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Garo culture

It is truly fascinating to learn about the different indigenous people living in Chittagong and other forest regions in our country. Our educational journey puts us one step ahead every time we try acquiring new ideas and knowledge about such communities. I believe that if we can preserve the tradition of the Chakmas, Garos or the Murongs with their lifestyles galore then Bangladesh would certainly earn the credit of owning a unique culture.

Tourism, on the other hand, can also play a major role in uplifting our economy and culture. We are happy to know that our government has taken a keen interest in the development of our forests and the tourism industry. The government has taken an initiative to develop an eco-park in Madhupur entitled 'Madhupur National Park,' at a cost of about Tk 9 crore. Unfortunately, the initiative steered along a wrong course resulting in serious unrest in forest homes. This has given rise to many questions in our minds. Does the government really believe in positive development? Why in most cases the grievances of the common people are left unheard? In this regard a few things must be stated after identifying the mistaken ideologies.

First, the development project has mirrored a wrong image creating discord between the planners and the local residents. The conflict is the outcome of a non-participatory project plan imple-

mentation. With the onset of the project work, part of their home (the forest regions) has already come under restrictions. This has given the indigenous people the impression that gradually they are going to be driven away. It is obvious for them to think this way because they don't have access to proper information.

Second, according to the project planners it is believed that the work is going on smoothly. In reality, we see some influential people being benefited while the freedom of others is disturbed, protests are suppressed when innocents cry for justice. Moreover, the situation has worsened due to a cheap political intrusion which has led to the ghastly incident, killing of a man. I believe if these communities are subjected to such treatment then they too will not hesitate to be violent. The story of the brutal killing would instigate people. The Garos may have to take refuge in different locations, much deeper into the forest, which the communities describe as hazardous. Practically, it's robbery in broad daylight! A large community is going to be homeless in the near future. Yet, no progress has been made for an all out bilateral discussion between the Garos and the government so far.

Third, if we want positive results then we should plan accordingly so that our errors are minimised. Over here the errors are the negative impacts of the so-called 'development'. With a rise in the



negative impacts, the outcome is at stake and a counter development is certain to occur resulting in minimisation of social welfare. I suppose this cannot be any government's motto.

With all this in mind, I must conclude that such a process of development has heightened tension on both sides. At present both the planners and the inhabitants are in a dilemma. I must say that the work should continue with good

correspondence and reconciliation. Only then true development in the sense of achievement and satisfaction would be accomplished.

Jamal Iftikhar
Department of Economics
NSU

In your write-up on the front page of the 31 December Daily Star, you gave a lovely picture of a Garo warrior on the

conventional thanksgiving day celebrated at Askipara in Haluaghat. You proceeded to say that the culture of the Garos had been lost for the last 70 years or so... gone are even the traditional ornaments and musical instruments.

Should you be interested in the Garo culture you could travel a bit south of Haluaghat to the Modhupur forest area where the Garo culture is quite active. There are many musical instruments, ornaments, the Garo dress is woven by men and women of the area, and the Wangala celebration of thanksgiving has been celebrated annually for many years. Not only are old songs and dances taught to the young people by those older in age, but new songs have also been written and sung.

The Garo people of that area are active in protesting the construction of a wall around 3,000 acres of forestland under a project titled 'Forest conservation and Eco-tourism in Modhupur...' the local ethnic people consider the project a threat to their livelihood (From P- 12, columns 6,7,8 DS of 4 January, 2004.).

You may be interested in contacting Father Eugene Homrich, (St. Paul's Church, P.O. Jalchatra, Dist. Tangail) 50 miles north of Tangail Town, who has been in that area for almost 50 years. He has been standing alongside the Garo people and helping them to learn more about their culture and to carry on the

beauties of their past.
Margaret Shield
Noakhali

In different national dailies the news was published that the Garos of Modhupur on 5th January 2004 gave an ultimatum to the prime minister to implement a five point charter of demand including cancellation of forest conservation and eco-tourism plan. The eco-tourism and forest conservation will affect the Garo community as there will be encroachment on their territorial jurisdiction by others. If the problem is not solved permanently, then in course of time their existence will be threatened.

There are many basic necessities which are to be met by the government but without looking into the problems of the people, it has taken up some projects at the cost of the indigenous people.

During the regime of Ayub Khan, the Kaptai hydro-electric project had ousted thousands of people from their homes. They have not yet been rehabilitated, nor have any effective steps been taken by successive governments in this respect. But such dislocation of people is not expected in Bangladesh.

Md. Azizul Haq
Advocate
Supreme Court, Dhaka

No underground activities, please!



I have read the news item in the DS, Jan 16 on the technical feasibility of having an underground city railway system in metro Dhaka. There are some sociological points on the overall feasibility of the plan.

We have seen the plight, unpopularity, and misuse of the underground pass and

shops near *Gulistan*. The usefulness depends on the standard and cost of living. The standard of living is poor in the LDCs (mostly marginal, living around the poverty line), and the floating population in cities is high (and economically backward) due to urban migration (centralisation). Social discipline is poor in the country, abetted by misuse of political power and influence. The operation and maintenance (O&M) standard is unsatisfactory in the third world for obvious reasons. We should not imitate the affluent western societies (even

for genetic food, article in the DS, Jan 16). We should depend on local logistic and maintenance support, as much as possible.

Go for open air systems, psychologically more acceptable in these days of lawlessness (our women-folk, generally speaking, are not yet westernised and independent.)

Try overhead rail first, as a pilot project, from Uttara to old Dhaka, via the airport. If it is successful, then the next phase of expansion may be examined on a broader vision.

A Husnain, Dhaka

We can see its impact on higher studies. Education is becoming a uniform of wealthy families. Many promising comparatively less meritorious students find themselves dropping out from higher educational institutions only because of huge tuition fees. Nowadays, the more reputable the university, the more is its tuition fees. We are lucky, because we don't have to see the barbarism of middle age. But now we lack something and that is unique. We don't have Shakespeare, Milton or Rabindranath, and we are suffering from an acute shortage of the wherewithal to develop human quality. We must make the younger generation aware of its necessities. Money is essential for saving life, but with an 'unfeeling mind' life is truly wasted.

Emil
6, Siddhawari Lane,
Dhaka

Disappointed

Generally, while reading newspapers I skim and select topics to read them thoroughly later. I found an article in the DS of Jan 11, 2004 issue "Moving above and beyond poverty line" by Mr. Rushid Islam Rahman, an economist and Research Director of BIDS. I am taking interest in reading articles relating to 'reaching the poor' and to issues concerning poverty. Seeing the title "Moving above and beyond poverty line" I was sure some new dimensions, thoughts, findings were there since the title was different from his previous article on poverty "Beyond poverty line" published in the DS on December 9, 2003.

Unfortunately, in the new article I found exactly the same contents used in the previous article but under a different title.

I am wondering why he did that, if there is nothing new then why publish the already published material. Is it to refresh readers' mind on the issue? Whatever might have been the purpose, it killed my time.

Mustak Hassan Md Iftikhar
Green Road
Dhaka

Tissue culture

The farmers of Joypurhat district were proved to be fortunate by cultivating potato, following 'tissue culture'. This highly successful tissue culture potato seeds were supplied by BRAC. Most of the farmers got a very high yield. Witnessing such a rapid growth, the farmers became puzzled. This promising method has been dis-

covered during the cultivating season of potato. The Joypurhat district area office of BRAC distributed 343 metric tons of potato seeds among 636 farmers in the current year.

In spite of being in popular demand, these valuable seeds were not distributed by BRAC later. This potato is cultivated at Khetlal, Kalai and Akkelpur in Joypurhat district. According to BRAC officials, the seeds by using appropriate fertilisers and insecticides in the procedure of tissue culture has a greater chance of success.

The journalists of Joypurhat district went on a trip to the areas where the potato was produced by "tissue culture" --- organised by the Joypurhat BRAC area office.

A Cizien
Dhaka

Hindu temples, houses torched

A news item published in the DS January 25 caught my attention. As I wrote on earlier occasions that incidents like these are not only serious violations of human rights but also extremely damaging to the very image of our nation. As it is, we have enough of other problems to deal with, let us not invite additional ones.

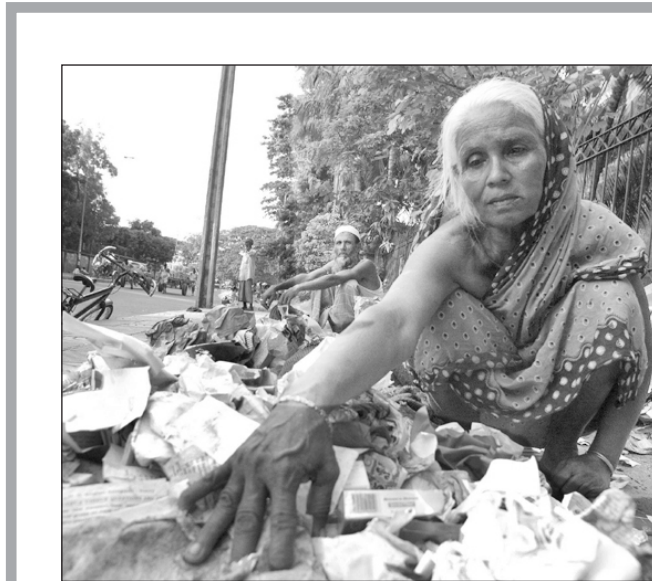
Vandalising the places of worship is a palpable offence. Are incidents like these any different from that of the Hindu fundamentalists demolishing the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya? I am afraid if one were to make an honest assessment, one would come out with the revelation that a greater number of temples of the Hindus have been vandalised in Bangladesh than mosques in India.

This is, however, not to undermine or downplay the innumerable persecutions of more serious nature which continue unabated there. No self-respecting nation can or should condone or overlook such heinous acts.

Shamsheer Chowdhury
Dhaka

Hybrid Democracy

A new phrase in international politics has emerged which is 'Hybrid Democracy'. In Russia the opposition candidate seems to propagate a new kind of democracy, which will have some elements of socialism and conventional democracy. After the fall of Soviet Russia, we have not seen communism in its real form. Because, for their survival the new countries emerged from Soviet Russia had to change their socio-



Domestic garbage collection

The DCC has subcontracted collection of daily garbage from the doorsteps, to the cycle-rickshaw vans. Each house pays Tk 20 per month for the service. But no DCC inspector ever came to enquire about the service. Also it has not been publicised where to lodge complaints (including telephone numbers). Recently, the van was absent for two days, and the DCC did not let us know where to dump the garbage in the absence of the van.

There is no media publicity on this service. The problem with the municipalities is the outdated administrative and management system, especially for big, fast-growing

cities (urban migration). The government is not treating the issue on an emergency basis. The Ministry of Environment is un-systematic in its policies, and doesn't care for citizens' feedback (I am not aware of any existing, visible mechanism in the public sector).

For example, no cheap garbage bag is available for the households, with the sudden banning of 'free' polybags. Some sort of cheap bags could be manufactured from recycling of several hundred tons of daily garbage. What shall we do with political sermons when it comes to practical chores of daily life?

M Abadi, Dhaka

of two or three families having political influence and these elites enjoy all sorts of rights and privileges in the field of higher education, healthcare and some other requirements like high quality food, clothes, residence etc. If their homeland fails to provide proper education, healthcare for them they have easy access to other countries that can fulfil their demands. So, it is clear that this democracy or hybrid-democracy is not meant for the interest of common people; it is merely a tool to create some short sighted, worthless laws only to serve the purpose of a privileged class of people.

To conclude, we must find out a way out of this situation and try to establish a system which is free from all kinds of partiality, mortal limitations and follies.

Md Arif Sadeq
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Abolition of death penalty

We would consider it an act of timidity if our government rescinds and renounces death penalty from our country. We would strongly condemn and vehemently oppose such decision if it is taken by the government.

We cannot run our state affairs at the tune and music of western countries and donor agencies. The socio-economic and political situations in our country are totally different from theirs. If our per capita income is 350 US dollars, their per capita income varies from USD 20,000 to 40,000. If they live in air-conditioned buildings, we live in tin-shed and thatched houses.

The governments of some countries like the USA, the UK and Israel take pride in upholding human rights, freedom and democracy, but in the guise of the so-called war on terrorism they shoot and kill hundreds of innocent people and freedom fighters, violating human rights.

It would be a great disaster and a catastrophe for our law and order situation if we do away with death penalty and do not sentence to death the notorious criminals, murderers and terrorists.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, tit for tat and crime and punishment should always go side by side.

OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka-1203



To ride or not to ride!

DS editorial

The DS opposition to 'politics of ultimatum' is praiseworthy but did not spell out the specifics for the oppositions to opt for. Sure enough, setting of a deadline (to an elected government) is not the language of democracy, but it's an indication of conspiracy and instigation towards anarchy. Threats in season and out of season cannot be a solution to the ills of the society which are being faced by all and sundry.

I do not agree with the editor that the opposition's demands 'reflect the socio economic realities'. Violence, as said, is a prime factor 'for social degradation and upsetting the balance of cordial atmosphere'. It could be handled in a positive manner if both the parties were sincere and self-respecting. Elimination or control of godfathers should not be the sole responsibility of the government but joint efforts must come forth.

Problems like corruption, price spiral, dismantling of a building (the power centre) are not the creation of a single party. These problems have been perennially there and need to be addressed collectively. The mention of a building, as a cause of discontent, ah me! is not rational. I really don't agree with those veterans in the opposition who could include a building in their rancorous charges. Their posture of bringing in a tea-shop-gossip into a national resolution is comical and deplorable. For argument's sake, if inmates of some buildings are 'eyesore for some', they should be

dealt with on the basis of specific complaints under the rule of law.

The cry of the day is not demolition of a building of sand and stone, but the demand of the majority is that the opposition should abandon the politics of confrontation, violence, culture of *hartal* and burning people with indignation after setting fire to cars and buses. And instead of issuing ultimatums to the government, they should fight for our rights by attending parliament. The press always feels obliged to pronounce the leader of the AL as the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament (LOP). If the AL leader does not attend parliament at all, can she be called the LOP?

AF Rahman
Dhaka

Wet-proof shopping bags

With the banning of cheap polybags for shopping, the shoppers face problems carrying wet and frozen purchases as the other contents of the bag get spoiled. Hence the local private industry may produce cheap wet-proof sheets like greased paper and other products for approved sale. Perhaps, these could be produced from recycling the city's collected garbage.

It is not clear why the authorities do not announce substitutes for cheap shopping bags. There must be some synthetic sheets which are wet proof and at the same time environment-friendly. No big research is required. The problems of the millions of shoppers

are ignored.
AMahasen
Dhaka

Education, a lucrative business

Nowadays people are more civilised, because today our society is enlightened with the opportunity of education. Education can be compared with the most valuable wealth in this world. It is such a wealth that can never be stolen, bought and sold. Because of mismanagement of our policy, education is likely to be moved from its track of ideals.

The main role of education is to impart knowledge to the generals. Education is not only a means of livelihood, rather it is a means of livelihood of our soul. We can enrich our mind with this weapon. Education creates self respect, confidence, personality etc.

In today's world, importance of education is felt more than ever before. Now students can find themselves in a wide range of subjects. But unfortunately lucrative career based subjects are given the first choice. Students are looking for those subjects which will ensure them a bright career with handsome salary. Other humanitarian subjects including literature are deprived of meritorious students. The students of today's world are running after money, though at present, the civilised world is suffering from lack of humanity which is a very important issue.

US Congressmen and minorities

The four-member US delegation led by Congressman Joseph Crowley during their visit to Bangladesh expressed their dissatisfaction on the handling of minority issues by the present government and the total disregard for dispensing justice to the minorities. Mr. Crowley emphasised the need for ensuring equal rights of all citizens which is indispensable for a pluralistic society and a pre-condition for democratic governance.

We are sure, Mr Crowley and his delegation could not get the real picture. The discrimination is so acute and extensive that it is difficult to realise the extent of the problem within such a short period of time. Moreover, the Congressmen could not get the information from the people in rural areas who are really oppressed and suffered a lot in the hands of the political activists.

Apart from that, grabbing of minority property after humiliation and false litigation with forged deeds has compelled a huge number of people to leave the country for good during last two years.

The occupation of Garo land in the name of eco-park at Tangail is the latest addition to persecution and eviction of minorities from Bangladesh.

These activities should not go unchallenged and the government in power should shoulder the responsibility of it all.

We request the civil society organisations to take up the matter in all seriousness to restore the human rights of the minority groups.

Bijan Kumar Nath, Dhaka



Love, peace & harmony!