

# Administrative System of Marma Tribal Society

ALL people in Bangladesh constitute a significant proportion of the total population of the country. Most of them are, however, tribal people. The total estimated tribal population was nearly 4.5 lakh as per the population census of 1981.

There are more than dozen of district tribes in the hilly areas of Bangladesh. Lists of tribes and their distribution in different districts are given in Table 2. The majority of the tribal people live in the hilly forests with primitive ways of life, self-contained tribal organization in society tied with age-old customs, tradition, ritual and religious belief and separate ethnological entity. The hilly areas of Chittagong Hill region include Khagrachari, Rangamati, Bandarban Hill districts.

Chakmas are the single largest tribe and the Marma the second largest in Bangladesh with majority of them living in Bandarban Hill districts.

Political organization of the Marma tribe, like many other tribal societies in this geographical region is a three tier system with the individual settlement at the lowest level headed by *Karbari* to the circle level with the *Bohmong Rajah* as the circle chief. The mouza level administrative organization is in between these two and headed by the *Headman*. This hierarchical system of political and administrative organization of the studied Marma tribe is shown below:

In the long past there was existence of well defined village organization in this tribal society under the respective tribal chief which played very significant role in the social and cultural life of the tribal people. These village organizations were actually the social and religious institutions of these societies under this system. Each settlement had a leader named *roangong*. This is an Arakani word of which *roa* means settlement and *gong* means leader. The *roangong* were called by different names in different clans as well as tribal societies in this region. For example, among the Marma tribe different names of *roangong* are *dhabeng*, *Jainsa* and *tashtidar*. Among the Chakma they were termed as *Dewan*, *Khisha*, *Chenge*, *Talukdar* and *Laskar*. The common names of the settlement leader of Tippera tribe were *pomong*, *tatimong*, *dhabeng*, *murchul* etc. All the tribal chiefs used to collect revenue through them. Most common form of collection of revenue was in kind e.g. by a portion of *jhum* crop produced by the tribesmen.

In 1892 when this entire region was under British occupation the existing three circles namely Chakma, Bohmong and Mong were divided into 33 taluks. Of these, Bohmong Circle had 18 taluks, Chakma had 9 and Mong circle had 3 taluks. These taluks were again divided into several mouzas and each mouza was headed by a headman. This reorganization of the administrative system in the tribal areas were made by British administration. In this process of reorganization many *roangong* were appointed as headman and they used to serve occupation British ad-

ministration as their representatives primarily for collection of revenue from the people. Subsequently, the British administration felt it necessary to have even smaller units of administration for effective control in the collections of revenue. The concept of settlement level administration was considered at that time and the head of each settlement was appointed and

by Dr Selina Ahsan

The *Karbari* is responsible for depositing the collected amount as *Jhum* tax to the headman prior to *Rajpunnah*, the ceremony for collection of *Jhum* tax by the *Raja* from headman and *Karbari*. The *Karbari* performs his judicial functions with the help of a few elderly respected persons of his settlement.

mouza level court.

The headman is appointed through a process of selection and recommendation at various level from Marma settlement to circle chief levels. At the initial state a headman is nominated by the *Karbaris* within the mouza. The *Rajah*, the circle chief then recommends his name to the Deputy Commissioner, the head of the government administration at

Table - 1  
Estimated tribal population—1981.

Tribes	District			Hill Tracts Region
	Ctg Hill Tract	Khagrachari	Bandarban	
Chakma	114592	94524	3461	212577
Marma	31169	39692	51874	122735
Tripura	5062	42577	6736	54375
Tanchengya	11875	289	5531	17695
Moro	191	469	17151	17811
Uchai	-	3035	975	4010
Lushai	1025	-	16	1041
Bawm	130	82	5521	5733
Pankua	2278	-	-	2278
Chak	65	38	806	909
Khlang	910	5	507	1422
Khomoi	16	71	1101	1188
Total	167313	100782	93679	441774

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

named as *Karbari*.

The main responsibility of *Karbari* was collection of revenue from the people for the occupation British administration as well as for their respective tribal chief, besides maintaining law and order and providing leadership in various social and religious activities.

The three tier-system of political organization and administration, thus introduced among the tribal societies, is still in existence in the Marma tribal society.

However, with the change in the government system from British administration of Pakistan Government and currently under Bangladesh administration there have been some changes in the administrative and judicial functions of the head of these existing traditional three-tier organization. The three-tier administrative and political organization has been discussed below.

## Karbari and Settlement-Level Administration

In the Marma tribal society a *Karbari*, the head of a settlement-level organization, is the most important institution in the administration of the settlement. A settlement is composed of a number of families. The domain of settlement administration headed by *Karbari* includes various rules, traditions, values, customs and norms for regulating social, cultural, economic and religious life of the people.

As mentioned earlier, the concept and role of *Karbari* was derived from the old traditional system of local settlement leader named *roangong*.

A *Karbari* is appointed by *Rajah* (Circle Chief) as per recommendation of the concerned headman and this recommendation is again based on the opinion of the people of the respective settlement. Sometimes a *Karbari* is also appointed by the headman as per recommendation of the people of the community.

A *Karbari* is the head of the lowest court in the hierarchy of judicial administration within the Marma tribe. This court is authorised to settle all disputes within the settlement, example: marriage, divorce, disputes on land ownership for *Jhum* as well as plainland cultivation and any anti-social act. A *Karbari* has no of-

Level	Name of Organization	Name of Head of Organization
1. Highest	Circle	Rajah
2. Middle	Mouza	Headman
3. Lowest	Settlement	Karbari

office. Normally his own house is his office. He also has no office staff.

## Headman and Mouza Level Administration

A mouza consists of several settlements (village). The head of the Mouza is termed as headman. He is the head of mouza level administration and also the judicial head of the

the district level. The headman is appointed only on the approval of the Deputy Commissioner. In the past however, the process of appointment of headman was different. Only the circle chief could appoint the headman in consultation with the *Karbaris* and other elderly persons within the mouza.

The headman plays a very significant role in the social, religious and cultural life of the people of a mouza within the Marma tribal society. He is also the head of the administration as well as head of the mouza level court. The headman provides the institutional linkage between the settlement through *Karbari* and the circle chief, as well as district gov-

Table - 2  
List of Tribes and Locations in Bangladesh

Location(District)	Name of Tribe
Chittagong Hill Tracts Region (Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari Hill districts)	1. Chamka
	2. Marma
	3. Moro
	4. Tippera
	5. Lushai
	6. Khumi
	7. Tongchangia
	8. Bawm
	9. Kuki
	10. Chak
	11. Pankho
	12. Barjog
	13. Kheyong
	14. Shendu
	15. Riang
	16. Rakhain*
	17. Magh*
	18. Garo
	19. Hajong
	20. Khashi
	21. Manipuri
	22. Santal
	23. Munda

\* Rakhain and Magh are considered to be the same tribe as Marma. There are however some differences in opinion which have been discussed in details elsewhere in this thesis.

# Gender Vital in Food Distribution

by Dennis Craig

CATHERINE Bertini has a new agenda to help solve the world's food problem. The 40-year-old newly-appointed head of the United Nations World Food Programme, the largest supplier of donated food to Third World countries, wants women to be given greater consideration in the distribution of food.

Her manner is in direct contrast to her predecessor, James Ingram, an irascible Australian former diplomat. During his 10 years as the Programme's Executive Director, Ingram fought ceaselessly to wrest complete control from the Director-General of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, Edouard Saouma, who regarded the WFP and its emergency food resources as part of his fiefdom.

Ingram's sabre-wielding tactics eventually triumphed and his successor, Bertini, has inherited a virtually no-strings-attached operation with \$2.4 billion worth of resources to distribute to the world's needy.

But she is far from satisfied. "Donor countries simply have to give us more," she says positively. "We are reaching 70 million people, 40 million of them the victims of war, civil strife, natural disasters and other emergency situations. There are millions more the Programme does not reach — cannot reach, because it doesn't have the resources. In my first few weeks in office," she continues, "I visited nine donor nations to ask for more. I am hopeful in spite of the recession."

One of her first priorities will be to ensure that women get their fair share of the food WFP distributes. "Disparities in the division of food rations between men

and women," she says, "are particularly apparent in the Programme's food-for-work projects, through which workers employed in self-help development activities receive payment or part payment of wages in food rations."

It is now generally accepted that heads of house in developing countries are mostly women who do the

employs 1,600 men and women around the world. Only seven of the 102 posts in senior grades are held by women. You can take it that I shall be doing my best to redress this obvious imbalance."

Bertini is a native New Yorker, second generation Italian-American, whose grandfather emigrated to the United States from southern Italy at the turn of the century. In the traditional Italian manner of those days, her grandmother had many children, of whom 17 survived. Yet indirectly she showed granddaughter Catherine that there were roles for women other than relentless motherhood.

"When I was a child she gave me a book called Elizabeth Blackwell, MD., the story of America's first woman medical practitioner. It inspired me to believe that women were capable of being or doing anything, given opportunity. For some years now I have been able to help some women fulfill their potential."

Her own career illustrates how she has lived up to her convictions. After distinguishing herself in a number of senior posts in both the private and public sectors and winning a string of honours for achievements in human rights and other areas, she was chosen by President George Bush for the job of Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services.

The 13 food assistance programmes she managed serve one out of every six Americans, through schemes as wide-ranging as national school breakfast and lunch programmes for 25 million children to food distribution on Indian reservations. The budget she managed for 1991-92 exceeded \$33 billion.

One of her proudest achievements was to persuade legislators to grant extra food to undernourished mothers wishing to breastfeed their babies instead of having to buy costly manufactured formula foods.

Bertini does not intend to become known as a travel junkie, using any and every opportunity to visit other countries, particularly those in attractive parts of the world.

"Certainly I will have to travel, but for the first year at least I will concentrate on reviewing the organisation here to ensure its efficiency and trying to persuade donor countries, to give more food and cash."

She and her husband Thomas Haskell, a freelance photographer, do however plan to spend holidays travelling around Italy.

"I'm in touch with six families of close relations," she said. "It's great to have a large, ready-made family, and I want to find other members."

— Gemini News  
About the Author: DENNIS CRAIG has worked for three UN agencies for more than two decades and is a specialist writer on international organisations.

## CATHERINE BERTINI New head of World Food Programme

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# Philippine Farmers Seek to Revive Traditional Rice Varieties

by JC Calderon

FARMERS may have no reason to rejoice when the super-rice variety reaches the market five to eight years from now.

The rice strain, currently being developed by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), promises to yield 20 to 30% more than the current high yielding varieties (HYVs). Instead of being replanted in the traditional way, the rice will be sown broadcast, thus saving time and effort.

Genetic conservationists working with farmer groups in the Philippines, however, are not so thrilled. Groups like SIBAT (Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya — literally, Shoot of Science and Technology) are instead working to recover traditional seeds and promote organic farming.

While SIBAT and IRRI share one objective — to produce greater rice yields — they differ in strategy.

Using biotechnology, IRRI designs new seeds in laboratories using homogenous genetic strains. Although they are high-yielding, the rice varieties produced require large quantities of imported fertilizers and pesticides.

Worried about the dangers posed by using homogenous varieties, SIBAT's scientists seek to resurrect some of the 3,000 rice varieties used in the Philippines before the advent of IRRI's Green Revolution in the 1960s.

Today only five IRRI-developed varieties are commonly used, opening the country to pests like the highly-resistant tungro that wiped out the predominantly IR-8 rice crop in

seeds for planting and family consumption.

The key to success is farmers' organisation, says Philip Bontuyan, who handles SIBAT's seed conservation project.

With their organisations, it is easier to hold seminars stressing the need for genetic conservation. Collective decision-making and action are quicker too.

Eventually, SIBAT hopes the farmer organisations would take over the community seed banks.

SIBAT's member organisations in Lapu-lapu, Roxas and Butuan cities and in Dangcan town store between 30 and 89 varieties of rice as well as corn, herbs and legumes.

Meanwhile the Kilusan ng mga magsasaka sa Philippine (Philippine Peasant Movement) has initiated the inventory and characterisation of 150 traditional rice varieties.

Conservationists say that after 31 years, IRRI has made Asian farmers even more dependent on multinational seed fertiliser giant as well as biotechnological companies engaged in 'stealing' rice germplasm. They say the presence of research centre like the IRRI is part of the scheme of gene-poor industrialised countries to control seed varieties from the Third World.

Using germplasm from traditional seed varieties, these institutes develop new seeds. These are then patented by seed giants and are sold back to farmers at high prices. — Third World Network Features

# Greening of the Desert and Agricultural Promotion

AREAS of green grass and trees stretch out as far as the eye can see. Rolling hills, freshwater lakes and a scattering of wildlife complete a scene straight out of the US mid-western farmland.

Except that it isn't. It's in the heart of the Arabian peninsula where sandy stretches are being transformed into verdant fields capable of growing produce and ultimately attracting tourists. And this particular piece of 'desert mirage' is the Dubai Creek Golf Club, the region's second professional-size golf course, set to open at the end of the year.

Traditional perceptions of the Gulf as nothing but dry, desolate stretches of sand are being challenged by the oil-rich nations' rush to green their deserts.

The region's governments have channelled billions of dollars into projects to turn their arid desert region into farmlands and parks. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi, for instance, has spent millions of dollars on planting roadside palm trees that will be protected by miles of fencing.

farming sector comprising dairy farms. The Kuwaiti government is aggressively promoting agriculture.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, have dairy-producing facilities. The UAE is also a major exporter of strawberries

to parts of Europe. While most of the motivation for greening the desert is to combat the choking sandstorms whipped up by the wind, there is also a greater drive for self-sufficiency in food. The value of Arab food

imports — including countries like Sudan and Egypt, which have vast agricultural areas — will reach about US\$90 billion by the year 2000.

"It is very strange that Arabs import 80 per cent of their food needs," said an editorial in the UAE's Al Bayan newspaper.

Along with farming, tourism is one of the major non-oil sectors targeted for development as part of a policy of diversifying income resources. The UAE tourism industry is already growing at 25 per cent annually, and investments are being made to keep up with the growth.

The UAE has already spent US\$5 billion on farming and afforestation, planting millions of trees, constructing green belts around main cities and expanding modern irrigation.

It has turned about two million square metres of sandy desert into green parks and its farming projects include animal husbandry techniques like the artificial insemination of dairy cows.

For Dubai's new golf course, contractors flew in bermuda grass from the United States. The 80-hectare fairways will have to be watered with one million gallons of water in the summer to keep them green.

The contractors also dug six lakes, four of them with fresh water and stocked them with fish. Flocks of birds dot the green landscape.

The UAE proclaimed April 15 national tree day and teams

of civic workers took to the streets to plant trees and distribute saplings of residents as part of the campaign to turn the desert green.

Government officials and thousands of the trees would be planted in new areas and highways. In Abu Dhabi, the largest of the Emirates, some 30,000 saplings will be handed out to residents.

Sam Al Qubaisi, Abu Dhabi municipality director of agriculture and afforestation, said that booklets on how flowers grow in the desert will also be distributed free.



Kuwait, which is still busy rebuilding itself after the Gulf War, already has a growing

of 15 national tree day and teams