paper, this identity politics has emerged as a thorny issue due to the fact that the majority of Bengali origin people and the Bangladesh Government have historically perceived any special identity for the Chakmas and other hill people in the CHT as direct threat to the territorial integrity of the newly independent country.<sup>2</sup> It was also perceived that the demands for special identity would eventually translate into the demand for regional autonomy, which was unconceivable in the political climate of the post-independence period. As a compromise to the demands of the hill people living in the CHT, successive governments have established several institutions to promote peace and development in the CHT.

This paper takes an institutionalist approach to study the peacebuilding initiatives of successive governments in Bangladesh. The institutionalist approach looks at the role of formal institutions such as the legislative, executive, and judiciary as well as political parties and interests groups in understanding politics and political processes of a particular region.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on the historical data and secondary materials, it examines the creation of various administrative and political structures and their effect on building peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

---

1 Rajkumari Chandra Roy, *Land Rights of The Indigenous Peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh* (Copenhagen: IWGIA Document No. 99, 2000) p. 47

2 Kalam Shahed, *Ethnic Movements and Hegemony in South Asia* (Dhaka: Hakkani Publishers, 2002) p. 222

3 Guy B. Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science* (London: Pinter, 1999); R.A.W. Rhodes, "The Institutional Approach," in D. Marsh and G. Stoker, *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

Let us begin with the initiatives taken by the first government of independent Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took several affirmative policies to promote the hill people. For instance, he introduced the special quota system for the tribal students for admission into higher educational institutions. He also continued the traditional tribal circle administration, granted foreign scholarship opportunities for tribal students, and allocated hostels for tribal students in Chittagong and Dhaka. Mujib also nominated a women MP to represent the hill people.<sup>4</sup> Despite taking such favorable initiatives for the tribal people, some of Mujib's public speeches neglecting the demand for a separate ethnic identity for the tribal communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts hurt the tribal sentiments.

Having frustrated with Mujib's insensitive attitude towards the hill tribes, M.N. Larma formed the Parbattyo Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (Hill Tracts Peoples Solidarity Association) – the PCJSS, which would act as an umbrella organization of the hill peoples. The movement started without any external assistance and thus lacked the financial resources to expand its base. During its formative years between 1972 and 1975, it had limited ability to mobilize and organize people.<sup>5</sup> At that time the ethnic leaders attempted to fill up their demands through democratic and constitutional ways, and some sorts of understanding might have been built up between the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS. When the ruling party, Awami League (AL), with its monopolistic control over the parliament, switched to a one-party BKSAL government headed by a president, M. N. Larma joined the BKSAL. But the military coup in August 1975, which killed Mujib and most of his family members, changed the regional ethnic agitation and the political condition in the country quite dramatically. In September 1975 M. N. Larma started an underground movement and soon the PCJSS was transformed overnight into a clandestine party with the Shanti Bahini as its armed wing. It was the time when the Indian government started offering active support to the Shanti Bahini. The Indian support to the Shanti Bahini added fuel to the fire.<sup>6</sup> This was the turning point of unrest, which highlighted the need for a strong peace building process in the CHT.

---

4 A. K. Dewan, *Parbottyo Chattagram o Bangabandhu* (Chittagong Hill Tracts and Bangabandhu) (Rangamati: Published by Sudipta Dewan, 2011), pp. 9-11

5 Kalam Sahed, *Op. Cit.*, p. 243

6 S. Kamaluddin, "A tangled web of insurgency" in *Far Easter Economic Review (FEER)*, 23 May 1980.

The military regime led by Ziaur Rahman identified that the ethnic insurgency in the CHT was mostly caused by economic disparity and underdevelopment. Despite that Zia decided to pacify the rising turmoil using both military and administrative strategies. Consequently, he formed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) in 1976 and a Tribal Cultural Institute (TCI) in 1978 in Rangamati as peace building and development initiatives. When General H. M. Ershad came to power, he also undertook several innovative measures to bring peace and stability in the insurgency-prone area. Most notable among Ershad's initiative were holding dialogues with the PCJSS leaders and the armed rebels of the Shanti Bahini, and the formation of three local government councils in 1989. After the restoration of democracy in 1991, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came to power under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia. Begum Zia paid attention to the CHT insurgency and resumed the dialogue with PCJSS. The success of the BNP government was limited to reaching an agreement on a cease-fire with the Shanti Bahini for five years. When the Awami League came to power in 1996 with Sheikh Hasina as the prime minister, the newly elected government invested its political energy and diplomatic clout to pacify the long-standing unrest in CHT. This eventually led to the signing of the historic Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord of 1997 between the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts and the PCJSS. As a direct result of the CHT Peace Accord, the government formed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHT RC) and the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA).

In summary, the preceding discussion suggests that between 1972 and 2001, successive governments have formed various administrative and political institutions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to promote socio-economic development. To what extent have those institutions contributed to the peacebuilding efforts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts? This question forms the core of the inquiry in this paper. Before addressing this question, it is pertinent to discuss the concepts and theories of peacebuilding.

#### **Peacebuilding: conceptual and theoretical discussion**

Peacebuilding is a modern concept. It is quite difficult to conceptualize the term of 'peace' because it can be used and abused in different aspects and situations. The term peace conjures images of harmony and bliss in psychological, social and political sense. In the academic parlance, the term 'peace' as a concept was

first introduced by Johan Galtung (1964), the founder of the discipline Peace and Conflict Studies. He divided the concept into two categories: negative peace and positive peace. In Galtung's words, negative peace "is the absence of violence, absence of war" while positive peace "is the integration of human society."<sup>7</sup>

What is then peacebuilding? The concept of peacebuilding was first introduced by the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992 in his famous speech titled *An Agenda for Peace* prepared at the request of the UN Security Council. Boutros-Ghali suggests that peacebuilding is an initiative which heightens the sense of security and encourages conflicting parties to turn their energies to work for peaceful restoration of their societies.<sup>8</sup> The peacebuilding strategies outlined by the UN Secretary-General have greatly influenced the subsequent peace researcher's understanding of the peacebuilding enterprise. Yet most scholars agree that peace is a complex, long term, and multi-layered process. So peacebuilding covers all activities aimed at promoting peace and overcoming violence in a society. Prof. Ho-Won Jeong quite rightly explains the term peacebuilding in the following words:

Peacebuilding involves a process comprising various functions and roles. It often entails a wide range of sequential activities, proceeding from cease fire and refugee settlement to the establishment of a new government and economic reconstruction. The end of violent conflict has to be accompanied by the rebuilding of the physical infrastructure and the restoration of essential government functions that provide basic services.<sup>9</sup>

In the above definition we find that peacebuilding is a long term activity going beyond the short-term imperative of stopping an armed conflict to promoting physical infrastructure and providing basic services to ordinary people through government institutions or functionaries. Thus, a long-term peacebuilding strategy is aimed at addressing "the principal political, economic, social and ethnic imbalances that led to conflict in first place."<sup>10</sup>

---

7 Johan Galtung, 'An Editorial,' *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 1(1), pp. 1-4

8 Report of the Secretary General, *An Agenda for peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping*, Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992 (A/47/277-S/24111, 17 June 1992. This footnote was cited in the book of *Shanti o Sangharsha Odhyayan* [Peace and Conflict Studies] by Md. Rafiqul Islam, Md. Shahinur Alam and Anurug Chakma, Published by Zhingeyful from Dhaka in 2013, pp. 127

9 Ho-Won Jeong, *Peacebuilding in Post Conflict Societies: Strategy and Process*, (New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt., Ltd, 2006), p. 1

10 *Ibid*, p. 4

On the other hand, according to John Paul Lederach, “peacebuilding is recognized as dynamic, having something to contribute in every phase of a conflict and always moving/changing in response to the situation and the stage of the peacemaking efforts.”<sup>11</sup> It indicates that peacebuilding has no specific starting point. So it entails both short and long-term frameworks. Such frameworks would include demobilization of the armed groups, refugee resettlement, development assistance, institutional reform, and the advancement of human rights. Nonetheless, it is agreeable that not all peace processes are the same, especially in considering the variations in conflict situations. For example, the case of resolving the CHT dispute in Bangladesh is unique. This is due to the fact that the peacebuilding initiatives of the government along with direct dialogues between the government and the rebels have resolved the CHT conflict without any international mediator or third party involvement. In order to understand how the peacebuilding process worked in Bangladesh, we now turn into a brief history of the CHT and the institutions that evolved there to promote the tribal communities’ development priorities.

#### **The Chittagong Hill Tracts under British and Pakistani Regimes**

A brief description of the pre-independence history is necessary to understand the administrative structure of the CHT region and the politico-economic status of the tribal people living there. The district of the Chittagong Hill Tracts was formed by separating the hill and forest areas of the old Chittagong district in 1860 A. D. The total area of the district is 5,138 square miles. In 1961 the total population of the district was 385,079 with the tribal people representing about 85 percent of the total population. The district is a hilly region and its historical development has been different from that of alluvial plains of Bangladesh.

The codified laws applicable to other part of Bengal were not considered suited to the requirements of the unsophisticated and simple tribesmen of the Hill Tracts. So, the British government framed an act of simple rules under Regulation 1 of 1900 which formed the basis of criminal, civil and revenue administrations of the district. The rules in the CHT Manual made under Regulation 1 of 1900 were intended to protect the rights and interest of the

---

<sup>11</sup> John Paul Lederach, “Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies” in *The Politics of Ethnic Consciousness* (eds.) by Cora Govers and Hans Vermeulen (Houndmills, UK: Machmillan Press, 1997), pp. 1-30

tribal hill men, as well as their customs and practices, and racial peculiarities and prejudices.<sup>12</sup> From 1900 to 1947, the CHT was governed as the ‘Backward Tracts’ and ‘Excluded Area.’

After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the CHT district became part of the then East Pakistan. The Pakistan Government abolished the tribal area status of the CHT by a constitutional amendment. Article 223 of the Constitution of Pakistan in 1964 codified this abolition of tribal status for the CHT. However, empowered by the regulation 1 of 1900 the deputy commissioner (DC) continued to be head of the administration in the district. As the highest decision-making authority, with huge discretionary power, the DC would play a key role in all matters relating to the CHT. This was the only district in the then East Pakistan having no Municipality. It was only in 1960 that a District Council was set up on the basis of the Basic Democracy Order of 1959. The District Council was composed of 22 members (10 from public officials and 12 from the general public) with the Deputy Commissioner as the chairman. The objective of the Council was to coordinate the work of the various government departments, with emphasis on culture and educational grants for students. Besides, the post of Circle Officer was introduced in the Hill Tracts in 1962; a similar post had long existed in the rest of the province since 1919. The main responsibility of the circle officers (Development) was to implement development works with the help of a Union Council Chairman. The tasks of the circle officer would be supervised by a sub-divisional officer. In 1965, a Town Committee was established in Rangamati. The town committee consisted of a Chairman and six members, all of whom were elected.<sup>13</sup>

Although the administrative structures created by the British colonial government and the Pakistani authority created high hopes, they eventually failed to meet the core demand of the local people for regional autonomy. The construction of Kaptai Dam, which was commissioned in 1962, has brought further irreparable havoc in the socio-economic and cultural life of the tribes. For many tribal people, the Kaptai Lake has snatched away the happiness of tribal life.<sup>14</sup> In order to mitigate the plight of the tribal people, the Pakistan

---

12 Muhammad Ishaq (ed.) *Bangladesh District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*. (Dacca: Bangladesh Government Press, 1971), pp. 255-256

13 *Ibid*, pp. iv-vi

14 Harikishore Chakma, Tapash Chakma, Preyasi Dewan and Mahfuz Ullah, *Bara Parang* (The Great Exodus: The Tale of the Development Refugees of the CHT) (Dhaka: Centre for Sustainable Development (CFSD), 1995), p. 41

Government established a (private) intermediate college and a girl school in Rangamati in 1965. This was the first college and the first girl school in the region. At that time, according to CHT district Gazetteer, there were only about five hundred persons (teachers 180, health workers 87 other technical jobs 27, administrative clerical and office groups 122, maharis) engaged in government services including teachers, technicians and clerk, peon and guards etc in the district.

The communication in the district was extremely difficult and inadequate. There was no direct road connection between the district headquarters and the sub-divisional headquarters of Ramgar and Bandarban. There was only one metal road from Kaptai to Chittagong. The literacy rate in the Chittagong Hill Tracts district was the lowest in the country. But there were three Circle Chiefs, locally known as Rajas, whose social and political status was considerable in the area.<sup>15</sup> During the Pakistan period, the circle chiefs would participate in the national and provincial elections. M. N. Larma was an exception. He did not come from the tribal royal families, but had the credit of winning the parliamentary election in 1970 from the North CHT constituency.<sup>16</sup>

Since the formation of a separate hill district in the Chittagong Hill Tracts by the British colonial government in 1860, the administrative structure of the CHT region has evolved gradually. After the partition of the Indian sub-continent, the CHT lost its tribal status, and the tribal people living in the CHT remained under-represented in various public jobs. Despite various initiatives taken by the successive governments, the roads and communication infrastructure in the CHT remained very poor, and the overall socio-economic status of the local hill people were negligible. How have the successive political regimes in independent Bangladesh addressed the development needs of the CHT people? The remaining of the paper tackles this question.

#### **Peace-building initiatives through creating institutions**

I argue that successive governments in Bangladesh have formed various institutions to establish peace and stability in the CHT region. Using the 1997 CHT Peace Accord as the cutting point, these institutions can be divided into two categories: pre-Accord institutions and post-Accord institutions. Table 1 provides a list of these institutions.

---

15 Muhammad Ishaq, *Op. Cit.*, p. v

16 Raja Tridiv Roy, *he Departed Melody*, (Karachi: PPA Publication, 2003), pp. 201-04

Table 1: Pre-, and Post-Accord Institutions in the CHT

<b>Pre-Accord Institutions</b>	<b>Post-Accord Institutions</b>
Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB)	Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC)
Tribal Cultural Institutes in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari	Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA)
New Administrative Districts – Bandarban, Khagrachari, and Rangamati	Land Dispute Resolution Commission
Local Government Councils in the Hill Districts	

### **The Pre-Accord Institutions**

#### ***Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board***

Some tribal-friendly steps were taken by the Sheikh Mujib regime (1972-75). Early in 1973 Mujib decided to set up a separate board for the development of CHT. But he could not do it during his lifespan. After the brutal assassination of Sheikh Mujib along with most of his family members in a military coup in August 1975, Bangladesh fell under military rule for about 15 years. After assuming power, General Zia made several changes to the domestic and external policies of Bangladesh. For instance, in the domestic arena, he replaced Sheikh Mujib's policy of secularism with an overt state policy of Islamization. In the external affairs, he prioritized reaching out to China, the Arab World, and the United States, reversing Mujib's policy of aligning with the Indo-Soviet axis. On the question of the CHT, Zia took a host of policies with civilian and military components. Despite his manifold initiatives, the political situation in the CHT rapidly deteriorated quite sharply.

Among the various initiatives taken by the Zia regime, the formation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) deserves special attention. With an aim of promoting peace in the CHT area, the CHTDB was set up in Rangamati under a Presidential Ordinance called 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board Ordinance' (No. LXXV11 of 1976) on 14 January 1976.<sup>17</sup> Since inception it has maintained a unique local government structure which exclusively designed for the CHT.

---

<sup>17</sup> www.chtdb.gov.bd

The CHTDB consists of six members including a chairman and a vice-chairman. The Commissioner of the Chittagong Division was originally made chairman of the Board, with the deputy commissioner of the undivided Chittagong Hill Tracts district acting as the vice-Chairman. After the assassination of Zia in May 1981 and the promulgation of martial law by General Hussein Mohammad Ershad in March 1982, the organizational structure of the CHTDB was changed. In the changed structure, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Chittagong Division Army took over as the Chairman of the Board.<sup>18</sup> For quite a long time the GOC would chair the CHTDB and this tradition returned after the imposition of emergency in the country in January 2007.

Since then the deputy commissioners (district administrative chief) of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari have been acting as ex-officio members of the CHTDB. When the Awami League came to power in 1996, it appointed a tribal MP as the chairman of the CHTDB, with its bureaucratic structure remaining unchanged. Since 1992, the Board has been placed under the Ministry of Special affairs, headed by the Prime Minister. After the signing of CHT Peace accord in 1997, the CHTDB was placed under Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts (MoCHTA). There is a consultative committee comprised of twenty two local hill people representatives and thirty five delegates from local state institutions and prominent persons. The goal of the consultative committee is to advise and support the implementation of development projects and services initiated by the CHTDB.

It is important to note here that it is the CHTDB which has first introduced a small honorarium for the tribal Chiefs and monthly salary to headmen. Since its foundation, the CHTDB has appeared as a competent institution and a role model in the development history of the CHT. It has played a very effective role in implementing thousands of development projects. Today the successes of CHTDB can be seen in CHT's transformation from a primitive and isolated region to a well-communicated and socio- economically advanced region. The CHTDB has contributed to improving farming technology, road network, enhanced education, health and sanitation – all of which have boosted up the

---

<sup>18</sup> Amana Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts* (Dhaka: University Press Ltd, 2nd edition, 2002), p. 123

growth of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>19</sup> It has also built many roads, schools, hostels, rest houses, bridges, culverts, temples, mosques in CHT area.

Since its establishment in 1976, the CHTDB has rapidly developed its institutional capacity and showed its skill in implementing projects very successfully. Among its various development schemes, the Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP) deserves special attention. Created in the 1980s, the ICDP is a joint initiative of the CHTDB and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). As part of its development schemes, the ICDP has established four tribal residential schools in the CHT region – one in Rangamati and the rest in Bandarban. Among the four schools, one is exclusively designed for the Mro and Khumi tribal students in Bandarban. The government hoped that the rapid development of the area would bring economic benefits to the people and thus reduce the gap between the hill people and Bengalis. Besides, CHTDB embarked on an ambitious scheme to develop the area rapidly. Schools, colleges, roads, electricity, hospital, cottage industries and co-operatives – all bear testimony to the government's economic drive to develop and modernize the area. The annual report of CHTDB of 2011 reveals that up to the year 2010 from 1976 it has implemented around 525 projects. It also shows that up to 2011, around 1,00,121 children got pre-schooling facilities under their ICDP project.<sup>20</sup>

These massive development works initiated by the CHTDB were not free from complains, During the Zia regime PCJSS became suspicious about the CHTDB's role. They considered the roads (Kharachar to Panchari, Dighinala to Chotomerung, Dighinala to Babuchara and Dighinala to Marishya.) have been strategically built for easy movement of security forces, and the so called cooperative farming or 'model village' project as a tactic for bringing the tribal people together into concentration camps and thus facilitating the deprivation of the hill people of their villages and farm lands. More than 87 percent of the tribal people believed that projects would not change their lot but rather facilitate the influx of outsiders.<sup>21</sup> During those days of mistrust and counter

---

19 The Integrated Community Development Project For Chittagong Hill Tracts Area--ICDP (Rangamati: CHTDB, 2010), p.10

20 *Barshik Unnayan Protibedon, 2010-2011* (Annual Progress Report for the Year 2010-2011) (Rangamati: CHTDB, June 2012), pp. 25-30

21 B. P. Barua, *Ethnicity and National Integration in Bangladesh: A Study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publication Pvt. Ltd., 2001), p. 114

insurgency it was natural from the side of tribal people to misunderstand the CHTDB's development initiatives control by military official. But as far days as went on the attitude started to change and tribal people took part in CHTDB's development works. Among the ICDP project officials around 95 percent were recruited from tribal communities. Up to 2011, ICDP appointed 3500 Para workers, who are mainly from tribal women. In infrastructure sector it brought surprising and tremendous successes.

### ***Tribal Cultural Institutes***

There are eleven tribes living in Chittagong Hill Tracts. They have separate own language, culture and heritages. A core demand of the tribal communities in the CHT is to promote, preserve and develop the tribal languages, culture and heritage. In response the demands of the tribal people, in 1978 Zia established the Tribal Cultural Institute in Rangamati and placed it under the Ministry of Education (culture and sports). Establishing the TCI, President Zia hoped that he could attract the mind of the educated tribal elite living in urban areas. Initially, the TCI would have administered as a project of the CHTDB until it was taken over by the Ministry of Sports and Culture in July 1981. During Ershad's tenure, in June 1985 a regional office was established in Bandarban to promote the cultural diversity of the small ethnic communities. Ershad also established a Tribal cultural institute in Bandarban in July 1988, which would operate under the Ministry of Education. The control of TCI in Rangamati was transferred to the Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC) on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1993, while the control of TCI in Bandarban was handed over to the Bandarban Hill District Council on 21 November 1993. These changes came into effect after enacting the Bandarban Hill District Local Government Council Act, 1989 [Section 21, 1989 clause 23(kha)].<sup>22</sup> The creation of TCIs in Rangamati and Bandarban hill districts in 1978 and 1988 were significant development in recognizing the cultural rights of the hill people. However, it was not until 2001, when the third TCI was established in Khagrachari.

In 2010 the tribal cultural institutes were renamed to Kudra Nri-Goshthir Sangskritik Pratisthan after Bangladesh Parliament passed the Khudra Nri-Goshthir Sangskritik Pratisthan Aine, 2010'' (Act of 23 of 2010). Apparently the goal of such renaming was to accord a new identity "khudra nri gosthi" (in

---

22 Usha hla Roaza, Rangamati Hill District Council in Brief (Rangamati: RHDC, 2005).

English small ethnic groups) to the hill people. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the effect of the cultural institutes and their renaming. As Khaled Belal writes, such institutes were able to open a new chapter in the cultural history of the CHT:

Obviously the motive behind initiating such a revolutionary task was to boost grandeur of tribal culture as an integral component of national culture. In pursuance of that conceived policy, the tribal Cultural Institute embarked on a massive test of training and reformation and has so far achieved great success especially in fields of songs, dances, painting etc. In fact, a total regeneration has taken place in the culture of vocal and instrumental music, dance and dramatics. Interested tribal boys and girls coming from various communities are imparted training under the auspices of the cultural Institute.<sup>23</sup>

A brief analysis of the TCIs' achievements would provide credence to Khaled Belal's remarks. The TCIs have accomplished several tasks. They have conducted studies on the customs and practices of the tribal people and arrange tribal language course for officials of the government and autonomous bodies posted in the tribal areas of the CHT. The institutes have also published books, journals, and periodicals focusing on the culture and heritage of hill people. In addition, they also organize seminars, cultural festivals, literary and music competitions, and art exhibitions. The write-ups in the TCI journals such as the *Upjatiya Gabeshana Patrika*, and the *Girinirzhar* are worth mentionable. It is well evident that since the 1980s, the TCIs have turned into a centre for young tribal writers and researchers. The emergence of a new generation of tribal researchers including Ashok Kumar Dewan, Sugata Chakma and Surendralal Tripura, and Probanshu Tripura is worth noting here.

The three cultural institutes in the CHT region have been working to enhance the tribal literature, culture and heritage. It is in this backdrop, the Khagrachari Khudra Nri-gosthir Sangskritik Institute has recently published 9 books and trained 230 artists in dance and music under a project on promotion, preservation and documentation of the culture of ethnic minorities of Khagrachari district.<sup>24</sup> The Rangamati cultural institute has also taken up a new initiative by opening a tribal museum. The museum has a modest collection of valuable materials showcasing the rich and diverse culture and heritage of the

---

23 Khaled Belal (ed.), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Falconry in the Hills* (Chittagong: Published by the author, 1992), p. 53

24 Khagrachari Hill District Council, *Mahajot Sarkerer Unnayan o Safallyer 4 bashar*, (4 years of Development and success of Grand Alliance Govt.) (Khagrachari: KHDC, 2013) p. 8

ethnic communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The TCIs have also played an instrumental role in organizing festivals such as the Adivasi Mela and the Boishabi. The Adivasi Mela features indigenous cultures whereas the Boishabi represents the celebration of the New Year.

***Splitting Chittagong Hill Tracts District into Three New Districts***

The splitting of the Chittagong Hill Tracts district into three administrative districts was another important administrative reform carried out by the Zia and Ershad regimes. During Zia's tenure, the Bandarban subdivision was promoted to district as per a government circular on 18 April 1981. Two years later another subdivision named Khagrachari, located in the northern part of CHT was separated from Chittagong Hill Tracts district to form a new district called Khagrachari Hill District in October 1983. During the same time, the former Rangamati Sadar was turned into Rangamati Hill District.<sup>25</sup> As the analysis in this paper suggest, the splitting of the CHT district into three independent administrative districts represent a landmark development. This is due to the fact that since then, all peace building efforts would center on the newly created districts. Through this administrative reform, government services would be decentralized with a view to reaching out closer to the people. In addition, the new districts would create many employment opportunities, albeit in lower ranks, for the local tribes.

***Creation of three Hill District Local Government Councils***

The introduction of local government structures also contributed to the political emancipation of the tribal people in the CHT. It is in this context in 1989 three Hill District Local Government Councils (LGCs) were established in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari. General Ershad thought that the LGCs would not only earn the trust of the hill people, they would offer an alternative to the longstanding demands for autonomy in the insurgency-prone hill tracts. Although the LGCs created much hopes among the local communities, for various reasons they could not function properly. The non-cooperation from the PCJSS leaders, anti-autocratic movement against Ershad regime and resignation of the newly elected Chairman of Rangamati HDC are notable among others reasons. However, in the long run, these institutions have appeared as the most

---

<sup>25</sup> Ganendu Bikash Chakma, *Aitihāsik Prekḥapate Parbattya Sthanya Sarkar Parishad* [Hill Local Government Council In the Historical Perspective] (Rangamati: Sthanya Sarkar Parishad, 1993), p. 64

effective institutions ever created by the Bangladesh Government for the welfare of the hill people. In retrospect, the LGCs have acted as the stepping-stones for the post-Accord institutional rearrangements in the CHT. In fact, since the signing of the 1997 Peace Accord, most of the development works have been implemented through these institutions in CHT.

The local government system in the CHT needs further analysis. This is due to the fact that it offers a form of local self-government system for the ethnic communities.

### **Performance of the Pre-Accord Institutions**

After General Zia's assassination in May 1981, Vice President Justice Abdus Sattar took over the power. During the short tenure of President Sattar, there was no remarkable progress toward the resolution of the CHT issue. Then came the military regime of Hussein Muhammad Ershad who stayed in power from 1982 to 1990. During his tenure, Ershad took several new measures to address the CHT problem and to bring peace and stability in the area. In a meeting held with the tribal leaders in Chittagong on 19 September 1987, Ershad first declared the CHT problem as a national political crisis.<sup>26</sup> He thought that political dialogue rather than military campaigns would be the right path to dealing with the insurgency.

In an effort to reach out to the Shanti Bahini rebels, Ershad formed a liaison committee, headed by Upendralal Chakma, the then parliamentarian from the CHT constituency. The first dialogue between the PCJSS and the Ershad Government was held on 21 October 1985. Thus, the 6<sup>th</sup> round of dialogue was held between the two Parties. The next scheduled meeting did not take place, as Shelly claimed, due to the some unacceptable preconditions raised by the PCJSS to the Ershad government.<sup>27</sup> In fact, both parties were too rigid to move the dialogues continuing. Despite that, Ershad appeared to be more interested to solve the problem as soon as possible. As a manifestation of his intention in September 1987 a high-powered six-member National Committee was formed with retired Air Vice-Marshal A. K. Khandakar as its chair. A.K. Khandakar was then the planning minister of Ershad's cabinet. The committee was charged with identifying the problems of the CHT and proposing solutions.<sup>28</sup> The

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154

<sup>27</sup> Mizanur Rahman Shelly, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: The Untold Story* (Dhaka: Centre For Development Research, Bangladesh, 1992), p.138

<sup>28</sup> Derek Davies, "Four rays of hope", *FEER*, 23 March 1989, pp.20-22

committee held six meetings with representatives of PCJSS at Pujgang of Khagrachari. But the meetings could not yield any positive result because of rigid position of both parties once again. Later on, the Government embarked on a plan to find a permanent solution to the problem in consultation with the tribal leaders, elites and other respectable persons living in the country.<sup>29</sup> Four such consultation meetings were held from 1988 to 1989. The last dialogue in this kind was held on 15 February 1989. A renowned journalist and researcher Subir Bhaumik observed:

In January 1989 a meeting of fifty four tribal leaders, including the Chakma and Bohmong Chiefs, and ten non-tribal leaders from the CHT was held at Chittagong with major General Abdus Salam, presently, GOC, 24 Bangladesh infantry division, initiating the discussions. At the end of the meeting the leaders signed a joint communiqué supporting the nine-Point Government plan. The following month, four bills creating separate District Councils for Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban, with some seats reserved for tribals were placed before the Bangladesh National Assembly and adopted as law.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, the fourth dialogue produced some tangible progresses toward the evolution of local government system in the CHT. This was evident on 15 February 1989 when the Ershad government moved and discussed several bills such as the the Rangamati Hill Tracts Local Government Council Bill 1989, the Khagrachari Hill Tracts Local Government Council Bill 1989, the Bandarban Hill Tracts Local Government Council Bill 1989, and the Hill Districts (Repeal and Enforcement of Law and Special Provision) Bill 1989 were moved and discussed in Parliament. The last Bill was adopted on 26 February while the rest were passed on 28 February 1989.<sup>31</sup> The new LGC Acts of 1989 (Act No.19, 20, 21 of 1989) provided for general elections for the formation of Hill Tracts Local Government Councils. In accordance with the Acts, elections were held on 25 June 1989 to form the LGCs.

Obviously that was the beginning of a new era in the field of much cherished political emancipation of the tribal. Each of these Councils is headed by a chairman who has to be an indigenous person. One of the salient features of the HDCs is that two-third posts of members of local government councils were reserved for the tribal people with the rest for the Bengalis. Table 2 illustrates the composition of the three Hill District Councils.

---

<sup>29</sup> Khaled Belal (ed.), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts : Falconry in the Hills* (Chittagong: Published by the author, 1992), p.10

<sup>30</sup> Subir Bhaumik, *Op., Cit.*, p. 304

<sup>31</sup> Ganendu Bikash Chakma, *Op., Cit.*, p. 171

Table 2. Structure of the Hill District Council.

Position and Name of the representing tribes	Number of seats		
	Rangamati	Khagrachari	Bandarban
Chairman (always tribal)	1	1	1
Members			
Chakma	10	9	1
Marma	4	6	
Tanchangya	2		1
Tripura	1	6	--
Lushai	1	--	--
Pankho	1		
Kheyang	1	--	--
Marma & Khiyang			10
Murong			3
Tripura & Uchai			1
Bom, Panku & Lushai			1
Khumi			1
Chak			1
Total	21	22	20
Bengali	10	9	11
Grand Total	31	31	31

Source: B. P. Barua, *Ethnicity and National Integration in Bangladesh*, 2001, p. 72

Prominent Bangladeshi historian Syed Anwar Hussein summed up the importance of the newly created local government structures in the CHT in the following words:

With an aim to solve the CHT crisis politically the formation of Local Government Council at least theoretically is a meaningful commencement. Note that ... the institution has widened the path of representation for the local people. Yet there might have dispute regarding the process of making the council practically effective, but this is removable in light of necessity. The main goal of political solution which is to involve the local people in the national mainstream politics could be achieved only by based on this tiny but meaningful initiation not by destroying it.<sup>32</sup>

In its early stage, under the LGC Acts, The Ershad Government transferred three departments to the councils. These were the departments of health and family Planning, primary education, and agriculture extension department. Later, during the BNP regime (1991-1996), the administrative control of

32 Syed Anwar Hussein, "Parbotyo Chattagram: Samasya o Samadan" [Chittagong Hill Tracts: Problem and Solution] in *Ekata* 1 March 1991 quoted in G.B. Chakama, *Op., Cit.*, pp. 194-195

another six more departments was vested to the councils. They are Cooperative and Social Welfare, District Sports Office, Public health and Engineering, Social Welfare, Small and Cottage Industries, Tribal Cultural Institute, Live stock and Fisheries, Public Library and Shilpakala Academy. The scenario changed after the signing the 1997 Peace Accord. On the basis of the Accord, some major amendments to the aforementioned Hill District Acts were passed in 1998 to ensure greater degree of decentralization of powers targeting the tribal people's empowerment. The 1998 amendments renamed the local government councils to Hill District Council. As per three Hill District Council Acts of 1989 (as amended after the 1997 CHT accord) a total of 33 administrative departments are expected to be transferred from the Ministries to each of the three Hill District Councils. But till 2012 only 12 departments have been transferred from the central ministries in Dhaka to the Hill District Councils in the CHT.<sup>33</sup>

Since their inception, the Hill District Councils have been responsible for coordinating the works of various agencies including the Government of Bangladesh and various non-government organizations.

Each council implements various development projects and administers the different government and semi government departments transferred to the council to meet the need of time. After the peace accord government was to take various steps to strengthen the council. Now indeed all development activities related to the transferred departments are being administered through these councils. So, for fulfilling the long cherished goal of its people, these councils have now been regarded as the main focal point of administration as well as development activities of the respective districts. A report regarding HDC's performance reveals that:

The HDCs have successfully managed increasing activities and budget allocation for interventions on education, health, agriculture and women empowerment. Their capacities were enhanced with regards to planning and budgeting, tracking delivery and reporting with better transparency, fair recruitment and procurement processes. Such enhanced capacity will not only support the HDCs in better management of the subjects transferred to the HDC, but will make a stronger case for the transfer of the remaining subjects to the HDCs as per the CHT Peace Accord.<sup>34</sup>

---

33 PCJSS, Report on the Status of Implementation of the CHT Accord, Jan, 2013, p. 36 [Hereafter PCJSS Report]

34 Annual Report 2011, Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facilities (CHTDF)-UNDP, Bangladesh, p. 2

The major peacebuilding contribution of the HDCs is the creation of employment for the educated young from the tribal communities. Those who have been employed in various posts of the council or different departments appear to be happy with their present status and thus lack any incentive to take arms or support an insurgency. Thus a sizeable number of young and educated men and women have been making efforts heart and soul for having a settled life by managing a job rather than going to anti-government movement. Their thought is now centering on how to get a job with a government office or a non-government office. So it can be said that the government policy in diverting the mindset of the tribes is quite successful and it helped bringing peace in the region. Yet, these arrangements are not beyond limitations.

Some argued that the local govt. councils, like those in the plains today, and those all over the then East Pakistan province in the 1960s, are basically development bodies with little or no administrative (and legislative) powers. The creation of the modern district councils in the CHT can at best be considered as the granting of a system which the tribal people in the CHT lacked before. For the critics, the Hill District Councils do not offer an effective system of administrative devolution of power nor do they grant any test of autonomy for the hill people.<sup>35</sup> Such criticism derive from the observation that before the accord of 1997, there was a provision of transferring 22 departments to the local government council, but it was increased to 33 subjects/departments by the act of 9 of 1998 after peace accord.

In effect, the large majority of administrative items are still controlled by the central ministries in the capital city Dhaka, with the local hill district councils in the Chittagong Hill Tracts having little control over most of the administrative issues. In addition, the formation of local law enforcement force [police (local) under section 34 c] for the supervision of law and order situation in the district is yet to be fulfilled. On top of that, the provision relating to land administration and forest management of the hill districts are yet to be transferred. The list of non transferred departments is still long one.

#### **The Post-Accord Institutions**

As shown in Table 1, after the signing of the historic CHT Accord a few new institutions have been set up. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (RC), Ministry of CHT Affairs, and the CHT Land Dispute Commission are

---

35 Rajkumari Chandra Roy, *Op., Cit.*, p. 34

worth noting. Now let us discuss about RC. Before discussion of Regional Council and Ministry of CHT affairs it is relevant to give a brief background of how the concept of the institution and the much discussed CHT Peace come into being.

Following the National election of June 1996 the Awami League (AL) returned to power after 21 years with Sheik Hasina as the new premier. PM Sheik Hasina applied her political wisdom in reaching an immediate settlement on the CHT issue. Fortunately, she got the cooperation from her Indian counterpart I. K. Gujral in resolving the CHT dispute as well as the Ganges Water dispute. Coincidentally, the AL had a majority but not the two-thirds needed to make the constitutional amendment demanded by the PCJSS to guarantee the rights and identity of the tribal people. This congenial political atmosphere both at home and abroad encouraged the Awami League government to go ahead.

The signing of the historic Ganges Water Sharing Agreement with India in December 1996 is a real manifestation of Hasina's farsighted leadership. In order to resolve the CHT crisis, she formed an 11-members national committee headed by the Chief Whip in Parliament, A. H. Abdullah, in October 1996. The committee included the mayor of the Chittagong City Corporation, and MPs of both ruling and opposition parties. One needs to remember that Hasina's predecessor, Begum Khaleda Zia (1991-96), had also formed a national committee and arranged several peace talks with PCJSS, which resulted in a long ceasefire but did not produce any conclusive end to the insurgency.

As time progressed, the PCJSS rebels were weakened by fighting among themselves. The PCJSS leadership also failed to achieve any specific goal and secure any assurances from India for providing sanctuaries and other material help crucial for carrying out the struggle.<sup>36</sup> The Shanti Bahini rebels were also under Indian pressure to withdraw their bases from the Indian soil. All these factors – internal fighting among the Shanti Bahini and lack of support from India – contributed to encourage the PCJSS to think of a negotiated peace.<sup>37</sup>

Professor Rehman Sobhan, a renowned Bangladeshi scholar, rightly notes that:

Gujral's move to solve outstanding problems extended beyond the Ganges to seek a settlement to the lingering crisis over the CHT where insurgents from the Chakma Community, over the past 15 years, were being sheltered across the

---

<sup>36</sup> B. P. Barua, *Op., Cit.*, p. 129

<sup>37</sup> Amena Mohsin, *Op., Cit.*, p. 202

border by India ... The agreement between Hasina government and the Chakma insurgents was facilitated by Gujral's intervention and presumably some pressure on the insurgents, so that they agreed to lay down their arms and eventually returned to Bangladesh with their families.<sup>38</sup>

That is why, they (insurgents) were also in a positive mood to reach in quick solution relinquishing their previous stance. Considering all these perspectives the National Committee organized by AL, held at least 7 rounds of fresh dialogues with the PCJSS. With the progress of the dialogue, both sides reached a mutually acceptable position which led to the signing of an agreement known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord on 2 December 1997. As stated before, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council and the Ministry of CHT Affairs are two new administrative structures which came out as a direct result of the Accord. The formation of these two structures and their effects are discussed below.

***The CHT Regional Council:***

The introduction of CHTRC is a great achievement and also a matter of which our People's Republic is proud as being an institution striving for institutionalizing the democracy ever since her very birth. The formation of CHTRC as per the Accord, 1997 is a straight recognition of human rights of the indigenous peoples living in CHT and of course, also an encouraging indication to the rest of the ethnic indigenous peoples living in other parts of the country.

According to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act, 1998, an interim Regional Council was set up in 1999 consisting of 22 members including the Chairman. The newly formed RC began its operations in May 1999 with PCJSS leader Jyotirindra Bodhipriyo Larma, better known as Santu Larma, as its chair.<sup>39</sup> The Regional Council chairman enjoy the status of a state minister and had coordinating and supervisory authority over the three Hill District Councils, the district Police, the civil administration, and the CHT development Board. Undoubtedly it is a tribal dominated body as two-thirds RC members including the chair come from a tribal origin. The RC is to be indirectly elected by the members of the Hill District Councils for a period of five years.

In retrospect, Bangladesh has succeeded in bringing the insurgent group PCJSS into a peaceful and normal life by appointing the rebel leader Shantu Larma and

---

38 Rehman Sobhan, 'I. K. Gujral: A tribute from Bangladesh', *The Daily Star*, 13 Dec. 2012)

39 CHTRC's Souvenir *One Decade* (Rangamati: CHTRC, 2010), p. 16

his followers as regional council chair and members. As a direct effect of such administrative innovation, the PCJSS has abandoned underground politics and shown a sustained interest in practicing democratic politics. It is an epoch making event in the history of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Bangladesh too. A Change in life style of the PCJSS members is another remarkable side. Since the signing of the 1997 Peace Accord, the PCJSS leaders have not only worked with the CHT regional council but also got involved in legitimate business and voluntary activities. Thus it is a positive feature in peace building history through institutional approach.

***The Ministry of CHT Affairs (MoCHTA)***

Among the post-Accord institutions, the Ministry of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (MoCHTA) is the principal organization responsible for coordinating the governance and development affairs of the CHT region. As mentioned before, prior to the 1997 Peace Accord, the government of Bangladesh would administered the CHT region under a special affairs division of the office of the Prime Minister. This administrative mechanism would continue until 15 July 1998 when the MoCHTA was established as a separate ministry.<sup>40</sup> In order to attain legitimacy and legality the Ministry Rules of Business (1996) covering the aforementioned special affairs division was amended by a Cabinet Division Notification of the same year. As per the provisions of the Peace Accord the MoCHTA would be led by a tribal minister. An advisory committee was formed at that time. In principle it was supposed to play a pivotal role and its impact and influence on all matters relating to the CHT was also to be crucial. By establishing this ministry the central government planned to address the coordination problem with regard to the CHT affairs by ensuring direct participation of the tribal people.

The power and authority of the MoCHTA includes the following: I) the residual jurisdiction of the Government to legislate on CHT matters; ii) Supervisory Revisional authority over the functions of the Hill District Councils, the district administration headed by the Deputy Commissioners, and the Regional Councils, and iii) allocation of funds for the Hill District Councils and the Regional Council. The Ministry is additionally entrusted to provide a crosscutting function of keeping relation with other ministries, providing a

---

<sup>40</sup> *Barshik Protibedon 2011-2012* [Annual Report] Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs].

linking mechanism to ensure efficient and effective socio-economic promotion of the region. To run the ministry effectively there is a good number of officials of different tiers. For instance, there is a post of Secretary, 2 joint Secretaries, 6 Deputy Secretaries, 6 senior Assistant Secretaries, 1 senior assistant head, 1 personal secretary to the Secretary, 1 personal secretary to the Minister/ State Minister along with 21 posts of first class rank, 14 posts of 2<sup>nd</sup> class rank, and 28 posts of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class employees.<sup>41</sup>

#### **Performance of the Post-Accord Institutions**

The post-Accord institutions have faced numerous challenges which can be divided into five categories: i) legal and procedural complications; ii) bureaucratic non-cooperation; iii) anti-accord activities; iv) lack of elected representatives in the institutions; and v) lack of cooperation and coordination among the institutions.

Lack of political goodwill in the present ruling party (AL) is one of the major impediments to peacebuilding in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is ironic that violating the provision of Accord, present government has appointed time and again a state -minister instead of a full cabinet minister for the MoCHTA. There has been no full minister of CHT Affairs from 2001. Furthermore, it is quite disappointing that among the 23 subjects which have been transferred to the Hill District Councils, only three departments (BADC, Health Engineering and Child home) have been transferred during the Awami League's two regimes (1996-2001 and 2009-2013). The advisory committee has not been reconstituted although in effect it does not possess any executive power. It is now remains virtually inactive.

The validity of the important provisions of the Accord relating to CHTRC Act and HDCs Acts has been thrown into uncertainty due to the verdict of the High Court on the two related cases filed on 13 April 2010 which was stayed by the Appellate Division of Supreme Court.<sup>42</sup> Besides, the rules of business of the CHT Regional Council has not been formulated yet. The absence of rules of business has caused friction between the CHT's administrative and governmental spheres. Even there is no obvious plan for making the RC fully functional by building office infrastructures and allocating sufficient funds for the council. As a result RC is still unable to live up to the expectations of the

---

41 MoCHTA Annual Report, 2011-2012.

42 PCJSS Report, p. 10

peace process. The RC's power to supervise and coordinate the functions of HDCs has not been materialized. Though several amendment proposals were accepted in an inter-ministerial meeting held on 30 July 2012, the CHT Land Commission Amendment Bill is yet to be placed to the Jatiya Sangsad for unknown reasons. This has created frustrations among the indigenous people of the CHT.

Further, there is lack of clarification of mandates, responsibilities and authorities of the Ministry of CHTs Affairs vis-à-vis other CHTs institutions. There are no clear operational rules and administrative frameworks for most of the CHTs institutions. For example, the supplementary rules and regulations as well as the administrative orders essential to make the government institutions such as the Regional Council operational, are yet to be either elaborated or approved by the Government. As a consequence, the mandates and authorities of the respective CHT institutions tend to overlap considerably. This in turn leads to inter-institutional confusion and differences which greatly undermine the delivery of relevant services to the people. However it is unrealistic to think that there would be peace in the hills without discernible power devolution to the new CHT institutions.

Lack of coordination and cooperation among the CHT institutions is a vital issue. There is also lack of coordination between the MoCHTA and other affiliated institutions such as CHT Regional Councils (CHTRC) and Hill District Councils (HDC). This seriously undermines the functioning of the respective institutions. The CHTRC cannot function properly because of lack of support from the Ministry of CHT Affairs. The Ministry is more in contact with the deputy Commissioners than with the RC Chair about the CHT governance, which rather humiliated the RC.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the three HDCs and Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) which are directly under the Ministry of CHT Affairs often ignore the supervisory and coordinating authority of CHTRC. This tends to create frustrations among the office bearers and limit their effectiveness in facilitating and supporting development. Consequently, the CHTRC which was established to resolve the problems of the indigenous peoples has become useless.<sup>44</sup>

---

43 Mohammad Rashiduzzaman and Mahfuzul Hoque Chowdhury, *Building Peace in Bangladesh, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT): An Assessment of the 1997 Peace Accord*, Report for the USIOP Project (New Jersey, Glassboro, 2008) [hereafter USIOP Report], p. 43

44 Visit: [www.aitpn.org/IRQ/voll-iii/issue\\_4/story/o7.html](http://www.aitpn.org/IRQ/voll-iii/issue_4/story/o7.html)

Bureaucratic procrastination is nothing new in the governance system. But in the case of implementing the peace accord it seems to be unbearable. As it was noticeable later, visible assignment of authorities to some tribal dominated organizations (MoCHTA/CHTRC/HDC) caused anxiety among the local bureaucracy accustomed to pride, power, privileges and an unmistakable bearing of public importance.<sup>45</sup> In many ways, the Accord's institutional prospects became a victim of such unanticipated consequences right from its inauguration.

The perceptible bureaucratic non-cooperation surfaced as the unresolved obstacles. The state minister status of RC Chairman appeared to the MoCHTA and the HDCs as a matter of power struggle. The creation of such high ranking post in local governance system came as an outrage to Bangladeshi civil servants who usually enjoyed the colonial style order of precedence among the local officials and other district-level dignitaries. They seemed uncomfortable with the special privilege of Shantu Larma, who was placed at the highest rank and status over all the Bangladeshi Government officers posted in the CHT and neighboring districts.<sup>46</sup> Shantu Larma also spoke about this in the same tone:

It is rather paradoxical to note that the inherent colonial stand and outlook of our civic polity aptly manifest its chauvinistic conservatism that unmistakably gets spelled in the general attitude, formulation of national policies and their applications to CHT. Consequently, the diverse feature of our nationhood abjectly suffers at every step. But apparently, our civic polity is often seen not being enough interested in addressing the unwelcome consequences arising out of such non-compatibility.<sup>47</sup>

But the government officials should not forget that the special status of the CHT regional council chair is an arrangement that was designed to bring political stability in the insurgency-prone CHT. The peace accord was undoubtedly a mutual understanding between the Bangladesh Government representatives and the tribal rebel group PCJSS. It ended the decade-long conflict in the CHT. But opposition to the Accord came from many sides. The then opposition party-BNP, Ershad's Jatiya Party, the Bengali community known as 'Bengali Settlers' living CHT and a faction of tribal young group known as the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) are worth mentionable among them. After assuming power in 2001 Begum Khaleda Zia did not deal the peace accord issue

---

45 USIOP Report, p. 33

46 *Ibid*

47 CHTRC, *One Decade*, see, forward part.

cordially. The appointment of Moni Swapan Dewan, MP from Rangamati as deputy minister for the MoCHTA, and Wadud Bhuinya, MP from Khagrachari as CHT Development Board's chairman are the clear manifestation of her anti-accord stance. It is fortunate that she did not scrap the Accord.

During the whole BNP rule Mr. Dewan could not work properly due to non-cooperation from the government. The emergence of UPDF's as an anti accord party just after signing the accord is concerning enough in this case. The hostile position of the UPDF has turned the post accord intra-tribal harmony into a complex situation. Terming the Accord as a 'compromise and sell out' they scornfully rejected accord-oriented institutions in general and the CHT Regional Council in particular. According to the UPDF leaders, the RC is a futile body without any real governance authority. So almost routinely, the UPDF castigated the new CHT institutions from the commencement of the peace process.<sup>48</sup> This has certainly put more barriers to institutionalizing the peace building process.

Apart from the above-mentioned challenges, the hostile activities of the Bengali Settlers appeared as a matter of serious concern. It would be relevant to mention here that during the 1970s and 1980s when the tribal insurgency in the CHT was at its peak, the military governments of General Zia, and his successor General Ershad took some deliberate steps to change the demographic balance in the CHT. These steps included, among others, a state-sponsored resettlement program for thousands of landless Bengali families from the plain districts. According to Ziauddin Chowdhury, the then deputy commissioner of Chittagong (1978-81), 'the programme was politically motivated and Major General Manjur, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Chittagong and commander of counter insurgency campaign, played a key role in planning and implementing the Bengali Settlement programme.'<sup>49</sup>

In mid-1979 General Zia initiated this scheme in consultation with some of his top officials. According to Anti-Slavery Society, in May 1980 Zia's government confirmed its policy towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts and started to encourage settlers to move there. A secret circular from the commissioner of the Chittagong division to government officials in other districts stated that it was

---

48 USIOP Report

49 Ziauddin Chowdhury, 'Broken Promises' in *Forum* 4 April 2010.

“the desire of the government that the concerned deputy commissioners will give top priority to this work and make the programme a success.”<sup>50</sup>

Under this programme the government brought new settlers in three phases. About 80,000 families with a population of 400,000 were brought to CHT in several phases.<sup>51</sup> As a result, the ratio of Bengali settlers to tribes in CHT rose to 27.05%; whereas in 1947 the ratio had been 2.05%.<sup>52</sup> Since then the newly settled Bengali people appeared to be a major barrier to the peace building process. On the Accord’s ninth anniversary, nearly 5000 Bengali from different parts of CHT assembled in Rangamati and demanded that the 1997 Accord be scrapped. In the post-accord CHT, whenever the Government proceeded to implement any important provision of the agreement, the newly settled Bengali community vehemently opposed it. They would do so by organizing tougher and destructive political programs. This never ending debate over the accord is not a good symptom of institution building and successful peace process. Given the fact that both the pro-accord and the anti-accord parties have adopted violent tactics, the accord may unravel altogether. The hostility of the anti-Accord UPDF and the Bengali settlers have seriously weakened the Government’s willingness to implement the CHT peace accord.

Lastly, as stated before, the Hill Tracts Local Government Council Acts of 1989 provide for an elected body to administer the council consisting of one chairman (Tribal) and thirty others members of which two-thirds are tribal and one-third is non-tribal. Although the first election of the local government system in the CHT districts were held in 1989, since then there have been no such elections to the Hill District Councils or the Regional Councils. This surely indicates the 1997 Accord’s poor institutionalization and weak governance capacity. Instead of holding general elections, successive governments have preferred to form nominated body with unelected officials. This practice in the long run will create bad impression to common people about government’s sincerity. Moreover, while the PCJSS hoped to demonstrate the RC as its major achievement, the continuation of interim nature has created disappointment among the tribal communities and their leaders.

---

50 Anti-Slavery Society, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Indigenous Peoples and Development Series, Report No.2, (London, 1984), p.24

51 S. S. Chakma, *The Untold Story*, p. 14

52 Mizanur Rahman Shelly (ed.), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: The Untold Story*, ( Dhaka: CDRB, 1992), p.13

**Concluding Remarks**

This paper shows that since 1972, successive governments in independent Bangladesh have formed various institutions to address the demands of the tribal communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. There are significant differences between the institutions created both before and after the 1997 Peace Accord. The pre-Accord institutions went through a process of recognizing the cultural and development needs of the tribal communities whereas the post-Accord institutions emphasized devolution of power among the local government organizations created for the CHT region. Since the tribal communities in the CHT region have long been involved in a protracted insurgency, with the PCJSS providing a political platform and the Shanti Bahini leading the armed rebellion, both the pre-, and post-Accord institutions made significant contributions toward the process of peacebuilding in the CHT region. It is in this context, one has to evaluate the long-term contributions of the institutions such as the CHT Development Board, the Tribal Cultural Institutes, which were later renamed to the Kudra Nri-Goshthir Sangskritik Pratisthan, the splitting of the CHT District into three administrative districts, and the evolution of the CHT District Councils.

The CHTDB, TCI and the HDCs have been so far able to prove their capacity, efficiency and necessity by focusing on some key sectors such as education, roads and communication infrastructure, women's empowerment, and health care services etc. These institutions transformed the CHT from an inaccessible to accessible area, with increasing improvement in literacy, enhanced communication, and better livelihood opportunities for the tribal communities. The mass tribal people including those who were previously involved in armed rebellion have benefited from these institutions, and are thus living peacefully. All employees including primary school teachers, development workers appointed by these organizations are totally loyal to their institutions. Thus thousands of families involved in directly or indirectly with any of these institutions will never go against his service provider. Briefly speaking, though the CHT predicament is too complex and difficult to meet all expectations; the institutional initiatives adopted by Bangladesh have proved to be quite effective in building peace in the CHT.