

Retrogressive Move against NGOs

A malicious concerted campaign against the PVDO (Private Voluntary Development Organisation) popularly known as NGOs, activities is being carried out across large parts of the country. Misinformed and misguided religious fundamentalists have joined their hands with the village *jotedars* and money-lenders in resisting the development programmes of the NGOs. In the past they used to set wild rumours racing, now they are resorting to issuing *fatwas* in the name of religion. In fact, the fanatics have continued the two-pronged propaganda attack along with the actual physical violence, assault, arson, loot and ransacking.

According to an article published in this newspaper's February 26th issue, 40 BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee)-run primary schools have been set on fire, 200 more looted in recent times besides the NGO's attempt to open a number of schools were frustrated. Another report published in a Bangla daily is categorical about the aggressive campaign pushed through by the *fatwallahs* in the rural society. From Bogra to Barisal these forces against development, progress, truth, justice and humanity have been busy spreading a most vicious propaganda campaign. Blatant lies and distortions of religious teachings are so rampant that these *fatwallahs* are actually posing a serious threat both to education and the development works carried on by the NGOs.

No less than 200 non-formal primary schools with an enviable record both in terms of bringing into the fold of primary education the children of the poorest of families and their retention for the entire course, are about to close down in the face of consistent opposition. Even the health and banking services rendered by BRAC, Grameen Bank and other NGOs have been boycotted through a public pronouncement of *fatwas*. However, the main accusation brought against BRAC in particular, is that they are engaged in converting the students, teachers and all other beneficiaries to Christianity. Nothing can be a more blatant and outrageous lie and yet the self-appointed elements are so poisoning the minds of the unsuspecting simple people.

Why are these fundamentalist groups going all out against the NGOs? The answer to this question may be had in the challenge thrown by the NGOs through their programmes of empowering the poorest of the poor and the weak, women in particular, of our society. The perverted and malicious propagandists know that no fabrication other than Christianization will serve their purpose as nicely as they would desire. The *jotedars* and money-lenders have suddenly found that their interests also meet at a point with those of the *fatwallahs*. So the two vested interest groups have waged a battle against the agencies responsible for giving the poor segment of society a taste of economic independence and self-respect.

Now the question is how the retrogressive forces have been left with enough room for their heinous manoeuvrability? The administration seems to have ignored the zealots' crusade for disinformation and misinterpretation of religion. In the name of Islam, these fanatics are bent on taking the country back to the middle age. They are using religion for serving their own ends and therefore, should be made accountable for their action. In this regard the Islamic scholars should clarify the situation through an objective interpretation of religion. If they take a stand on the issue and condemn the motivated and slanderous campaign of the perverted religious leaders they will have done service to the nation, not to mention the progressive religion, that is Islam.

Israel's only Option

The Palestinian wound after the Hebron massacre has been so deep that ingratiating remarks won't just heal it. The international community led by the United States on the question needed first to accept the fact that it would never be the same again with the Palestinians and then only could it meaningfully go about repairing the damage by some concrete actions. The sign is being read at last of a positive development in this regard. A proposal for an armed international presence in the Israeli-occupied territories has reportedly received US backing at the UN and a Security Council resolution is expected on this.

There are two reasons why this should be regarded as a welcome happening. In the first place, the Israelis have abysmally failed to protect Palestinian lives on the West Bank and Gaza strip, a fact that is underlined not only by the latest murderous assault but also by what followed and had preceded it.

Even after the peace accord of last year and all sorts of negotiations having followed in the long-drawn interim period for establishing phase-wise Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories, the Israeli authorities have remained blind-folded to the security requirement of the Palestinians. They have not met their part of the bargain. The notable thing is that Tel Aviv has even braved embarrassing Washington which had brokered the accord staking its goodwill on it. If safety to life and limb is elusive even under a contractual agreement signed in presence of the most powerful country, the USA, with the whole world watching and keeping faith with it, then the only remedy seems to be taking away the security obligations from the Israeli hands and placing these with a UN force.

The other rationale for this step lies in the fact that the credibility of the peace process has hit the lowest point in the wake of the Hebron outrage. The Palestinian leadership cannot therefore be blamed for refusing to sit across the table with the Israelis unless the vastly changed climate is rendered minimally congenial for the purpose. To live down the adverse effects of the Hebron massacre the Yitzhak Rabin government has tried out a hackneyed formula that all occupation forces apply when their backs are to the wall: It has announced compensation to the victim families and ordered release of a specified number of Palestinian prisoners and the arrest of some Jewish leaders.

Basically since the Israeli authorities have proved untrustworthy in providing security to the Palestinians, what now remains to be done to steer the peace process to its goal is to have a UN mandated force secure day-to-day normality while the PLO and the Israeli authorities went about the business of establishing autonomy for the Palestinians, as a precursor to the Jewish vacation of the occupied territories including Jerusalem.

ACCORDING to an announcement made by the US Justice Department, a former CIA officer and his wife have been arrested on charges of spying for Russia. Held without bail pending further court action were Aldrich Hazen Ames, a 52 year former chief of the Soviet branch of the CIA's counter-intelligence unit, and his Colombian born wife, now a citizen of the United States. US officials said the couple, arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), had been charged with spying for the Soviet Union until its demise in 1991 and then for Russia since then. He reportedly received a sum of \$1.5 million in pay-off.

Espionage against actual or potential enemies or even friendly states is not new. Such activities, considered essential for the security of states, have been going on from the ancient times. Intelligence gathering and allied activities became a major pre-occupation of the rival super powers during the height of the cold war. Indeed, CIA and KGB became household words not only in America and Russia but even in the rest of the world. Spy movies and thrillers became hits. But the end of the cold war and dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about a fundamental change in the world scene. Charles Krauthammer, a Washington Post columnist, described the changed circumstances very succinctly when he said, 'The Soviet Union was a mortal enemy, unrelentingly hostile because it defined its interests as intrinsically opposed to those of the West. It held deeply that there were two opposing camps in a world with only room for one. Russia today is far different. It is not ideologically hostile to the West. Properly speaking, it cannot be said to have any ideology at all. It does, however, have national interests. Some are compatible with America's, some are not.'

The United States appreciates the fact that the Russians are marring a front line against Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia. But in some other areas signs of con-

The Ames Affair: Beginning of a New Phase in Russo-American Relations

American taxpayers have been providing liberal doses of financial assistance to Russia. They must have been dismayed that instead of being grateful for the help, the bankrupt Russians are secretly spying on them by infiltrating the CIA and perhaps by paying the spy with their own money!

Conflict of interest are already visible. The US does not like, for example, the Russians to meddle in the Baltic republics. Despite such differences in these peripheral issues, Russia and its president Yeltsin were seen as important allies in the American thrust for extending democracy in the free market economic system around the world. Even more important, the United States have been seeking the dismantling of the Russian nuclear arsenal as a major policy objective. The western world, led by the United States, lost no time in seizing the opportunity to advance the cause of economic reforms in Russia. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development was hurriedly established to provide credit to Russia and other democratic regimes in the region. The World Bank and the IMF have also got themselves involved in a big way in the transition of these economies from a centrally planned to a market driven system. Large-scale bilateral assistance have started to pour in with a view to propping up the shaky Russian economy as well as the equally shaky Yeltsin regime. Despite massive budget deficit and domestic pressure to cut down government expenditure both Bush and Clinton have been most generous in providing economic aid to Russia. In fact president Clinton not only continued Bush's policy but went a step further when he decided to stand by Yeltsin even after the latter's debacle in the parliamentary election. Indeed some people thought that Clinton had unwisely put all his eggs in the Yeltsin basket.

The Ames affair must have been a rude shock to the Clinton administration. Having

done so much to bolster Yeltsin's grip on power, Clinton may not have expected this kind of a stab in the back. Clearly he was very angry when he said, 'We think it is important that appropriate action be taken. If they do not, we will take action and we will take it quickly.' After all, American taxpayers have been providing liberal doses of financial assistance to Russia. They must have been dismayed that instead of being grateful for the help, the bankrupt Russians

the CIA team. The United States, in a series of formal and informal exchanges with the Russians over the last four days, has asked that several steps be taken both to lessen the harm done to US intelligence operations and to signal that the Cold War era hostilities are over, even if intelligence gathering at some level continues. Russian deputy foreign minister Grigori Mamedov is visiting Washington to close the chapter and perhaps heal the wound.

century Lenin and his successors merely continued the Czarist policy. Russia should therefore be treated as a potential superpower with expansionist designs, at least in its neighbouring regions.

The possession of nuclear weapons by Russia, even if the country is going through economic turmoil, makes it a formidable military power. Its superpower status may have been eroded by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact but its human resources, geo-political situation, and a large, well trained and well equipped and highly sophisticated army cannot be ignored. Russian troops continue to be stationed in practically all the former Soviet republics. Initially the presence of these troops did not attract much attention on the assumption that these forces would be withdrawn in due course when alternative facilities would be ready for them in Russia. Recent events clearly show that these troops may never leave their current locations. One by one the former Soviet republics are being brought within the fold. The cases of Belarus and Ukraine illustrate the process. Recent events suggest that economic compulsions are beginning to wear off the euphoria of independence for most of these countries. Most of the Central Asian republics have been plagued by internal dissensions and conflicts as well as economic problems. The initial impression that these republics will find new orbits has not been borne out by the recent developments. Neither Turkey nor Pakistan is in a position to replace Russia in meeting their economic and security needs. Inevitably they are gravitating back towards Moscow.

Russia today is in no condition to embark on a policy of aggressive expansionism. Its economy is in shambles. Its political power structure is shaky. The conflict between the president and the parliament has not yet been resolved. However, despite these internal difficulties, Russia has not suspended its plans for the future. That can be the only explanation for continuing the espionage system inherited from the Soviet Union. Once Russia is able to put its house in order it will be in a much stronger position to resume its global political and military role. Indeed the role that Russia has been playing in the Bosnian conflict clearly shows that though it may be troubled by inflation, unemployment and shortages of goods, its diplomatic clout is still very formidable.

It is against this background that the Ames affair has sent a shock wave across America. Suddenly the American people have come to realize that a great power may change its ideology but it still remains a great power; its military goals may change but its potential to intervene remains in tact. In fact it continues to play its proper role which is consistent with its history as well as its strategic situation in the world. In Bosnia the Russians have now intervened on the ground and at the peace table they are on the side of the Serbs. The Americans have taken up, somewhat reluctantly, the cause of the Bosnian Muslims. Two great powers, two conflicting interests. The diplomatic honeymoon is over. In concluding this article I cannot resist the temptation to quote Charles Krauthammer who, writing in the Washington Post said, 'The Ames affair did not cause the honeymoon's end. It only marks the end. It is a minor event. But it signals the truly major event playing out today in Bosnia, tomorrow in Crimea: two great powers, after a momentary embrace, going their own way.' Thus begins a new chapter in the relation between two great powers.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

are secretly spying on them by infiltrating the CIA and perhaps by paying the spy with their own money! Ignoring the fact that it was Bush who initiated the policy the Republicans are already sharpening their knives to attack Clinton for his failure to foresee the Russian threat to American security. Defending his policy towards Russia Clinton declared that US assistance to Russia and the other former Soviet states was intended to advance American national interests — such as reducing the nuclear threat to the United States, promoting democracy and developing a market economy. When such aid 'is no longer in our national interest we should stop it', he said. For the time being, he insisted, US assistance should be maintained.

American officials who had gone to Moscow to discuss the matter with their Russian counterparts did not come back satisfied. In fact Moscow was reportedly rather cool to

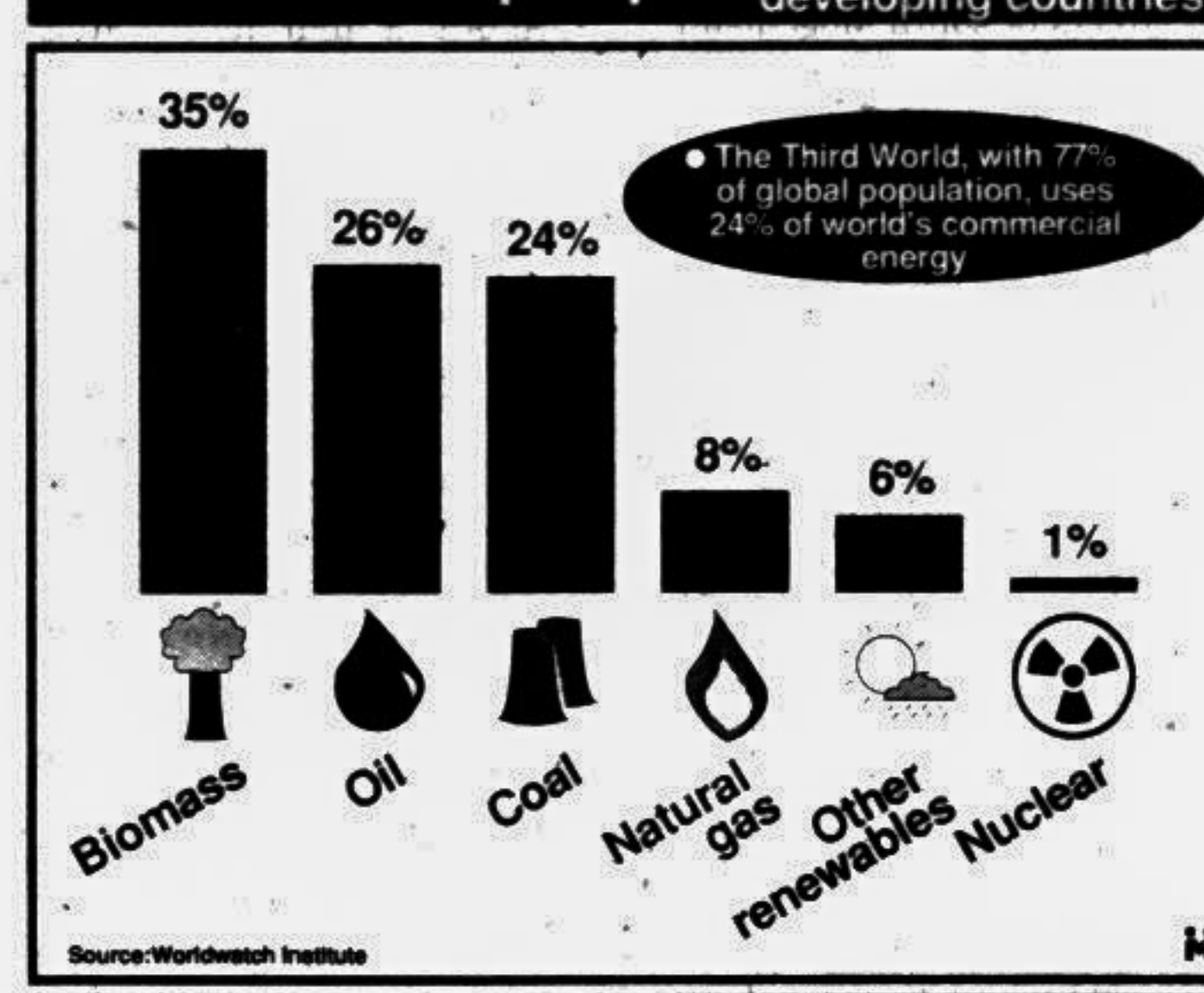
No one believes that the rift between Russia and the US created by the spy scandal will be allowed to widen. Neither nation wants it. Eventually some sort of formula will be found to draw a curtain on the episode. The CIA in particular does not want a lengthy Senate hearing where its operations might be subjected to the glare of intense public scrutiny. The Russians will not, in all probability, like to jeopardize the flow of badly needed American dollar. However, even if a lid is put over the spy episode, uneasiness in the United States about Russian motives and goals will persist. It may be mentioned here that a section of American scholars, including such veterans as Henry Kissinger, have been calling for a reappraisal of American policy towards Russia. They recall the lessons of history in pointing out that an aggressive and expansionist approach towards its neighbours has been a distinctive feature of Russian policy all through the 19th

Indonesia Takes the Hi-tech rather than the Low-cost Road

Stephen Carr writes from Bandung, Indonesia

Indonesia is expected to start work soon on the first of what may be a dozen nuclear power plants on the heavily populated islands of Java and Bali. The area is prone to volcanic eruptions and the country has abundant sources of conventional fuel. But there is comparatively little debate about the planned programme.

Power to the people: Energy use in developing countries



nuclear operation. In Indonesia, the body in charge of ensuring the safe transport of dangerous materials, putting out tenders and overseeing construction of nuclear plants will be the National Atomic Energy (BATAN).

BATAN is very much a Habibie creation, and Habibie is regarded by many as the most powerful of President Suharto's ministers. While he retains such power, it is hard to envisage BATAN acting as a truly independent body. Such an agency needs the technical ability, authority and freedom to order an immediate shutdown of a nuclear power station in the event of an accident.

Tenders for building the first plant will be invited in early 1995. It will be constructed by foreign companies.

Firms from France, Germany and Japan have already expressed an interest. Russia may also be invited to bid for a contract.

The successful companies will have to employ hundreds of local contractors, which has caused some concern. In conventional engineering projects, endemic corruption and nepotism often make it difficult to ensure the most competent operators get the right contracts.

Also common is a willingness to compromise high safety standards by cutting costs, or rushing jobs to meet deadlines. An estimated 20 per cent of the cost of any large construction project in Indonesia goes in bribes. The Mount Merapi plant is unlikely to be an exception.

The site is itself controversial.

slat. Java is one of the most densely populated islands on earth, home to more than 100 million people.

In addition, Java is located in the world's second most active earthquake zone, right over four tectonic plates, or shifting slabs of the earth's crust. As a result, Java has 20 active volcanoes. Earthquakes can reach high levels of intensity: up to 8 on the Richter Scale.

But Japan is also in a highly active seismic area, and operates 36 nuclear plants.

There has been some domestic opposition to the nuclear programme. But in a country where it is an offence to express hostility towards the government, dissenting voices are few. One criticism is that electricity from conventional coal-fired power stations costs 4.5 US cents per kilowatt hour, while nuclear generated electricity would cost nearly 8 cents.

Only the Forum for the Environment (WAHLI) has campaigned, on the issue. It printed 25,000 leaflets setting out its arguments against the nuclear plan, and organised a seminar in Jakarta to discuss its point of view.

The seminar was not allowed to take place. Lack of a police permit to stage the event was the official reason given for the ban.

The government is also sensitive to foreign criticism. An Australian journalist who wrote unflatteringly about the country's nuclear ambitions was deported.

Although Canberra has said it would be willing to sell Indonesia uranium to fuel its reactors, the Australian media has been less than deferential

on the issue, both to its own and to the Indonesian government. Reports have appeared on the 'folly' of Indonesia's nuclear option. A foreign technical expert was quoted as saying: 'When Indonesia builds a nuclear power plant, it's time to get out of the country.'

There has been little debate about whether there are ulterior motives behind going nuclear. Agung Kiriadi, spokesman of the Forum for the Environment, said he believed the plan to acquire nuclear technology went back to the time of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, and contained a hidden agenda. Once the technology was mastered 'it is not so far', he said, from obtaining the know-how 'to get nuclear weapons'.

None of Indonesia's immediate neighbours — Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei or Papua New Guinea — have expressed any disquiet over the nuclear plan, although they would certainly suffer the consequences of a nuclear mishap. The first three, along with Indonesia, belong to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), an organisation whose members do not comment on each other's policies. Papua New Guinea also shares this convention in regard to Indonesia.

So Habibie's plans to build a reactor, the first of up to 12 in Java and Bali, look like they will go ahead. None of the neighbours object. Australia is looking forward to its receipts from future uranium sales. And there will be no shortage of Western companies, in search of profits, willing to build it. — GEMINI NEWS

Stephen Carr is a freelance writer specialising on South East Asia.

OPINION

Politics and Parliament

Shahabuddin Mahtab

There was a saying that politics was the noblest of public service. The Chief Election Commissioner of India, Mr T N Seshan has termed politics as three 'C's', i.e., Cash, Crime and Corruption. Albert Schweitzer has defined human values as, 'You must give some time to your fellow men. Even if it is a little thing, do something for those who need help, something for which you get no pay, but privilege of doing it. For remember you do not live in a world all your own. Your brothers are here too.'

It is through political activism of the highest breed that a politician can serve his fellow beings, and ensure the highest form of social service. A parliamentarian or a minister can serve the country most, if he so desires. A poor country like Bangladesh needs the services of people who place service before self.

able discussions, explanations, transparency and accountability. The opposition party's news comments, statements are to be respected an listened to or else the democratic culture simply does not exist. The Awami League has placed many suggestions, bills, proposals in the house which were constructive in nature, but were not welcomed by the treasury bench. Many other important bills and proposals that were tabled in the house are perhaps languishing with the Committees.

The most important business of the MPs is to be in the house when the parliament is in session. The most important persons of the house, the leader of the opposition must have a commanding presence in the parliament.

It was clearly spelled out by all the three alliances in November 1990 that the electronic media would be placed under a fully autonomous body. It continues to be under the Ministry of Information, and mainly the activities of the government are covered, the media coverage of the Awami League or others' activities is almost non-existent or at best meagre. In a democratic civil society, there must be a free flow of information and this is only possible when the electronic media is freed from governmental control. Although it is late in the day, the government can still free the electronic media for a free flow of news and information like the BBC, whose credibility is very high. The image of the BNP government will be greatly enhanced, if the right step is taken now.

Ministry of Industries

Sir, 'A chip of the old block' — runs the popular adage. Sometimes, however, it appears the reversed rule is also true, as happened on an occasion in the case of BSCIC and the Ministry of Industries!

BSCIC refused to furnish replies to letters sent to it, did not care to follow the rule of law, did not bother to implement the decisions/orders meted out by the highest authority of the Govt. As such the matters were conveyed to the Ministry of Industries through letter No. Personal/N.H./19 dt. 09 July, 1985. Silence reigned! On non-receipt of any reply reminders kept being sent. In mid-1989, the Ministry merely asked for additional papers regarding the matter. Those were punctually supplied. After that absolute silence, in spite

of reminders which kept being sent, the number ten of such being sent on 21st October, 1993. No ray of hope having appeared, help was sought from the Human Rights Organisations, who according to United Nations' Universal Declaration Section 3 and 5 (Bangladesh Constitution's Article Nos 32,35) accepted the representation. The Ministry of Industries was requested to look into the matter and to take an early action through their letter Nos. Bamak (Legal aid) 956/93, dt 15.11.93 and No. CA/6227/93/6085 dt 24.11.93 of Bangladesh Human Rights Commission and Bangladesh Human Rights Bastabayan Sangha respectively. In the letters, apart from the personal matter related to the rights of employees, and the question of economic uplift of the country were dealt with. But what

happened? Silence continued to this day!

At the time of an autocratic regime, the rule of law may not prevail, but under the democratic system of govt., how does a Ministry continue to remain so undemocratic?

Nazmul Huda
38 Siddheswari Road, Dhaka

Saving the sub-cultural entities

Sir, It is popularly believed that some 'supernatural power' created life, either with Adam-Eve or with gradual evolution of organic matters into homo sapiens — man — who have developed their habitat in what is known as the planet earth today.

Supporting the theories on the advancement of civilization through time periods, as enunciated by the researchers of various disciplines with varied insights, most believe that

it is predominantly the technological progress that influenced the behaviour of a segment of mankind qualified with distinct dialect, customs, appliances, and governance — broadly referred to as a nation.

In this human development process, those who lagged behind in time at different places have been differentiated by virtue of their appreciable sub-cultural lifestyles contrasted with that of a nation and are now identified as 'indigenous people'.

All continents are still inhabited by a few millions fast extinguishing indigenous people who are struggling to conserve their unique heritages in the face of threats of invasion of their societal individuality despite the UN declaration on the rights of the indigenous people of the world.

M Rahman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh