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Language and culture of ethnic minorities



Almost 46 ethnic minorities are existing in Bangladesh having diversity of language and culture. But their culture and language are so much vulnerable, that possibility of the ethnic people losing their cultural identity cannot be ruled out. It is a matter of anxiety that the government is not taking any adequate steps to save the ethnic cultures. The government had set up three institutes named "Upajati Sangskritic Institute" in the 1980s. But these institutes exist on paper only. The government of Bangladesh never tried to show proper respect to its ethnic people. The very term "Upajati" causes humiliation to the tribal people. Bangla Academy was asked several times to withdraw the word "Upajati" and to use the word tribal. Actually the word "Tribal" never means "Upajati" or "sub-nation". In the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Encyclopaedia Americana and Oxford Dictionary I did not find such meaning. Ethnic minorities have their own language, culture, history, customs and traditions. Those are neglected in practice. Their children cannot learn their own language. They were never introduced with their own script. Bengalees sacrificed their lives for Bangla language. But ethnic minorities are on the verge of losing their linguistic identity.

February 21 has been declared the International Mother Language Day. But other languages in the country are being neglected. The conscience of Rafique, Salam, Barkat is crying behind the Martyrs' Monument (Shaheed Minar). It is not a dream or an illogical demand that we want introduction of the ethnic languages at the primary education level. If the government doesn't come forward in this respect, who will care about the language of the ethnic minorities?

Rupam Chakma
Rajshahi University

our morality and our culture have changed? From media reports we know that 13 million dollars will be spent on a project titled "Strengthening Bangladesh Police".

We expect our government will make the best use of this money for the real development of the police force. I also learnt some days ago that Rab is going to make a fresh list of the criminals. However, I would appeal to them to nab the godfathers responsible for the ever deteriorating crime situation in the country.

Md. Shahadat Hossain
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Learning English

I am writing to express how happy I am that my letters are now being published in your daily and all because of my mom, who inspired me to write in English. I am a student and I wanted to improve my English but was a bit reluctant to study it in the traditional way. Nowadays, English is compulsory for students. My knowledge of English was bad but my mom always inspired me to learn the language. English was a favourite subject of my mom.

So, at first when she recommended me to read English newspapers, especially The Daily Star regularly, I had a very hard time understanding it but I kept up the habit and it got better. If I didn't understand a word I found it in my dictionary. Also I was very interested in finding new words as she helped me a lot.

I believe that this has been the best way for me to develop English language skills. One of the most memorable days in my life was when my first letter got published in DS; then my mom was the happiest person on earth.

Md. Toufiqur Rahman
Rothkola, Kishoreganj

Islamic cricket?

From my balcony facing the park, I watch a new phenomenon. Madrasah boys, in regulation attire of long kurta, pyjamas or loongie, and caps on head, play and practise cricket with all the zeal of normal boys and sportsmen. What is this trend, and why?

Cover the knees, as a devout Muslim? Ok, do it, but what is wrong with the long, standard trousers? And the shirt has to be that long, reaching beyond the knees and just above the ankles (like the ladies' kurta)? Why the loongie cannot be discarded for a while, as it is not suit-

religious practices and mores. Why all ordinary folks have to carry religious flags, symbols or icons outwardly, all the time? The root of religion is inside, and no propaganda or undue publicity (to attract attention) is necessary. It is not necessary to know the religion of a good, normal person. Godless communism failed, for obvious reasons the divine Creator was ignored. Why individuals have to reveal their religion, in and out of season? Judge them by their behaviour and attitude.

What has happened to the philosophy of the Golden Mean? It is sad to note that these days some groups are trying to establish that they are better Muslims! What is more annoying is that the medium of politics is being increasingly used to drive home the point. There were two relevant commentaries in the editorial page of The Daily Star of April 22; which included the mindset of a section of Americans led by President Bush. Hence the trend is global. What steps to take in Bangladesh? Why not discuss it openly?

It appears that politics is going through a holy and spiritual bath, which condones what should be condemned. It is a dangerous mixing of the head (politics) and the heart (religion). The vast majority of the masses (ordinary citizens in all countries) would be confused at this religious autocracy. Why an individual has to be ordered or threatened to be oriented in a certain way when approaching God? The personal relation has to be established first, before public performances are accorded approval by the uncontrolled breeding of different types of 'authorities'. The term zealot is noticed more and more in public utterances. Who are the arbiters?

Our politics is in a shambles; and now eerie religious fatwas are being showered right and left. Who are the regulators, and where are they?
A Mawaz, Dhaka

Survey on corruption

The TI-BD survey report (DS, April 21) confirms the all-pervasive presence of corrupt practices in the Bangladesh society, as revealed through field survey of over 20,000 households. The government has all along been denying the No 1 position of Bangladesh in the global list of corrupt countries. Now the average amount of bribes spent on various kind of services have been revealed. We are wasting two per cent of the GDP, if not more due to other systems losses. Let the authorities challenge these figures.



General Aurora

General Jagjit Singh Aurora passed away, leaving behind a distinguished career. Among one of his biggest achievements, and the most relevant to us - Bangladeshis, was the 13 day victory in the 1971 India Pakistan war that led to the birth of our own country. The prologue to the victory was not easy, but the help we got from the Indian armed forces in equipping and training the Mukti Bahini, and the quick and relatively eventless showdown on 16

December was definitely the credit of Aurora's forces. I pray to the Almighty to bless his departed soul and hope the government commemorates this war hero's contributions to our homeland with due solemnity.
Shafiqat, Seattle, US

Politicians and business cartels have now combined to make mockery of documented procedures. The civil service has also been tainted and polarised. The question arises: who are the greatest enemies of the country? Why respect Jekyll and Hyde governance?
M Abadli, Dhaka

questions only 2/3 months before the final exams. It was so hard to prepare ourselves in such a short time. So many students did not get sufficient marks in those subjects. Now in the third year, we have ME-302 which is introduction to English Language study. But again we have not got the sample questions.

The NU authorities should look

May Day and garments workers

I think most of the workers in garments factories do not know much about May Day. They perhaps know that on this day they will get a holiday. Perhaps they may know this day is for them. But they do not know why this day is observed.

Most of the garments workers come from the rural areas. What is the situation prevailing in rural areas? The rural people are struggling hard for survival. They migrate to towns and cities for better jobs, but seldom get it.

In the garments factories they are doing overtime to raise their meagre income. The salary that they get for working eight hours a day is not enough. The organisations that represent them should correctly assess the real needs of the workers and find out how to fulfil them in our context.

Asaduzzaman Bhuiyan
University of Dhaka

The Queen's English

There is an ongoing argument both in the academic circles and the press about the onslaught of Americanism on 'roper' English. Of course, one has to accept those language changes and that is what constitutes its interest and variety, but one has to draw the line somewhere. To use a commercial analogy, there is a point below which one will not go! The place where one draws the line is becoming nebulous, and one very often feels that one is fighting a rearguard action. Obviously in such a scenario, a big question mark hangs over how long 'pure' English can survive.

To turn to Dr Richard Murphy's views, I am afraid, he brushed aside the urgency of the English language in the context of Bangladesh, a country struggling hard to find a place in the sun. Over the period, Bangladesh had to pay quite a price

in her developmental strides for failing to realise the primacy of the English language in this globalised world right from her emergence as an independent nation. Until now English language has virtually remained an exclusive preserve of the affluent class in our society. The sooner we are able to remove this class-barrier, the better.

Syed Badrul Haque
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Rakkhi Bahini and Rab

Our politics is imitative. Earlier, the other major party (now in the opposition) introduced Rakkhi Bahini to control governance. Now the coalition regime has introduced Rab, with "cross-fire" killings. What is the difference?

Get out of the rut, and escape from the vicious circle, which is slowly and surely eating away the new nation and the society, like destructive worms within the system.

There is too much conservatism in our politics, as the leadership is poor, and lacks boldness and moral courage. Too much ego holding many prisoners. Why the top leadership is so crowded, like the streets of Dhaka metropolis? There is no traffic control in politics, plus colour-blindness (the traffic lights).

The political gurus tell us what to do, but never bother about the feedback. Too many islands of fragmentation. It is usual in the under-developed countries, where all crave for a piece of the pie. Therefore discipline is at all-time low; and violence is forced upon the opponents.

Now the religious fanatics have joined in the scramble, threatening the crowd with divine punishment and what not. There is no priesthood in Islam, but there are too many clerics around, adding to the confusion. This point should be clearly explained for public aware-

ness. As a zero level citizen, my fatwa is: how many rozi are halal? Most are makru, if not haram. Who catches whom? Let us watch how long the merry-go-round goes on in this political mela (fair). Cruel flirting with the underprivileged is not a lesser crime. "Judge not, that ye be judged!"
AZ, Dhaka

Bangladeshi girl in US Federal custody

A 16 year old Bangladeshi girl has been put into US federal custody. She is suspected of planning to carry out a bomb attack in New York. The image of Bangladesh has been lowered beyond measure by some so called leaders continuing their heinous propaganda against the country. They brand Bangladesh as a fundamentalist country through seminars and all other opportunities in and outside the country. The accusations are not true.

We should resist these subversive elements working against the interests of the country.
Mohammed S Islam
Banani, Dhaka

Where is the owner?

The police are yet to nab or take any action against the men responsible for the Savar building collapse which is unprecedented in our history. Hundreds of poor workers died or were crippled due to the utter negligence of the greedy owner of the building causing immense sufferings to the deceased workers' family members.

Reporters asked police whether they have arrested the owner of the building. Police replied that they did not have the address or whereabouts of the building owner. "Now I might do something" replied a police officer after a reporter pointed out the DOHS residence of the building owner.

It is a great shame that people are getting away with such palpable crimes. The government should take a tough stand on the issue.
Nazmul Haque
Sabujbag, Dhaka

Image problem

Bangladesh has an image problem. Actually image of a country is much like the reputation of a company or any individual. Nowadays our image problem has worsened all over the world. It has a direct bearing on our development as a nation, since in the modern world the nations have to rely on close interaction. On 27 January 2004, Transparency International termed Bangladesh the most corrupt country. The TI report gives a detailed account of corruption in different sectors. The EU resolution is another blow to our image.

We should be aware of how the world at large is viewing us.
Pavel Chakma
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Law and order

On April 13, 2005 one of our respectable teachers, while delivering his lecture on environmental chemistry, offered us some important suggestions on the overall situation in the country. We are going on a study tour to Chittagong and Sylhet. He advised, "If you are attacked by miscreants, be careful, don't go into any argument or protest against them anywhere. If you want to live, leave everything to them." He also presented some examples of how some of our teachers lost their valuables after being attacked by the criminals. Our teacher said this because he was worried about our safety. Then we see our rules, regulations and governance leading us to a situation in which teachers advise their students to accept criminal acts without demur. Should I think that

Indian Idol finalists in Bangladesh

Indian Idol finalists Amit Sana and Rahul Saxena paid a visit to Bangladesh and performed at the Sultana Kamal Women's Complex. What an impact they had on the audience there, joined by local bands like Black, Miles etc. They really were welcome by the crowd who gathered in the complex to see them perform. Hope this kind of interaction in the cultural field between India and Bangladesh will continue.

Mohammed Fahim Hara
Eskaton Road, Dhaka

able for dynamic athletic movements? What is the attitude of the holy teachers who control these boys? It should be explained to gain public support (of the majority of Muslims).

What is the relation of clothes or uniforms to religion? Cover your body in a decent manner, that's all. It is a perturbing sign to find regimentation creeping inside rejuvenated



It means political governance has lost its image and credibility. No use shouting about reforms of CT Govt and general elections. Elect whom for genuine public service and operation clean-up? Another news story in the same newspaper described the corrupt practices in tendering procedures of rural power projects.

To NU authorities...

We are the third year students of the Department of English under National University. In the first and the second years we had two subjects namely-Basic Language skills and ME-901. The subjects deal with advanced reading and writing skills but we received the sample

into the matter.
SM Shafique Mridha
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Let's save UNO

The world went berserk, millions of people were killed in Europe, Africa and Asia, Germany was razed to dust, two atom bombs were dropped on Japan, hunger, want and disease spread all over and then the UNO was set up in 1945 with the solemn pledge "We the peoples of the United Nations are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime brought untold sorrows to mankind."

The UNO is now 60 years old. How far has it been successful in its aims and objectives, purposes and principles, maintenance of peace and justice and to save the world from the scourge of war?

Are not we disappointed, shocked and gravely concerned for the following reasons after the World War II?

1. Unresolved Kashmir issue
2. Israeli occupation of Palestine since 1948.
3. Korean War 1950-53.
4. Vietnam War 1954-73.
5. Anglo-French attack on Suez Canal in 1956.
6. USSR invasion of Hungary in 1956.
7. USSR invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.
8. Arab-Israeli war in 1967.
9. USSR invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.
10. Gulf War 1990-1991.
11. Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1990.
12. US occupation of Afghanistan since 2001.
13. US occupation of Iraq since 2003.
14. US war on so called international terrorism since 2001.

tious shows, braggadocio, arrogance and belligerence and war mongering policies made the UNO moribund, crestfallen and ineffective?

So the most important question today is what is the use and justification of the UNO?

Reports say that some world statesmen and influential quarters are working hard to effect some reforms and give a new lease of life to the UNO.

We understand that with the backing of the US, India is vying for a permanent seat in the UNSC with veto power. Japan is also willing to become a permanent member of the UNSC with veto power but China is opposing Japan. Germany and Belgium are also interested to attain permanent membership of the UNSC with veto power.

We are not aware of any rule, regulation or qualification

required to become a permanent member of the UNSC with veto power.

Due to our bitter experiences with the UNO, complicated international and regional problems, untold socio-economic and political sufferings of peoples, deteriorating law and order situation in the world and various other cogent reasons we strongly suggest and recommend the following reforms for the UNO.

1. The US, Russia, China and France may continue to remain as permanent members of the UNSC but without veto power.
2. The UK may be excluded from permanent membership of the UNSC.
3. India, Japan, Germany and Belgium may be made permanent members of the UNSC without veto power.

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