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Endangered indigenous

The Garos, people of sorrow ! Yes, we are....

I am very amazed reading two little letters in the Daily Star regarding on the Garos of Modhupur forest. Thank you so much Mr. Shah Mustaque Ahmed and Dr. David Fussell for expressing solidarity with the rights of the Garo people. For being a member of Garo community, I am very anxious about the future of Modhupur Garos. Only God knows when the situation would turn to normal for Modhupur Garos. But I like to tell my countrymen very frankly "Bangladesh is not only for the Bangalis". Is there any country where everyone speaks the same language, belongs to the same race, and shares the same culture, beliefs and traditions? Practically speaking none, is the likely answer to this question.

The Garo new generations ask, "Who are we? It is generally considered that indigenous peoples, like the Garos, are the original inhabitants of Bangladesh on which they have lived from time immemorial. The Garos have stable ethnic, religious and linguistic traits, which are not those of the majority of population in the country. At present the Garo way of life is almost threatened in the midst of a vast majority Muslim population. It is because, our religions are culture religions. This means that religion is bound up closely with the way we are in the world -- with our family life, our sense of identity and our national histories. We Asians do not separate religion from our social, political, economic and personal lives. The partition of Indian sub-continent had happened in 1947, according to the two-nation theory of Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Till now, religion in politics is very common in South Asian countries national politics. After the partition how were the Garos in Pakistan? And after the emergence of Bangladesh, what is the present state of

their living? Many inquisitive minds of Garo older generations always try to compare with the past and the present. It is saying, those who fail to learn from history are doomed to relieve it.

Now we are in to the journey of third millennium. Behind our living, we have a long history and in front of us a big future. The Garo new generation does not have any nostalgic longings like the older generations. In the clock-dominated world they are always busy with discovering future. Some of the Garos might feel much pride for their education. Some of them might feel satisfied in their hearts for the good number of literacy rate in Bangladesh. Now for the Garo's education means reading, writing and solving arithmetic in Bengali medium. Garo children never get any chance to learn their own language in school. It is very difficult for our younger generations to know the history of Garos in Bangladesh. If we don't understand our past, how can we deal with the present or plan our future? What will you say to your children? Then what will you teach them? Present education system of the country has been designed to draw all people in mainstream nationalism. But we must admit our differences in ethnic or national identity, in culture, language or religion.

"All individuals and groups have the right to be different, to consider themselves as different and to be regarded as such" [Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (UNESCO, 1978)].

Sergius S Marak
Southern Baptist Mission, Sarodaganj, Gazipur

Communicative Language Teaching: Misunderstood!

It is a pleasure to see that an academic issue like 'Communicative Language Teaching' has triggered such a warm debate in public. This shows the degree of our concern for a good education system, which no doubt will help usher in better learning and teaching

situations in future. Considering the extent to which the debate on 'Communicative English' has rolled along to date, it is clear that downfall of our students' grammatical

proficiency in English is the prime reason behind the grudge against 'Communicative English'. The charge may be framed as such -- from the time of the introduction of 'Communicative English' in our curriculum our students are showing a very poor performance in grammar skills as grammar is no more taught and assessed. Now let us see where

the real problem lies. It may be noted at first that all along the letters of Dr. Alam, Mr. Momin and Mr. Azizul Haque (published on DS July 07, August 02 and August 6 respectively) a major misunderstanding seems to have crippled, all of them are using curriculum/syllabus and method interchangeably. Dr. Alam, for example, says at the start of his letter "...curriculum...has undergone massive change" and terming it 'a complete flop' he denounces 'Communicative English'. Mr. Momin, on the other hand, blames 'Communicative English' because now grammar is not taught and assessed forgetting that teaching and assessing grammar are the tasks of syllabus to determine and not of a method. And lastly, Mr. Azizul Haque wishes 'communicative method of teaching English will be stopped -- and a new curriculum will be introduced' that said what he proposes is not an alternative method but a syllabus. We should draw a clear line between curriculum/syllabus and

a method (they are so different in nature and objectives that there is hardly any scope for saying I meant); the former (broadly) indicating 'what' to be taught and the latter 'how' to be taught. So if grammar is no more taught and assessed with consequent impact on students' efficiency in English the responsibility goes on to the curriculum or syllabus and not on a method. So we may call for a change of curriculum and/or syllabus and not a method (though a method is intricately related to curriculum/syllabus). For the present debacle of English proficiency and the confusion that has so far ensued, the NCTB is, however, largely to blame. The introduction of their new curriculum with hardly any focus on grammar was simultaneous with their prescription of 'Communicative English' which may lead people to believe that grammar does not have a place in this approach to language teaching. 'Communicative English' certainly allows grammar but the tech-

niques of teaching and assessing grammar according to this method, are no doubt, different from that of 'Grammar-Translation Method'. This might be illustrated here but the space does not allow to. One may wonder if the 'old method' could ensure a good foundation in grammar what is the need for introducing a new one. The answer is, even if we take for granted that the 'old method' could ensure a foundation in grammar it was not enough. The students need to use this skill in their real life situations. Knowing the rules of swimming does not ensure that one will be able to swim. One needs both to know and to do and the 'time-tested' method has nothing to say on the latter aspect. Mathematically, if the 'old method' is equal to grammar then 'Communicative English' is equal to grammar plus use.

Now, I wish to refer to a point that Mr. Momin has made saying 'hundreds of prominent English scholars came out through that old system of English teaching'. No doubt, our country has seen though not hundreds but some English scholars and again as I said in my letter, they could do well in English chiefly on their own efforts. And moreover, if the 'old system' dates back to the time earlier than 1971 there are other issues to consider, not only a classroom language teaching method. Mr. Azizul Haque's proposal of involving school teachers in their own affairs is, however, well justified. But such a venture without first ensuring their proper training and to the complete exclusion of experts may prove to be dangerous.

In fine, I should not be taken simply as a staunch supporter of one method or another. All I care for is a way that can guarantee optimum language learning. In considering this way of teaching, we cannot afford to forget that we have embarked upon changed global circumstances where the need for cross-cultural communication is felt more than ever before. True, for numerous limitations our country often cannot rise to the occasion. Still, we should insist on going ahead.

Md. Zahid Akter
Asst. Professor, Leading University, Sylhet

Bangladesh cricket team

Bangladesh cricket team just concluded their series against the mighty Australians. Like everybody, I also was confused about their performance there. But thanks to our cricketers and the new coach Dave Whatmore as they at least tried to resist the Australian attack. Though they lost both the test and ODI series, they were able to show the rest of the cricket world that they have the potential, they have the ability to do even better than this.

So we should not lose heart. We should keep faith on them. Definitely one day they will bring glory. What we will have to do now is to wait and give them more time to grow more confidence.

Nazmus Saquib
Mayakanan, Dhaka

Planning for water and referendum on gas

Water has been an outstanding issue between Bangladesh and India for a long time now. Both the countries have been trying to hammer out their differences in pertinent areas but no significant breakthrough is yet in sight. It is hoped that the countries concerned would strike a sustainable and mutually beneficial deal on water sharing in the nearest future.

The global forecast regarding Bangladesh's water situation is not encouraging. The country's vulnerability to water disaster (I would like to call it like that) is relatively high. But Bangladesh is not doing enough to remedy the situation at this stage. The country needs to identify its water related challenges and opportunities in light of requirements. It should assess periodically: the effects of climate and ecological changes (often unnoticed or undetected) on its water resources; the economic, social, political, territorial and developmental impacts of water resources on its well-being both at present and in the future; and the viability of evolving policy, engineering and technology options for bringing about improvements in the country's water situation; to mention a few.

Bangladesh needs a comprehensive, people-centred and result-oriented "National Water Plan" for managing its water resources (both existing and potential) in a more efficient and effective manner. The plan should contain, among other things, a sub plan called "National Water Contingency Plan" to deal with

water security and water related emergencies.

The country needs to work out strategies as to: how to reduce its dependency on water from India? how to improve say, seasonal water situations in relevant areas of Bangladesh? how to ensure sustainable development in affected areas, both existing and potential, in the event of say, a total stoppage of the flow of water from India due to natural causes or otherwise? and, how to prepare the affected people for a change in life or living situation? I am contemplating the above change because a strategy to minimize or eliminate the water problem of affected areas might require the people (of those areas) to change the means of their livelihoods from say, agricultural activities to industrial activities (including cottage industries) either wholly or partly, full time or part-time. Bangladesh can seek the support of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Bank (WB) and other donors for supplementing its effort towards a proper management of its water resources. The bottom line is: water management should be accorded a competing priority in the development dimension of Bangladesh.

Dr. M. S. Haq
New York

Biriani for the BCL boys in DU

Bangladesh is always in the news for weird things. It was in the BBC news couple of years back that Bangladeshi students protest for right to cheat on exams. And now we see the fighting between the students of the JCD and BCL in Dhaka University, finally general strike and treating these political activists and future ministers with *kachchi biriani* by the Dhaka University Vice Chancellor.

Which direction we are going? How long Bangladesh will continue such abnormal things.

Always Bangladesh is in the bottom line of all economic indicators, but in one, Bangladesh is always on the top, at least for last two years -- as the most corrupt country in the world.

It seems that no research, no innovation but being a student leader is much profitable in Dhaka University, at least the VC will treat you with *kachchi biriani*.

Sayed Rahman
KY, USA

Banning of polythene shopping bags: An alternate view

In the recent past polythene shopping bags have been banned in Bangladesh. Somehow the ban was widely supported both by the press and a section of the public. In fact, the press hyped it up so much that it became almost impossible for anyone to offer a different viewpoint against the ban. Now that the matter has settled down, some comments about the ban may be worthwhile.

Two points were highlighted for banning the shopping bags: a. Polythene shopping bags cause health hazards.

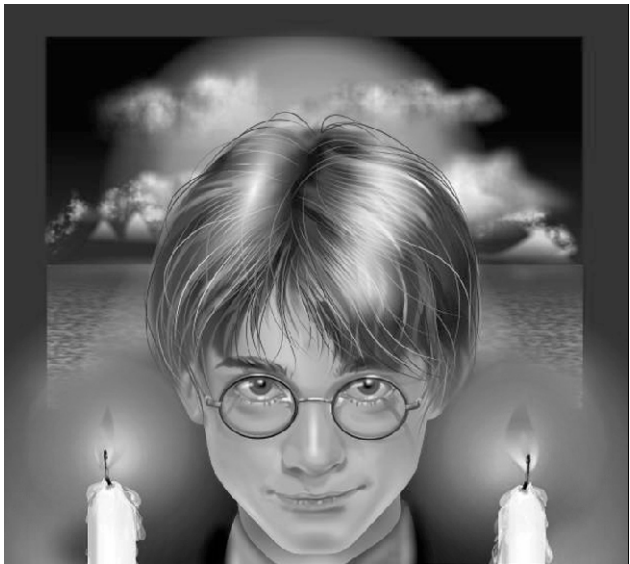
b. Polythene shopping bags are not biodegradable and as such clog drains and sewers.

Now the point arises as to who is qualified to declare a substance to be a health hazard. The obvious answer that comes to ones mind is the Ministry of Health and people from medical profession. It is difficult to recall whether any such declaration was made before banning the items either by the Ministry of Health and/or people from medical profession. About clogging of drains and sewers, agencies responsible for keeping these clear are WASA and municipalities. These agencies are not reported to have had much complaints about the bags, at least, not to the extent of banning the bags.

It was definitely not the most important issue of the time. Then why so much of hype was created by the Ministry of Environment and the press? It remains a mystery as to who has benefited from the ban of the shopping bags.

Let us see how the ban has affected the public. The poly-shopping bag manufacturing can perhaps be termed as a labour-intensive cottage industry. The industry used to provide employment to thousands of people including distributors, traders, printers, vendor's etc. According to one estimate about ten thousand people lost their livelihood because of the ban. Now the shoppers often have to carry shopping bags from home or buy some and which are not very convenient, to say the least. Earlier shopkeepers could afford to provide free bags to the shoppers as those used to cost them hardly about Tk. 40. But now the paper bags cost them Tk.2 to

Potter magic



Potter matters

Sitting in Dubai I am watching "Harry Potter" on TV along with my two grandchildren who, like other children of the world, are great "Harry Potter" fans. I did not know that "Harry Potter" was selling more copies a year than any other book except the "Holy Bible". But the Bible has been selling for centuries and Harry Potter only for a couple of years. The Bible is a book on religion and Harry Potter is on witchcraft. It seems likely that soon books on witchcraft may overtake books on religion in terms of annual sales. After all, the world is changing and there is very little we can do about it.

Fayaz Khan, Joar Sahara, Dhaka Cantt

Tk.10 per bag. The shopkeepers are not very happy about it especially in a depressed market of consumer goods.

In absence of a viable alternative, it has not been possible to stop use of polybags altogether. One can find liberal use of those in various kitchen markets. Polythene wrappers are commonly used in packaging of various items like biscuits, candies, snack items like, *chanachurs*, nuts, potato chips, washing powder, cooking oil, toys etc. These are also routinely used in laundries, tailor shops, garment industries and many other areas (often for waste disposal to say).

We have to be realistic. Polythene had become part of life. May be we should have given due priority to collection and disposal of used polybags, rather than banning it in toto. For example, used polybags could be bought back by municipalities and/or some NGOs for proper disposal. Such an arrangement could have generated additional benefit of creating some more employment for street urchins.

In view of the above discussion it is recommended that: a. Ban on polybags may be

the ICAO requirements met with CAAB staff who deal with certification and surveillance of air carriers, repair facilities, licensing of engineers, flight crew, Aviation Law and Aviation Regulations.

The FAA assessed the performance of the CAAB in meeting standards promulgated by the ICAO. Every ICAO member state pledges to uphold its obligations under the Chicago conventions, adhere to safety standards contained in ICAO Annexes and utilise the recommended practices promulgated by ICAO as a guideline.

The FAA in implementing the programme assessed only those countries which gives licence to airlines that operate or have applied to operate in the US. The FAA also conducts random inspections of aircraft once they enter the US. After assessment and based on consultations between the FAA and CAAB several areas were found to be not in compliance with ICAO standards. Such as:

- λ To employ adequate technically qualified inspectors, (both operations and airworthiness)
- λ To develop guidance material

Forged notes in BB vault

No where in the world such news of detection of forged currency notes in Central Bank's vault has ever been heard before, but that 'impossible' happened in our country. And any one could guess from this incident where the level of corruption has gone today! It's also clear now why Transparency International had termed Bangladesh as the 'most corrupt' country in the world for two consecutive years. Bravo Bangladesh! Its name would very soon be found in the Guinness Book of world records. I congratulate (!) the present government for this incomparable achievement no governments in the past attained such point. Long live our BNP-lead coalition governance.

Jkobir
Dhaka



Taka tricks

lifted. This would restore livelihood of thousands of people, be convenient to shoppers and also generate some revenue for the government.

b. An arrangement may be devised to buy back the used polybags for appropriate disposal either by the municipalities and/or interested NGOs.

Syed Farhat Ahmad Roomy
New DOHS, Dhaka

Downgraded by the FAA?

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) of the USA carried out a safety oversight audit programme in 1993. The programme was to measure compliance with the Chicago convention standards of air carriers that has operations to the US. The initial International Aviation Safety Assessment [IASA] in 1993 found the CAA Bangladesh in compliance with ICAO Annexes.

But later in 1997 (Dec 2-4) a team consists of Aviation Safety Inspectors specially trained for safety visits and well versed with

for its inspectors.

λ Airlines certification records and documents were inadequate and incomplete, whether airlines comply with CAAB rules and regulations could not be determined due to limited record of checks and surveillance.

λ In many cases national rules were not in compliance with the ICAO recommended practices.

In last five years a very little has been achieved to effect the above deficiencies. Where ICAO/FAA recommended additional 09 Airworthiness Inspectors and 04 Flight operations inspectors for the CAAB, it has now only three AWI and a single FOI. Out of three Deputy Directors, one without being a pilot is acting as a Director while other two doing something else than they are trained for. If the ICAO/FAA conducts another audit in coming future we are going to be downgraded further to become CAT-3 Country, which will mean our beloved National Flag Carrier will not be able to enter the US air space any more. To me it appears that we are all waiting for

that day to come.

Rafiqul Islam
Mirpur, Section 1, Dhaka

PSC dotted with holes!

We know that the Public Service Commission is a constitutional supreme reliance body for the actual deserving candidates and the qualified job seekers. The PSC is always headed by a competent person as its chairman and in the past we had never experienced such random leakage of the question papers of the BCS examinations. The 24th BCS preliminary exam was held in last February 2003, but due to the leakage of question sets, PSC cancelled that exam and later rescheduled the said exam to be held on 8th August 2003. Accordingly the BCS exam was held at the divisional headquarters of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna and at the London centre simultaneously. All our sons and daughters appeared in the said exam with their most cherished desire of becoming a BCS officer and above all of getting a comfortable government job under the PSC. But alas! The following day it appeared in all the national dailies that the BCS question papers had leaked out again and the students demonstrated, brought out processions demanding exemplary punishment of those culprits involved in the leakage of the questions; and they also demanded immediate resignation of the unworthy Head of the PSC. It was also presumed that some staff of the PSC are directly involved in the leakage of the questions.

Really, we the helpless people of this country who have nothing to do but silently observe such mollified activities of the PSC and the government. We could never think of such grim episodes that have occurred twice -- just one after the other. Surprisingly the PSC did not take any action against those culprits held liable for the leakage of the questions in March last. Allegedly these criminal are close associates of the Chairman and member of the PSC!

Peerzada Syed Rafiqul Hussain
Hiala Shaheb Bari, Habigonj

RMG sector of Bangladesh

Bangladesh earns a good amount of foreign currency by exporting readymade garments (RMG). By the year 2005 the Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA) will be phased out meaning that Bangladesh won't have any access to

quotas anymore. And the consequences will be severe -- we will have to compete with countries like China, India etc. The RMG sector of Bangladesh should be more competitive and efficient in order to compete with these countries. But frequent power failure, inadequate infrastructure, hartals, terrorism and inefficient ports hinder this sector's growth to a great extent. If these problems are not met quickly, Bangladesh will lose its competitive edge. As a result many garments factories will be shut down and thousands of people will become jobless. The country's socio-economic situation will be further worsened. It is a matter of great relief that the government took some steps to counter the post MFA era in the recently concluded budget. But the government alone cannot shoulder this problem, BGMEA should also play a vital role in this regard.

A citizen, On e-mail

Cooperate with wives

It was tradition that wives would mainly do the household tasks, bring up children and husbands would work to impart financial support to the families. But in course of time due to family planning, education, economic welfare and women liberation movement, that convention has changed. Now both the husband and wife work to earn and raise their children. Although the recent practice of women's working bringing financial independence, it also exalts difficulties to the women's lives in terms of the dominating tendency of some husbands. These husbands accept that wives need to work but they do not accept the responsibility in

helping their partners in doing the household chores. And it is often seen that when both the husband and wife get back from work, the wife immediately engages herself in small domestic tasks whereas the husband takes rest and relaxes. As a result the wife feels burdened with continuous work and loses

temper. And moreover, an estrangement takes place and puts strain on marriages.

So, in order to get a solution the husbands should give up the male ego about not working at home and make their partners' life easy by cooperating.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka