

## Tribals Want their Problems to be Addressed

THE United Nations General Assembly launched 1993 as the International Year of the Indigenous Peoples. The theme of the year was "Indigenous People — a New Partnership". Among other things, the year's activities attempted to further international co-operation between states and inter-governmental bodies to solve problems faced by the indigenous peoples, increase their participation in development projects that affect them, and raise public awareness about them. This special year for the indigenous people was certainly supposed to touch 300 million indigenous peoples living in 70 countries around the globe. But the question remains — how a solitary year could be able to address all their problems or was it able to generate an ongoing process to address the problems of the indigenous peoples gradually? Simply to say — what practical results did the year yield?

Like many other countries Bangladesh has indigenous people. Through different sources it is learnt that there are about two million tribal people living in Bangladesh. And like tribal peoples of other countries they do also have problems relating to land, language and culture. So, naturally UN's declaration had a positive effect on the mind of these people.

In response to the UN's call, the Tribal Welfare Association, an association for the tribal people of greater Mymensingh district, organized a ground conference on 20-21 Nov '93 at Shaheb Quarter field, adjacent to Circuit House in Mymensingh town.

This was a conference attended by the Garo, Hajong, Coah, Banai tribes living in the north-eastern part of the country. As Garos are the majority among all these tribes, the leadership management and the whole function was dominated by them. Mr. Promod Mankin MP, the chief coordinator and president of the Tribal Welfare

by Nikesh Das

Association presided over the inaugural session while Barrister Mainul Hossain, president of the Editorial Board of the Ittefaq Group of Publications was the chief guest.

On the second day of the conference, different articles presented by the intellectuals shed new light on various aspects of the tribal peoples living in this area. View were expressed about the past, present and future of the tribes living in greater Mymensingh district as well as elsewhere in the country.

At the end of the two-day conference, a declaration on behalf of the *advast* people living in greater Mymensingh and Sylhet districts expressed solidarity with the majority people for the development of the country. It stressed the need for an 'Advast Forum' comprising representatives from all the tribal groups living in the country. It also sought cooperation from all concerned to help restore the cultural heritages of the 25 lakh tribal people. The declaration urged the government to take initiative of forming a Ministry of Tribal Affairs to oversee the problems faced by the *advast* people in the country. At the same time it sought cooperation of all in solving them.

Deliberations at this conference and many publications related to tribal peoples, showed that like elsewhere in the world, land problem is the main problem of the *advast* people living in Bangladesh. Social discrimination is another kind of problem which affects a majority of *advast* people.

There is no doubt that the indigenous peoples are lagging far behind, in all respects, they must get a chance to develop their socio-economic conditions and pursue their own indigenous notions to their best flourishing.

Though the government did not officially observe or patron-

ize the Year of the Indigenous Peoples, but there is no denying the fact that Bangladesh do have *advast* people and they have problems. And the government cannot deny the need of a proper policy for ensuring the participation of the *advast* people in national development. Indeed for achieving a smooth development of the country, proper planning is a must from the government side in this end. Barrister Mainul Hossain rightly



Interview with  
Promod Mankin  
Chief Coordinator  
and President of Tribal  
Welfare Association

What was the aim of the conference?

As United Nations declared the year as the Year of the Indigenous People so we felt it our duty to observe it. It is necessary to focus our problems and make apparent our existence in front of the majority people of the country as well as the world.

Why the government did not cooperate with your effort to organize the conference in Bangladesh?

This is very sad that Bangladesh government did not cooperate with us, saying, "In Bangladesh the *advast* people have no problem." We are rather angry at the government's atti-

observed that no democratic government can deny the problems of the tribal people; only proper planning and their participation in the development process can ensure real development.

The observance of the year of the indigenous people could only be justified if all concerned took concerted efforts to ensure the rights of the *advast* people and, at the same time, most importantly, helped them find their own voice, to be able to fight their own causes.

tude. It shows the government has no interest for *advast* people. As they think we have no problems so we doubt whether they want our development or not?

What are the main problems of the *advast* people living in Bangladesh?

Our problem is that we are simply undeveloped. Such a condition itself is a problem. Along with this we have land and security problems and always we are in the apprehension of being cheated. Our existence is at stake as we have no participation in decision making which affects us much.

What was the success of your conference?

We were very successful in organizing the conference. Thousands of *advast* people participated in that. They expressed their determination to restore their own cultural heritage. At the same time they showed their interest for national development. I think it is our success.

Have you any plan for greater mass movement demanding the rights of the indigenous people?

After forming Tribal Welfare Association in 1977 we have been working, as far as possible, against all the injustices faced by the tribal people. We will continue the process democratically. But just at present we have no plan to organize mass movement. If the need arises in future, then we would think of it seriously.

## An Endless Wait

by G A Momin

For years, for decades I have been whispering my love to you  
From the twilighted days of my existence  
I have been pining for your love  
You listen to me and then only  
break in sly smiles saying,  
"Wait and wait for sometime more."

For countless days of countless years,  
I have kept the serenade of my lambent love  
for the foamy waves of a flowing river.  
The waves in turn rolled fast and whirled  
into smiling breakers slyly telling me,  
"Wait and wait for sometime more."

Day in day out I have been  
to the green fields of golden crop and  
whisper my love to them saying,  
"I adore you and I need you".  
But the green fields too console me saying,  
"We know, you love us  
we know, you need us  
But you have to wait for sometime more."

Then I hear a talking bird perched atop a tree nearby saying,  
"You have been tricked into tomfoolery by all of them.  
None of them really belongs to you.  
Nor will they ever belong to you,  
for belonging is always pre-empted by might and machination  
by greed and duplicity."  
I now know my naive love and adoration  
have taken me wide apart.

And I stand beside her,  
and the flowing river,  
and the green fields,  
with the prospect of an endless wait.

## To the Winner

by Gazi Sadeq

We tend to forgive  
and become forgetful  
when we win.

But remember  
the losers never forget —  
they keep on their efforts  
to ruin.

**C**ALLIGRAPHY — Urdu calligraphy to be precise — may not yet be a dead art form in India. But it is dying a slow death.

The invasion of computers, for one thing, has very much to do with this disappearing act. For another, the production of Urdu books, which heretofore afforded calligraphers plenty of work, is on the decline and not many people are buying them.

In addition to this lack of readership, calligraphers receive practically starvation wages: hardly more than Rs 1,500 a month. That is less than a hundred American dollars.

All this plus the fact that Urdu is a complicated script in this day of simplified and fast communication systems is slowly sounding the death knell of calligraphy in India.

According to 60-year-old calligrapher Anis Siddiqui, one of the nation's well-known practitioners of the art, most of his ilk are resigned to the fact that their calling will soon be a thing of the past.

"The Urdu language itself is dying," he says. "Even present-day handwritings are poor and

## URDU CALLIGRAPHY

by Arjuna

almost illegible, and typewriting is totally inadequate."

Mr Siddique says calligraphy was born when man began writing, with red pens on clay tablets in ancient times. It was 1,300 years ago that calligraphy became the only mode for expressing man's artistic instincts in the Islamic world.

It is a complicated script, he says, with a 50-letter alphabet and strokes with half sounds, and even quarter sounds. Thick and thin lines denote different sounds and the placement of dots and letters above or below the straight line conveys different meanings.

Urdu was the court language of India till the British Raj ended in 1947. Everyone had to learn Urdu if you were connected with the courts as a

practising lawyer or as a client. Otherwise, you are lost. Urdu then flourished and Urdu poetry was a great art practised by many literary men.

was confined mostly to books and magazines. Not much artistic work is being done, which could contribute considerably to a renaissance of sorts in the language and its mode of writing.

Trained calligraphers, those who chose to stick it out in India, are now mostly employed in advertising companies. Also, some new work is being done to simplify the intricate styles of writing so that it could be learned quickly. Mr Siddiqui and other calligraphers of note are at present working out a new reference line for calligraphers, both for veterans and beginners.

For instance, from a straight horizontal line, which is currently in use, the group plans to change it so it runs at an angle of 63 degrees. This, they say, will revolutionise the writing of Urdu because it will eliminate many nuances of the language and make it easier to learn.

There is, however, still hope for the calligraphers to practise their craft, computer geniuses, for example, know nothing about calligraphy.

— Dephneus Asta



Cultural presentation by Garo girls in the conference.



Garos people wearing traditional dresses attended the conference.

## The British Council Language Matters

### The Intro

Today's column continues our spelling versus pronunciation exercises. Remember the tips about using your dictionary.

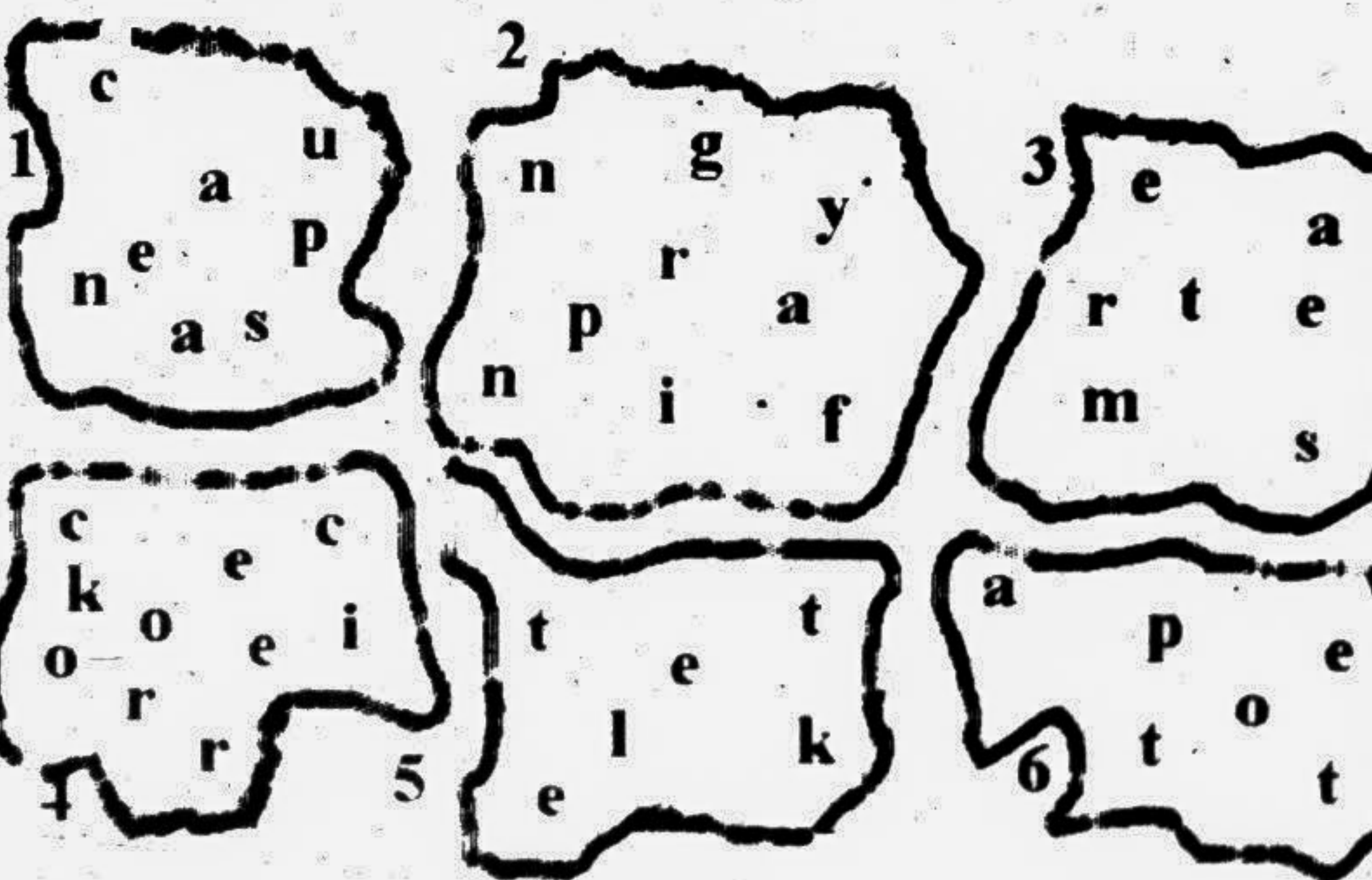
There is also a Wobbly Words puzzle and a Word Processor. Finally, there is a short grammar worksheet to practise some verb forms.

### The Word Processor.....



### Wobbly Words

Try this word puzzle. In each shape the letters are jumbled up. Put them in the correct order. What do all of them have in common? Be careful. Some of the shapes contain more than one word.



1. .... 2. .... 3. .... 4. ....  
5. .... 6. ....

### Grammar Games

Put the correct form of the verb in each of the following sentences.

- There is no point in ..... about it. (think)
- Larry insists on ..... to the cinema alone. (go)
- They are accusing her of ..... the diamonds. (steal)
- They tried to stop him from ..... the house. (leave)
- She apologised for ..... me waiting so long. (keep)

Can you see any pattern that can help you in other situations?

### Spelling vs. Pronunciation

Many English words contain what we call 'silent letters' — that is, letters which are not pronounced:

e.g. in 'know' the /k/ is silent

This can be a big problem for those who learn English through the written medium — unless you stop to look up the pronunciation of each new word you meet, you will probably — quite reasonably — 'learn' an unacceptable pronunciation of some words.

- Look at the words below and decide which, if any, of the letters are silent. Cross out these letters. A good dictionary will help you.

know	schedule	cave
mechanic	archaeology	have
February	honest	climbing
salmon	sign	ghost
secretary	raspberry	scent
knowledge	guest	thumb
tongue	programme	whole
receipt	cupboard	island
thought	which	witch

- Look at the words again. Are they really silent — that is, do they make no difference to the pronunciation of the words (as in 'know'), or do they give you an idea how to pronounce the neighbouring letters (as in 'guess' or 'quest')?
- Can you think of other words which have 'silent' letters? e.g. knife, comb, thorough, when.....

Answers to Grammar Games:  
1. thinking 2. going 3. stealing 4. leaving 5. keeping 6. keeping — The rule is that after a preposition the verb will be in the -ing form. Be careful with the expression 'I look forward to seeing you'. Here the 'to' is a preposition so it follows this rule.  
Answers to Wobbly Words:  
1. saucer 2. fry 3. pan 4. steamer 5. rice cooker 6. kettle 7. teapot — They're all found in the kitchen.