

Eco park and ethics in development

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ECO has now become one of the many fancy jargons associated with development policy in present times. The word Ecology that means a study of plants or living organisms or people in relation to environment. That being so, it is not understood why the government embarked upon a plan to construct an Eco Park in the Madhupur forest area, which is already there. Why at all was it necessary to construct a brick wall around the forest, which is more likely to be disturbed by such a course of action? The full details of the rationale for this line of action are not known. Worse still, there has not been any press release by the government with regard to the killing of a Garo youth named Piren Slaner.

fact that several thousand Garos living in and around the Madhupur forest did not like this approach to development which threatened their livelihood opportunities and the right of free movement. It is reported that the brutal police action of January 4, 2004 led to the death of Piren Slaner, and 25 tribesmen and women were injured. A protest rally was held and the speakers condemned the police action on unarmed indigeneous people. Two members of Parliament from Tangail district visited the place of occurrence.

Another news quoted Dr. Kamal Hossain as saying, "The government is implementing the project violating the rights of citizens". He is further reported to have said that some ruling party men would benefit from the Madhupur project that made Garos victims.

Strangely enough, there was no mention of any senior magistrate

or police officer visiting the area, which is normally done after such an incident. BBC is said to have reported that the tribal leaders have demanded a judicial enquiry into the shooting incident and exemplary punishment to those responsible for killing Piren Slaner. The further work for construction of wall has been suspended. It was reported that the Garos have been living in and around the Madhupur forest area for centuries. They have a long-standing dispute with the forest department over their title of lands.

It was, however, reported that the district administration had formed a committee to probe the incident. The actions to be taken by the district administration under the relevant regulations do not envisage formation of committee. What it requires is the holding of an executive enquiry to ascertain if the police firing was justified. Such enquiry will be independent of any departmental enquiry. Apparently, the regulatory injunctions have not been followed in this case.

The news report further states that the local police have filed two cases. One against four forest guards for killing and injuring the Garo tribesmen and the other case against ten Garo tribesmen on charge of damaging public property in the Eco Park. The type and nature of the public property damaged by the Garos have not been spelt out. The police have done their duty. It is too early to predict how long will it take to complete the process of investigation and subsequent trial. The forest department is said to have suspended work on construction of wall. It is not known if it will resume the work in near or distant future. What is certain is that Piren Slaner will never be back from 'the undiscovered country from whose

boorn no traveler returns'. However, the issues of right to be treated in accordance with law and of ethics in development will continue to remain in Bangladesh.

In one of his recent public speeches, the Chief Justice of Bangladesh is reported to have said that the poor have no access to justice because of their insolvency, ignorance and backwardness. The tragic event centering on the Eco Park at Madhupur more than justifies this observation. The indigenous Garo tribes are poorer and more innocent of the trammels of law and justice and more backward than average Bangladeshi. That is possibly why

The Garos, who have been living in Madhupur for generations, ought to have been involved in making the so-called Eco Park a success. Being the residents of the area, they would be more committed and better equipped to protect the forest that provides them with livelihood opportunities than the type of brick and mortar programme of the forest department.

they could not obtain a prohibitory order from a civil court preventing the forest department from their act of construction of wall. Apparently, the commotion over the Eco Park was building up for quite some time. No legal aid organisation came forward to provide legal aid to the Garos.

Madhupur incident raises substantive issues of the ethical dimension of administration and of development. The incident makes a mockery of the development policies and strategies as embodied in the government-owned Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP, 2003). PRSP asserts that the strategic elements of anti-poverty policies

and institutions will cover five broad dimensions. The fifth one specifically relates to *participatory governance*. It seeks to *enhance the voice of the poor*, and improve non-material dimensions of well-being including security, power and social inclusion.

PRSP goes on to assert that anti-poverty interventions will be targeted to the poor regions and with special focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged population and ethnic groups. The PRSP avers that institutional actions envisaged will be designed, among others, to reach the areas with high concentration of socially disadvan-

and the owner of such land shall not be divested or dispossessed of the land or evicted therefrom by any means: Provided that nothing in this section shall apply to the acquisition of such homestead under any law."

The law is there. There is no protection to the Garos in spite of

the law. The constitutional right to be treated in accordance with law thus is more a fiction than a fact.

Public debate on the issue may be the starting point. More efforts will be needed for operationalising the much trumpeted words 'listening to the voices of the poor' that form part

of our development policy agenda and repeated in many seminars and workshops.

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