

# Security dynamics in CHT

by Saleh Shahriar

**E**THNIC conflicts have become a global problem with serious regional implications. Scholarly concern with ethnic groups and conflict has become increasingly salient since the second half of the twentieth century. An estimate shows that one-third of all countries experienced civil conflict and ethnic unrest. The term 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic' finds origin in the Greek term *ethnos*, meaning nation, and its modern-day meaning translates to a group of people who share a common culture and sense of heritage.

There has been a proliferation of ethnic nationalism in many parts of the world. Language, culture, memory, history and tradition are the vital sources of ethnic nationalism. These variables can drive the members of an ethnic community to shape their own collective identity and destiny. Managing the violence of ethnic groups remains a central problem of state-building, security and development.

Bangladesh, to the east of India on the Bay of Bengal, is a densely populated South Asian country. It has more than 4,000 kilometres of border with India and 271 kilometres of border with Myanmar. It is a gateway to the eleven Southeast Asian countries, such as Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Chittagong Hill Tracts, bordered by India and Myanmar, is situated in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh. The hill tracts, composed of southeastern hilly districts of Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari, is plagued by ethnic conflicts and violent secessionist movements. The hill tracts have had a long history of conflict and bloodshed. Numerous ethnonationalist groups are active in the three hill districts.

Of late, a new separatist group, namely, the Kuki-Chin National Front, surfaced in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the hill districts of India, Myanmar and the disputed territories between China and the neighbours. The Kuki-Chin National Front has its own armed wing, namely, the Kuki-Chin National Army. Members of newly emerged militant group Kuki-Chin National Front looted over Tk 15 million from Sonali Bank's branch in Ruma,



— United News of Bangladesh/Abu Sufian Jewel

Bandarban on the first week of July 2024. They looted 14 weapons from the Ansar members guarding the bank and allegedly abducted the Sonali Bank manager.

The latest violent confrontation in Rangamati town and at Dighinala and sadar in Khagrachari resulted in the deaths of four people and left at least 72 others injured. Leaders of the Chakma community urged the Indian prime minister to take steps to protect the lives and properties of the hill tribes and religious minorities. These tribal leaders might have placed their demands to the interim Yunus government through proper means instead of showing their allegiance to the Modi regime in India. It is also true that beyond the accord-transferred responsibilities to the ethnic minority-controlled three district councils and the larger regional council, the hill leaders demanded the closing of most military outposts, stringent restrictions on the Bengali settlers and more resource allocations for the hills, to mention a few of those demands.

With the rise of China, Professor Walt, a realist scholar, in his 2018 paper entitled 'Rising Powers and the Risks of War: A Realist View on Sino-American Relations' predicts that the United States and China will increasingly see each other as rivals and will engage in

more intense security competition. The purpose of this paper is to address a couple of questions: What are the underlying security dynamics in the hill tracts? How does the super and great power competition shape the geopolitics of the hill tracts?

The Rohingya crisis has been disrupting bilateral relations between Myanmar and Bangladesh since the late 1970s. As a host nation, Bangladesh faces several non-traditional security threats originating from the Rohingya crisis. Drug trafficking is a major threat to regional security and domestic stability. Drug addiction has become a matter of serious global concern. Bangladesh is near the three major drug-producing regions: the Golden Triangle, the Golden Crescent and the Golden Wedge. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the smuggling of drugs and arms has increased instability in the region.

On May 3, 2023, violence broke out between the Meitei community and the Kuki tribe in Churachandpur town of Manipur, which is close to Imphal, the state's capital. The reason for the clashes has been attributed to the non-tribal Meitei people's demand for scheduled tribe status. While the Meiteis view the Kukis as outsiders and drug peddlers, the Kukis see themselves as marginalised by the Meiteis, who hold major political and administrative positions in the state. The violence in Manipur