



Bangladesh's Forgotten Crisis: Land, Ethnicity, and Violence in Chittagong Hill Tracts

Iftekharul Bashar

The issue surrounding the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh is more often than not, being sidelined by the more pressing issues of terrorism which affects South Asia. It is important to note that a security vacuum in the CHT may also have destabilizing implications, not just for Bangladesh, but for the region as well.



Map of Bangladesh showing the general location of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Image Credit: Bangladesh Internet Exchange http://www.bdix.net/sdnbd.org/world_env_day/2001/sdnpweb/sdi/international_day/Indigenous-people/chittagong-hill-tracts.htm

Thirteen years after the “Chittagong Hill Tract Peace Accord of 1997” the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region in south-eastern Bangladesh continues to be a simmering conflict zone. The peace accord was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Shanghatti Samiti (PCJSS). A major achievement of the accord was the quick restoration of peace after nearly two dec-

ades of insurgency in the area. It is a fact that some vital provisions of the accord remain unimplemented and this leads to continuous unrest and instability. In recent months, there has been a growing trend of violence in the remote areas of the CHT which involve various groups active in the area. The inter-group conflicts have so far claimed more than 700 lives since the signing of the peace accord.

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File Photograph of the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord of 1997. Photo Credit: Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples www.galdu.org

Actors, Issues and Complexities

The CHT that Bangladesh inherited, along with its historically disgruntled demography, is a hilly and forested region. It was later divided into three hill districts—Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari. The region occupies a physical area of 5,093 square miles, constituting 10 percent of the total land area of Bangladesh. The region is known to have been used by organized crime outfits as a critical eastern route for the transit of narcotics produced in Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle. The drugs were bound for India, Sri Lanka, United States, Canada, and Western Europe. Other criminal networks in various parts of Bangladesh also depend on this route for their supply of small arms.

The peace accord signed between the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS has its limitations and is met with skepticism from the population. As per the CHT accord, the Bangladeshi government's policy is for a gradual withdrawal of military troops. But there are concerns that this has increased the risk of a renewed matrix between organized crime and violence in the CHT which has a porous and vital terrain that connects South Asia to Southeast Asia. Bangladesh is now at a critical juncture where it will have to strike a delicate balance between conflict management and security.

The subject of dispute in the CHT, which has often led to violent conflict, has been the ownership of land. The conflict is between the indigenous people and the Bengali settlers (1977-1997). The peace accord has vital provisions on the settlement of land disputes in the region. It is a fact that the progress of implementation in this regard is very slow and this has fueled discontent among the local population. There are armed, indigenous, renegades who oppose the accord and are active in criminal activities. The slow implementation of the accord has resulted in renewed nationalist passions and separatist tendencies among the Paharis or indigenous hill people. There are reports of periodic tensions which have often led to violent conflicts between the Bengalis and the Paharis. At present, the greatest challenge to peace in the CHT is the inter-group conflict between the rival groups, the Parbatya Chhatagram Jana Shanghatti Samiti (PCJSS) and the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF).

The current security scenario has become more complex due to multiple factors ranging from ethnic tension over land to a creeping security vacuum. There are still a lot of grievances and discontentment. In fact, such sentiments continues to grow across a large segment of the indigenous community who supported, sympathized or took an active part in the insurgency. A sporadic eruption of violence in this strategically vital region might be the symptom of a deep rooted conflict that has not yet been resolved— at least in the minds of the people who have been suffering from land alienation for a long time, even before Bangladesh came into being.

Historical Background

As early as 1868, British colonialists have started the process of land alienation by taking over the ownership of land rights in the CHT with the creation of Reserve Forests. During the Pakistan era, in 1962, a hydro-electric power plant project undertaken by the state permanently displaced 100,000 indigenous people without any compensation. Some of those people have moved to Myanmar and India.

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When Bangladesh gained its independence in 1971, a group of indigenous people formally placed demands for autonomy to maintain their cultural and linguistic identity. However, the political leadership at that time refused to accede to their demands as they perceived it as a secessionist move. In response, in 1972 the Parbatya Chhatagram Jana Shanghatti Samiti (PCJSS) was established. Its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini (SB) was set up in early 1973.

Between 1975 and 1977 the SB developed its military organization and weaponry. It did not face much difficulty recruiting members from the youth segment of the population who resented the authority of Dhaka. The SB began its operations allegedly from bases in Tripura in India where they have strong ethnic connections. In 1977, the SB ambushed a Bangladesh military convoy. In response, the Bangladesh Army built up its defense systems in the area. Along with military actions the government also undertook economic measures to pacify the indigenous people. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) was set up. However, the approach did not work as it failed to build trust within the community.

Within the first decade of its independence, Bangladesh started a massive scale demographic engineering and resettled 200,000 to 450,000 lowland Bengalis in the hills of CHT. The strategy of the regime was to increase the number of Bengalis in the CHT to dilute the ethnic composition of the region at the expense of the Paharis.

As a result, around 100,000 people from the CHT region were forcibly evicted from their homes and lands, around 55,000 of whom have fled across the border to the Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram as refugees. By 1991, the Bengalis constituted about 48.5 percent of the total population of the CHT while in 1974 (i.e. pre-settlement period) they were only about 11.6 percent. The settlers were given "state owned" land which were actually community lands being used then by the indigenous people living there.



2010 file Photograph of a demonstration by Paharis against killings by Bengali settlers. Photo Credit: Brian Palmer/The Spitoon

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The insurgency was partly a violent response to the state's repressive policies and partly as an effort to pursue a secessionist movement based on the Jumma identity. Jumma identity was innovated to highlight the cultural, linguistic and religious distinctiveness of the indigenous people of CHT from the Bengalis. It was claimed that the thirteen different ethnic communities in the CHT constitute the Jumma nation. Since the 1980s, the PCJSS started to promote this new identity with a view to give a sense of unity to the Paharis. But the concept of Jumma identity has its limitations since the population this identity represents is not homogenous in terms of ethnicity, language, culture and religion. PCJSS' military wing Shanti Bahini basically led the insurgency that has claimed about 20,000 lives so far. At the peak of the insurgency, the Bangladesh government had to deploy as many as 40,000 security forces personnel to contain the activities of the insurgents.

Current and Emerging Security Scenario in the CHT

The developments in 2010 and in the first quarter of 2011 have been of particular concern. The year 2010 started with violence between the indigenous community and the majority Bengali speakers (the settlers) in the CHT region. The incident left thousands of ethnic

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minorities homeless as their houses were burnt down on 19-20 February 2010. In the attacks committed by members of the majority Bengali population, two persons, including one woman, were killed and more than 50 were injured. 357 houses were set on fire across 11 villages. Besides these attacks, in January and February 2011 at least 8 persons were killed in inter-group violence. There are many cases of abduction as a result of inter-group rivalry between PCJSS and UPDF. PCJSS claimed that 300 of their members have been abducted by UPDF. Meanwhile, the UPDF said that the PCJSS abducted more than a thousand of their members and that some were killed after abduction. The activities of criminal groups are also on the rise. There are a growing number of extortions and kidnappings by some of the renegades, and in many cases they remain unreported. This is becoming a challenge for peace and security in the CHT.

At the moment the peace accord remains, as is often described by some activists, as a mere agreement between the government and the PCJSS. The implementation of the accord has been treated as a matter of discretion by the four successive governments in power since 1997. Even though a number of laws were enacted with regards to the Regional Council and the Hill District Councils, other important clauses of the accord have not been given due legal status or recognition. This has already become a matter of concern for the Paharis.

In August 2009, the government began to disband major army camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to meet one of several unimplemented agreements of the 1997 CHT peace accord. But what would be its implications vis-à-vis security? For example, a segment of the insurgents in the CHT has not conceded to the accord, and continue to remain armed. What would happen if they launch major attacks? What would happen if insurgent groups of Northeast India and Myanmar try to exploit the possible security vacuum? Various insurgent elements in those countries would find it eas-

ier to seek sanctuary in Bangladesh's territory when they are under pressure in their own areas. What would be the overall impact of a security vacuum in a simmering conflict zone like CHT? Bangladesh has not yet been able to initiate effective countermeasures against all these vital issues and there is as yet no national consensus about what needs to be done to stabilize the region.

Prospects of Peace through a Development Approach

Surrounded by the Indian states of Tripura on the North and Mizoram on the East, by Myanmar on the South and East and the Chittagong district on the west, the CHT can be considered as a confluence of two regions- South Asia and Southeast Asia. Access to the Bay of Bengal through the Chittagong port and proximity to the land-locked Indian states adds to its geo-economic significance. For a greater Asian connectivity, CHT should be engaged in an enlightened manner with vision and foresight. The full potentials of CHT's growth and development remain underestimated and therefore unrealized. To tap the immense geo-economic potential of this region, the Bangladesh government must work with the communities living there and ensure a win-win situation. Socio-economic development of CHT needs to be integrated within Bangladesh's priorities. In terms of access to basic education, healthcare, electricity, road networks and transport facilities, safe drinking water and basic government extension services the CHT region is still among the least developed in the country.

It is important for the Bangladesh government to allay the fear of the indigenous people and empower them by solving their land problems and ensure that they enjoy the freedoms as guaranteed by the Constitution. Democratic governance, rule of law, and social reforms aimed at human development are the tools through which Bangladesh should pursue reconciliation and reintegration process in the CHT.

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Way Forward for Peace and Security

The resolution of the problem in the CHT is a political solution which requires the involvement of both the government and the local inhabitants of the CHT. The military solution to resolving the problems may be counterproductive and may provoke the Pahari people to revive the insurgent movement which will certainly threaten Bangladesh's national security and peace and reconciliation process. It is important that the Bangladesh government should not allow the region to become a non-governed lawless frontier land which was what happened in Pakistan's FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas). A security vacuum in the CHT will have destabilizing implications for Bangladesh and the region. CHT's terrain and proximity to the Golden Triangle of Southeast Asia makes it a favorite transit route for the movement of illicit drugs and a conduit for transnational organized crime. The emerging scenario in CHT will test Bangladesh's capacity to build peace and at the same time combat organized crime. Managing security in CHT needs to be backed by socio-economic development of the region which will require additional resources. The international development agencies should support Bangladesh to build durable peace in the CHT.

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In addition to providing the latest information on terrorist attacks and pronouncements, Global Pathfinder also includes over a hundred terrorist training manuals, counter terrorism legislations and conventions, analytical papers on terrorist ideologies, commentaries on terrorist trends and patterns, transcripts of landmark cases, interviews with terrorists as well as photographs from different conflict zones across the world. Further, Global Pathfinder also has a huge collection of jihadi websites, the contents of which are routinely translated and analyzed by our analysts. This analysis helps develop an understanding of the developments in the ideological spectrum and trajectory of the terrorist threat, in both in tactical as well as strategic space.

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Terrorist Trends in Indonesia: An Analysis of the Events of 2010

Rebecca Lunnion and Muh Taufiqurrohman

Indonesia's counterterrorism efforts have met a lot of success, especially against the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). In spite of this, the Indonesian government remains aware that the country is still a potential haven for terrorists. There is a need to analyze how the terrorists have adapted and modified their tactics to counter operations against them. There are existing trends which have been observed in the past year which are believed to have given terrorists the ability to regroup and recover from their losses.

2010 was a successful year for counterterrorism operations in Indonesia. It capped what has been nearly a decade of efficient capturing, killing, and disrupting of terrorists and their activities by the well-equipped and highly-trained Detachment 88. Over 100 persons involved in the military training camp set up by the Dulmatin-led group calling itself the *Tandzim Al Qaeda Serambi Mekkah* (TAQSIM, Al Qaeda in Aceh) were arrested by September 2010. Dulmatin himself was killed on 9 March 2010. However, even if the groups have been considerably weakened, they are far from being wiped out. Ansyad Mbai, the Chief of Indonesia's National Anti-Terrorism Agency, recently said that Indonesia remains a haven for terrorists. There is now the question on what are the dynamics that makes it possible for the groups to regroup and recover despite a robust counter-terrorism operation.

Jihadist groups in Indonesia have involved themselves in several activities which are worthy of examination. Among these concerns the establishment of a military training camp, the formation of specialized units and the conduct of *fa'i* or robbery of non-Islam believers. The jihadis are also taking a different approach in the way they handle the recruitment of new members.

The Aceh Military Training Camp

The establishment of a military training camp is seen to be a breakaway

from the current mainstream activities of *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI). It brings to mind the training camps established in Mindanao for the joint training of Indonesian and Philippine radical groups.

There were two key ideas behind the establishment of the Aceh training camp. First, is to go against the prevailing tendency within the JI to promote *dakwa* or religious outreach activities. Instead, recruits are trained to engage in jihad, or at least in *i'dad* (preparation for jihad) if the time for jihad was not right. There has always been a JI faction, led until recently by Noordin M. Top, which is committed to violent jihad through suicide bombings. However, in recent years it has been sidelined by the mainstream faction led by JI ideologue, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir.

It is interesting to note that Ba'asyir has publicly promoted *dakwa* and renounced violence when in fact, he is one of the "intellectual actors" behind the establishment of the training camp and is thus a supporter of violent jihad. This strategy of *taqiyyah* (denial) is a relatively new practice amongst jihadis in Indonesia. In the case of Ba'asyir, he is maintaining a facade of legitimate activities to promote a certain public image and thus deflect attention from law enforcement.

The second idea was the belief that it is essential to have a secure operating base to wage jihad in a more organised manner and achieve the ulti-

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File photograph of Indonesian police returning from a search of an area following a raid on a terrorist training camp in Aceh on 23 February 2010. Photo Credit: AP Photo/Heri Juanda/My North-west <http://seadev.bonnint.net/?nid=1>

mate goal of implementing Islamic law. This is also a relatively new concept, taken from the writings of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a Jordanian cleric and former mentor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Maqdisi argued against *qital nikayah*, or war to weaken the enemy through repeated Noordin-style attacks. Instead, he advocated for *qital tamkin* (war to establish Islamic law), which relies both on *dakwa* and jihad and by necessity requires a secure base. The idea for a military training camp was borne out of these two ideas and it was realized in Aceh in 2010.

From an operational perspective, the training camp was a failure as it had been running less than a month when it was raided by the Indonesian authorities on 22 February 2010. The raid leads to the theory that some jihadis are reconsidering the value of *qital nikayah* and Noordin-style bombings the latest example of such an attack was the twin bombings of the Ritz Carlton and Marriott Hotels in Jakarta in July 2009. The most recent suicide bomb attack was on 15 April 2011 and the target was the mosque at the Cirebon Police Office. The attack, which killed the bomber and wounded at least 25 people, lends credibility to this theory. It is interesting to note that the latest attack was a departure from the nor-

mal trend as the target (a mosque) was clearly an Islamic target. This could be a possible indication that the *takfiri* concept (if you are not with us, you are against us) is now being more rigidly applied. However, there still remains the possibility that the jihadis will lean more towards *ightiyalat* (secret assassination) style attacks.

Investigations carried out by Indonesian authorities revealed that prior to, and even after the raids, several jihadis, who did not participate in the Aceh camp, were scouting out several areas for a new base and preparing munitions. In fact, there were two men tasked with observing and assessing the training in Aceh in order for it to be replicated in future training camps. Some of the places considered were Ujung Kulon in Banten province, Batu Sangkar in Padang province and Poso in Central Sulawesi.

The establishment of another military training camp has received support from the online jihadi community in light of the events in Libya. On 2 April 2011, the Ar Rahmah radical website, posted a public announcement encouraging radicals to start *i'dad* in preparation for the "new Crusade" in Libya against Gaddafi. There are also discussions among Indonesian radicals about establishing a military training camp in Poso. This is seen as a continuation of the plans by jihadis like Warsito alias Abu Hasbi, who escaped the Aceh raids, to stockpile weapons for a new Aceh-style camp there.

Small specialized units

Even without the establishment of a military training camp, radicals will continue to form small specialized units to launch *ightiyalat* (secret assassination) style attacks. Specialized small units are necessary for jihadis as they are not easily detected by the police and are easy to deploy. In addition, small units would provide plausible deniability for the more well-known organizations – *Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid* (JAT), *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI), *Jamaah As Sunnah* (JAS) and *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI) – that they operate for but that are generally unwilling to be publically associated with terrorism.

In April 2011, there were indications that bomb squads and bomb-making classes were being held for

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participants from across Java. This by itself is not unusual as at least two separate bomb-making groups were disrupted last year alone. The more advanced bomb-making group was working under the Kurnia Widodo, a member of JAT and JAS. Hery Sigo *Samboja* alias Soghir, a member of JI who was involved in the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing and the 2010 attempt to bomb the Danish Embassy, was behind the other bomb-making group.

Robbery or *fa'i*

Terrorist groups have always have the need and willingness to fund themselves outside of generous donations from supporters (both national and international) and regular contributions from their members and sympathizers. A worrying development is that in Indonesia, terrorist groups have turned to robbery as a way to counter the increasing difficulties of obtaining funding amidst the government's crackdown on terrorism.

This trend became especially apparent after the arrests of individuals who were involved in the August 2010 robbery of the CIMB Bank Niaga in Medan, North Sumatra. The robbery was masterminded by Abu Tholut (JI member, JAT leader, and TAQSIM trainer), and Dulmatin was aware of the plans. Although Indonesian authorities arrested three men for donating millions of rupiah for the Aceh training camp, it is also said that other funds for the camp came from proceeds from several bank robberies, including a bank robbery in Medan. This is a trend likely to continue, with jihadis willing to justify robberies as *fa'i*, or theft from nonbelievers. In fact, an increase in robberies particularly in one geographical location (as what took place in North Sumatera in 2010) should be seen as a reliable indicator of terrorist activity, usually but not always in or near said area.

Recruitment

The last but not least noteworthy trend concerns recruitment. Although radical groups in Indonesia have often worked together, the *Tanzim Al Qaeda Serambi Mekkah* (TAQSIM, Al Qaeda in Aceh) military camp was a genuine *lintas tanzim* (cross-organisation) project. Ji-

hadis were recruited from a number of organisations, including JI, KOMPAK, *Darul Islam* (DI), JAT and FPI. Only after the training was well underway, when they had presumably become a cohesive group, was there any evidence of them calling themselves members of *Tanzim Al Qaeda Serambi Mekkah*.

Though one might suspect that these developments might have caused ideological rifts within the groups, there was no evidence of such. However, Dulmatin is said to have expressed dissatisfaction and distrust of the Acehnese, but this was based more on their ethnic identity than on a specific ideology. The Acehnese are generally known for being nationalistic and thus hostile towards radical Islam. Dulmatin apparently blamed the Acehnese for being partly responsible for the discovery of the camp. The Acehnese in turn were angered at being deceived, having been told that the training was in preparation for jihad in Palestine, something they supported, and not in Indonesia, which many of them did not support.

Perhaps a reason for the lack of rifts between members of different groups is because of the pattern of recruitment. As has always been the case, and will continue to be so, everyone recruited into the cause was either a friend or relative of one or more known jihadis. Only those deemed ready were told of the camp and offered the opportunity to participate.

An interesting paradox is evident from the indictments of those involved in or somehow connected to the Aceh military training camp. On one hand there was clear freedom of choice. It is a fact that many declined the invitation to join the training camp, citing work, financial or family reasons. There are also others who declined to participate in the training but offered to take logistical positions. For instance, Agus Mahmudi declined to train at the camp because he wanted to take care of his family. Instead, Abdullah Sonata tasked him with helping provide logistics for the camp.

On the other hand, there was significant peer pressure, not only on those who participated but also on those who did not, to prove their convictions. As in the case of army deserter Yuli Harsono, his motive to kill

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two police officers on 15 March 2010 in Prembun, Kebumen, Central Java and another two officers on 10 April 2010 in Purwodadi, Purworejo, Central Java was not purely revenge for what the police had done to the jihadis in Aceh. His ulterior motive was to show to some people like Hery Sigo *Samboja alias* Soghir who doubted his loyalty that he was trustworthy and a real jihadi. This is an ongoing trend, whereby radicals sometimes launch attacks because of their desire to be accepted as real jihadis, not because of purely ideological motives.

It has also been observed in some cases that some jihadis, having found themselves involved in facilitating terrorism in ways they may have not intended, have no option but to go with the flow. Helmy Priwardani (JAT) for instance, was pestered into dropping by Yogyakarta because Yuli Harsono (an army deserter who joined MMI and JAS) had something "important" to do. It was only after Yuli shot and killed two policemen while Helmy sat in the car that the latter realised what he had done. This is further compounded by the lack of trust in the police force in general, that makes even the average citizen reluctant to report suspicious activities.

It remains to be seen whether the jihadis can consolidate their ranks and organize themselves sufficiently to set up another Aceh-style training camp. It would require financial resources, which would likely be sourced from *fa'i*. In the meantime, the jihadis are seen to favor assassination-style attacks. There is still a lot of resentment towards Detachment 88 and other law enforcement authorities which could translate to retaliatory attacks but it is probably the case that internal dynamics within the groups themselves are motivating individuals to do more (attacks or damage) than they might otherwise do. The jihadis might have suffered a blow, but there are many who will learn from the mistakes they have made and would endeavour to continue the struggle.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The CTTA: Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis is now open for contributions from researchers and practitioners in the field of terrorism research, security, and other related fields.

Topical areas of interest are terrorism and political violence, terrorism and organized crime, homeland security, religion and violence, internal conflicts and terrorism, and all other areas of security broadly defined.

Article length could be anywhere between 800 to 1500 words. Submissions must be made before the 15th of every month for editing purposes and for inclusion in the next month's edition.

Electronic copies of the articles (MS Word format) may be submitted to the editors at the following addresses: isarabinda@ntu.edu.sg or isdiane@ntu.edu.sg

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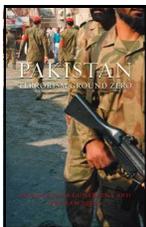
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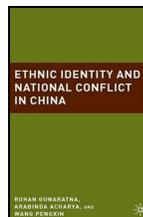
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- Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero (Reaktion Books, 2011) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna and Mr. Khuram Iqbal



- International Aviation and Terrorism: Evolving Threats, Evolving Security (Routledge 2009) by Dr. John Harrison



- Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China (Palgrave Macmillan 22 June 2010) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Dr. Arabinda Acharya and Mr. Wang Pengxin



- Targeting Terrorist Financing: International Cooperation and New Regimes (Routledge 2009) by Dr. Arabinda Acharya