

# The Complexity of Conflicts in Bangladesh

M. S. Siddiqui  
WMO Fellow- Bangladesh

## Declaration:

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## Summery

*Conflict is the natural disagreement resulting from individuals, groups and organizations and states. Bangladesh has some internal conflicts, which have evolved differently in all countries of South Asia. Bangladesh has political, ethnic and economical conflict resuling in barrier to social and economical developments.*

## Introduction:

Conflict is the natural disagreement resulting from individuals, groups and organizations and states. Conflict can be external or internal to the country. Conflict originates past rivalries and personality differences. Conflict is held at several plateaus such as individuals, groups or even nations (Islam et al, 2014)<sup>1</sup>.

Individuals are in conflicts for many reasons like property, family conflict or any other social issues may cause conflict between individuals. The second category is people to people conflict. Ethnic and religious violence stand out in people to people conflict (Varshney 2002)<sup>2</sup>. Examples of this include conflicts between ethnic and social groups, localized land conflicts, religious riots, homicides, domestic violence, common violence, or other crimes.

The external clash is state-to-state conflict is war between two countries (Gani and Lyer, 2010)<sup>3</sup>. This kind of conflict has declined. But internal conflict is on the rise. Indeed, internal conflicts have resulted in three times as many deaths as external conflicts, or interstate wars, since World War II (Fearon and Laitin 2003)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Islam, Md.Sirajul, Faruk, Md.Omar, Khatun, Razia, Rahman, Md.Esfaqur (2014), Conflict Between Workers And Organization In RMG Sector Where Security Of Sustainable Human Resource Development:(A Study On Dhaka City,Bangladesh), International Journal of Business and Management Invention, Volume 3 Issue 4 || April. 2014 || PP.52-66.

<sup>2</sup> Varshney, Ashutosh. 2002. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, First Edition. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Gani, Ejaz and Lyer, Lakshmi (2010), World Bank Policy Paper No: 31, Conflict and Development—Lessons from South Asia, September, 2010, available at <http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/3715/1/Conflict%20Development%20South%20Asia.pdf> and downloaded on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Fearon, James, and David Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97 75–90.

Internal conflict is a loose term. It can be classified into two broad categories (Ghani and Iyer 2010). The first category is conflict against the state. Examples of this are civil war, separatist movements, and conflict for state power. There is a very recent phenomenon internal conflicts are suicide bombings. Suicide bombings are an extreme manifestation of conflict carried out by a relatively organized group of non-state actors, and their goal is the destabilization of the state. These incidents are called terrorism.

All these types of internal conflicts have evolved differently in South Asia including Bangladesh. The developing world characterized with its heterogeneous populations. Anti-colonial nationalism provided only temporary coherence to identities in such countries, which soon faced multifarious problems of fragmentation in terms of ethnicity, religion and region (Huntington 1997).

Within the short span of 25 years, Bangladesh had undergone two different national independence movements - the first taking place in 1947 which led to the creation of Pakistan, and the second in 1971 which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh and its secession from Pakistan. During this interregnum, the national political space in Bangladesh was occupied by various combinations of secularism, socialism, democracy and linguistic nationalism. Later, after 1971, came the military dictatorships and the rise of a more strident Islamic hegemony. Within such complex and changing circumstances, the conflicts remain unresolved and in to extend accelerated with some more dimensions.

Although Bangladesh is widely known as a homogeneous country, it is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country in South Asia. 85% of population is Muslims; traditionally they bear a modern mindset. There are some religious and cultural ethnic minorities. Some of those have own languages.

Bangladesh has many types of conflicts of different categories. There are political, social and other problems. Some of these prominent conflicts are political, ethnic and economical at the present time.

## **Political Conflicts**

Bangladesh has more or less by polar system. Both the political parties have contrast political ideologies. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) form by the politicians of different political ideologies and also make alliance and allying with individuals and groups that opposed the Bangladesh's independence. They promote "Bangladesh Nationalism". This ideology based on a role of religion in social and political life under legal framework. These parties include the Jamaat-e-Islami (crisis group, 2015)<sup>5</sup> who has

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<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group Asia Report (2015), Mapping Bangladesh's Political Crisis, Asian N°264, 9 February 2015,

opposed the liberation of the country. The other party Awami League (AL) led the struggle of independence and the nation got independence on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1971. AL believes in relatively secular politics and “Bangalee nationalism”.

The personal feud between Sheikh Hasina, the president of the AL, and Khaleda Zia, the chairwoman of the BNP, plays an important role in the party conflict. The Daily Observer and other media in many countries termed “battling begums”<sup>6</sup> are the primary living representatives of Bangladesh’s two most powerful political dynasties.

The Bangladesh political system is characterized by excessive rivalry between the leaders of the AL and the BNP, the two main political parties of the country. As a result of this confrontational situation, Bangladesh has been afflicted with a political culture where everything centres on the desire to win power (Zaman, 2012)<sup>7</sup>. Under such circumstances, a “winner-takes-all” approach termed by Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) as “partyarchy” has become the principal feature of Bangladeshi politics (IGS, 2010)<sup>8</sup>. The attainment of political office is therefore seen as a means of access to and control over resources.

The electoral disputes also engendered tensions, resulting in sporadic countrywide violence. Both the parties consider each election was flawed, its results contested by the losing side, and accept if win the election. Both the parties have no confidence on each other and not willing to contest election under incumbent government. All the parties in the countries find a solution in non-party caretaker government to during election. The got somewhat relief conflict over election for few terms and the swings of parties in power has given the caretaker government a better alternate to incumbent government to conduct the election.

But the incumbent government of Sk Hasina amended the constitution scraping the caretaker government and BNP did not agree to the change of election time care taker government. In 2013, public protests and street battles involving party activists and government security forces escalated and by the time elections were held, political violence had caused more than 300 deaths.

Election-related violence continued made the 2014 polls the most violent in the country's history. Countrywide hartals (strikes), demonstrations and traffic blockades that stalled economic activity and travel outside the urban centres were accompanied by attacks on AL supporters and officials in the run-up to and on election day (Human Right Watch, 2014)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Begums means ladies.

<sup>7</sup> Zaman, Rashed Uz, 2012, Bangladesh - Between Terrorism, Identity and Illiberal Democracy, The Unfolding of a Tragic Saga, PERCEPTIONS, Autumn 2012, Volume XVII, Number 3, pp. 151-177.

<sup>8</sup> IGS, 2010, Institute of Governance Studies, *The State of Governance in Bangladesh 2007*, Dhaka, BRAC University, 2008; quoted in Naureen Chowdhury Fink, “Bombs and Ballots: Terrorism, Political Violence, and Governance in Bangladesh”, *Working Paper*, New York, International Peace Institute, February 2010, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Human Right Watch, (2014), “Democracy in the Crossfire: Opposition violence and government abuses in the 2014 pre- and post-election period in Bangladesh”, Human Rights Watch, April 2014.

According to Human Rights Watch: Before, during, and after the elections, Bangladesh's security forces launched a brutal crackdown on the opposition, unlawfully killing dozens of leaders and activists, carrying out widespread arbitrary arrests, and in some cases unlawfully destroying property belonging to opposition leaders and activists" (Human Right Watch, 2014)<sup>10</sup>

The second source of tension has been priority of moving forward with the trials of those accused of war crimes during the war of independence in 1971. The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) is a domestic tribunal set up in 2008 to try war crime suspects by the present government of AL. The than anti-liberation has gained position in Bangladesh politics with patronization of subsequent governments of Gen Ziaur Rahman, Gen H M Ershad and also democratic government of BNP. The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), a BNP ally, both oppose the ICT, claiming that it is unfair and politically motivated. The anti-liberation parties raised voiced against trial of war crimes and concerns from international lobbies have raised that this tribunal does not meet international standards, and previous violent clashes have broken out around ICT convictions during last few years.

It was in this atmosphere of confrontation and violence for caretaker neutral government during election and stop of war crime trials, During the elections in 2014, activists of the BNP and particularly of its main coalition partner, JI, resorted to massive violence, including the torching of dozens of polling centres. Aside from the lack of opposition participation in the elections, political violence and physical insecurity appear to have been important reasons for the low voter turnout. In about half of Bangladesh's constituencies, candidates from the governing parties ran unopposed and won their seats uncontested. Jatiya Party, a former coalition partner of the AL, is now the main opposition – but won only 33 seats in the election, 20 of them uncontested, and holds some ministerial posts in the government as well. They are in both government and opposition simultaneously creating an un-precedent coalition government. The turnout of voters was very low due to violence and boycotting by one of the two major parties has further undermined the perceived legitimacy of the new government.

The flawed conduct of the polls and the subsequent lack of democratic credibility of the election results has created conflict between Bangladesh's two major political parties, the AL and the BNP and this is a burning issue in front of the nation.

### **Ethnic Minority conflict**

The ethnic minorities living in both hilly areas and also some in plain lands differ significantly from the Bangali people in terms of their appearance, language, religion and socio-cultural identify.

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<sup>10</sup> Human Right Watch, (2014), "Democracy in the Crossfire: Opposition violence and government abuses in the 2014 pre- and post-election period in Bangladesh", Human Rights Watch, April 2014.

The mostly live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) comprise an area of 13.180 km<sup>2</sup> in South Eastern Bangladesh bordering to India and Myanmar (Burma). The indigenous population of at least 1,1 million belong to different tribal groups.

There are about 45 ethnic communities (Costa & Dutta, 2007)<sup>11</sup>; (GOB, 2008)<sup>12</sup> with distinct language, culture, heritage and abide by own administrating statutes (Mohsin, 1997)<sup>13</sup>. Majority of the people (i.e. Chakma, Marma, Tanchangya and Mro/Mru) are Buddhist by religion. Tripura follow Hinduism. Lushai, Pankho, Bawm and some of the Mro/Mru adopted Christianity. Indigenous people of the CHTs have closer ethno - cultural affinities with other Sino-Tibetan people inhabiting in Myanmar and the Indian States of Tripura and Mizoram.

The entire South Asia was under British rule from 1657 to 1947. The tribal fought and lost the war and came under British rule under certain conditions. The British passed an act named "CHT Regulation 1900" and it is well known as Hill Tract Manual. The King of CHT enjoyed complete autonomy by the government of India Act 1935 that declared CHT as „Totally Excluded Area“ from British administration.

The Hill people in CHT were very happy with the Act of CHT. It was divided into three circles and the community chief controlled the administration and judicial system. He was also responsible for collecting revenue and social security (Chakma, 2010)<sup>14</sup>. The CHT Regulation not allowed to sale the land to non-tribal people and made restriction for settlement of Bengalis in CHT (Panday & Jamil, 2009)<sup>15</sup>. The Bengalis, who intend to settle in CHT, had to take prior permission of settlement from deputy Commissioner who had to take recommendation from Headman or Circle Chief. In this way CHT manual restricted the influx of non-indigenous people in Hill Tracts.

After independence of Pakistan in 1947, CHT became part of it. The army government of Pakistan made a constitutional amendment in 1963 that began to effective from 1964. By this amendment the Bengalis (People from the plain area) had got chance to settle in CHT and the status of CHT area was changed from Excluded area to tribal area and the hill men to tribal people.

More over, the Pakistan government built a Kaptai Hydro –Electric Dam at Chittagong in 1962. As a result of this project thousands and thousands of hill people became internally displaced and lost everything, many of them became refugee in India and Myanmar (Hussain, 1999)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Costa, T., & Dutta, A. (2007). The Khasis of Bangladesh, In: A socio-economic survey of the Khasi people, Philip Gain & Aneeka Malik, pp 19-28, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>12</sup> GOB. (2008). Moving Ahead: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (FY 2009-2011, Planning Commission, Dhaka, Bangladesh

<sup>13</sup> Mohsin, A. (1997). The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, The University Press, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>14</sup> Chakma, B. (2010) The post-colonial state and minorities: ethnocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 48:3, 281-300.

<sup>15</sup> Panday, P. K. and Jamil, I. (2009), Asian Survey, Vol. 49, No. 6 (November/December 2009), pp. 1052-1070.

<sup>16</sup> Hussain S. A. (1999), War and Peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Retrospect and Prospect, Agamee Prakashani, Dhaka,

Since the independence of Bangladesh the indigenous population was faced with increasing immigration of settlers from the mainland, fostered by the government.

Immediately after the change in 1975 through the assassination of the Father of the Nation and his family, the new Government took more drastic step to militarize the whole CHTs declaring the region a politically special sensitive zone. The Government assumed full military control in CHTs ignoring the local civil administration. In order to earn more control over the region and balance between indigenous and non-indigenous population, the Government adopted a policy of State induced military led migration of non-indigenous poor and destitute folks of other part of Bangladesh to the CHTs without consulting the indigenous people of the CHTs (Nur et al, 2012)<sup>17</sup>.

The ethical minority nations first political and civil agitation and since the 80s armed resistance was organised, especially by the Shanti Bahini guerrilla movement. The presence of the military in the CHT, which was originally responsible for bringing in Bengali settlers as a counterinsurgency policy and giving them protection, has contributed towards aggravation of the situation.

During this military led administration, counterinsurgency operations were started throughout the CHTs that ruined the scope for accommodation and co-existence of both the hill people and migrated *Bangali* people in the CHTs (B.H. Chowdhury, 2002)<sup>18</sup>. The whole region was heavily militarised and the police and army unleashed a wide spread repression with a serious human rights violations. The CHT has officially controlled under militarization from 1977 onwards (Mohsin, 1999)<sup>19</sup> and Many Bangali, Pahari and military people were killed in armed conflict during 1979-1997.

The major conflict is the settlement of land issues between Bengali settlers and the indigenous community, a root problem of the conflict, along with cultural domination in the form of Bengali hegemonism. Indigenous rights to land are only partly recognized in the legal structure of the Bangladesh state, and in a nation of 50 million that suffers from land scarcity, the state has no clear policy on how to handle the land hunger of its political constituencies.

The focal point of the ethnicity unrest in Bangladesh has been the conflict in the CHT (Ray Roy 2003)<sup>20</sup>, (Adnan, 2011)<sup>21</sup>, and (Mohsin, 2002)<sup>22</sup>. They are critically engage with the Bangladeshi state on the notion of indigenous concepts of land ownership, self-administration, and cultural hegemony.

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<sup>17</sup> Muhammed, Nur, Hossain, Mohitul, Chakma, Sheeladitya, Masum, Farhad Hossain, Detten, Roderich von and Oesten, Gerhard ( Conflict and Corollaries on Forest and Indigenous People: Experience from Bangladesh, Sustainable Forest Management – Case Studies, <http://cdn.intechopen.com/pdfs-wm/35236.pdf>, accessed 15 October 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Chowdhury, B.H. (2002). Building Lasting Peace: Issues of the Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS) Occasional Paper series, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, Available From: <http://acdis.illinois.edu/publications/207/publication-BuildingLastingPeaceIssuesoftheImplementationoftheChittagongHillTractsAccord.html>

<sup>19</sup> Mohsin, A. (1999). *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Bangladesh (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press).

<sup>20</sup> Roy, Devasish (200), *The Discordant Accord: Challenges Towards the Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997*, in *The Journal of Social Studies*, 100<sup>th</sup> Issue- Perspectives on Peace: Visions and Realities CSS, Dhaka pp. 4-57.

<sup>21</sup> Adnan, Shapan and R. Dastidar, (2011) *Alienation of the Lands of Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, CHTC and IWGIA, Dhaka

<sup>22</sup> Mohsin, A. (2002), *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, UPL, Dhaka.

This conflict is now not only limited with seeking identity but also include other issues like ownership of land, and forest, resource use, settlement of non Bengali migrants and other socio-cultural, political and religious factors but also inclusion of this provision in the Constitution, removal of all non-tribals settled in CHT after 17 August 1947, autonomy for the CHT with legislative assembly and recognition of the right to self-determination etc.

After long time of conflict the Peace Accord of CHT 1997 signed by the than Hasina Government of AL has brought peace for the CHTs people for few years. But non-implementation of this accord creates a new conflict between indigenous people and government of Bangladesh and exaggerated the situation even before.

### **Economic Conflicts**

It is observed that the high conflict prevail in low income countries (Collier et al. 2003)<sup>23</sup>. That conflict is higher in lagging regions is consistent with the cross-country literature on the incidence of civil war, which shows that poor countries are at greater risk of internal conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2004)<sup>24</sup>; Fearon and Laitin 2003)<sup>25</sup>.

Conflict may be contributing to low per capita income, or low income may be contributing to conflict. The poverty-conflict link is a two-way relationship. The relationship between conflict and per capita income is not very tight. High income can't guarantee peace and stability (Gani and Lyer, 2010)<sup>26</sup>.

Bangladesh is a least developed countries although recently Bangladesh got unofficial recognition of lower middle income country having about 20% population under poverty line. The minimum wages is lower in the region have huge un-employed workers. This region has been chosen by western buyers as source of readymade garments (RMG) since early 1980s. It is the largest exporting industry, which experienced a phenomenal growth during the last three decades. By taking advantage of cheap labor and quota-based market in the USA and EU under the provision of Multi Fiber Arrangement (MFA) of GATT, it attained a high profile in terms of economic growth of the country who in turn provide livelihood for millions (Uddin, M.S. and Jahed, M.A., 2007)<sup>27</sup>.

But this sector is struggling with a number of problems. Conflict between owners and workers, labor unrest, shortage of gas and electricity, poor infrastructure, poor port facility, lead time complexities, conspiracy of home and abroad, advancing competitors in the quota free international market are some of them which are posing a great threat to its survival.

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<sup>23</sup> Collier, Paul, V. L. Elliott, Havard Hegre, et al. 2003. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. Washington, DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56: 563-95.

<sup>25</sup> Fearon, James, and David Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97 75-90.

<sup>26</sup> Gani, Ejaz and Lyer, Lakshmi (2010), World Bank Policy Paper No: 31, Conflict and Development—Lessons from South Asia, September, 2010, available at <http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/3715/1/Conflict%20Development%20South%20Asia.pdf> and downloaded on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2015

<sup>27</sup> Uddin, M.S., Jahed, M.A. (2007). Garments Industry: A Prime Mover of the Social Economic Development of Bangladesh. *Cost Manage.*, 35(1): 59-70.

The unrest takes shape of violence and vandalism. The agitated workers come to the street and go storming on vehicles and garment factories. For some years, the workers of RMG in different industries have been creating violence in the form of processions, vandalism, blockading the road to hike their minimum wage, attendance bonus and to ensure other facilities.

The sector has been reverberated with labor rampage, killings, wage disputes and disappearance incidents (Mahmud, 2012)<sup>28</sup>. In 2014, about 140 garments factories were closed due to conflict accompanied by the crisis of power and gas, price hike of yarn, poor infrastructure, and low price offers from international buyers amid increased production cost. These are the main reasons for the shutdown in the production factory (Islam et al, 2014)<sup>29</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The political conflict is due to lack of practice of democracy in Bangladesh and it may be resolved in due course. The ethnic minority problem has been created by undemocratic rulers and this problem needs political decision. Bangladesh has no other choice to address the issue of labor unrest for un-interrupted economic activities.

There are some more issues of conflicts in Bangladesh but the tree issues are to be resolved immediately for long-term peace and economic development of the country.

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<sup>28</sup> Iqbal Mahmud, (2012),The Reasons Behind Workers' Unrests During This Month And The Underlying Tensions Triggering These. New Age, 26/05/2012.

<sup>29</sup> Islam, Md.Sirajul, Faruk, Md.Omar, Khatun, Razia, Rahman, Md.Esfaqur (2014), Conflict Between Workers And Organization In RMG Sector Where Security Of Sustainable Human Resource Development:(A Study On Dhaka City,Bangladesh), International Journal of Business and Management Invention, Volume 3 Issue 4 || April. 2014 || PP.52-66.