

Indigenous primary education

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BANGLADESH possesses a total population of 2.5 million indigenous people, classified in not less than 45 distinct indigenous communities, most of them having their own culture and language.

The indigenous communities of Bangladesh live in vulnerable situations and they are deprived of fundamental human rights. Article 28 of the UNCRC recognises children's right to education that is free and compulsory, and Article 30 "protects Adivasi children's cultural and language rights further."

Primary education is the most significant part of all institutional education. Our education system focuses chiefly on primary education, that is up to class five. All of these are run by the active initiation and patronisation by the government, non-government and other organisations of our country.

Unfortunately there is neither any attention nor a different arrangement or any kind of special allotment from our government to the ethnic communities for the education of their children. Moreover, last annual budget (2006-2007) did not allocate money for this field.

The special affairs division of the prime minister allotted small amount of money for the development of ethnic culture and education, but there are no concrete information and statistics preserved on it. If we look at the national education policy in 2000, there was nothing specific about the indigenous people and targeting non-discriminatory



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We need to do more to help indigenous children stay in school.

curriculum in the education system.

On the other hand, National Education Commission (in 2003) suggested the initiative to set up 100 schools in the remote and ethnic residing areas in next ten years. This is the present situation of education where some of the NGOs and organisations are responsible for the development of ethnic community.

National plan of action (NPA-II) clarified the education system for poor, indigenous, and disabled children. NPA II also proposed to use modern equipment for the indigenous children. Out of four major areas of NPA, one is early childhood education. The Dakar framework for action emphasises the development and extension of early childhood education within the marginalised and vulnerable children's communities.

This issue is also supported in the PRSP. PRSP mentioned seven points as a mid-term strategy for Bangladesh on poverty reduction. One of those important issues is quality education. PRSP emphasised participation of the indigenous children, recommended preserving the languages of indigenous people, incorporating their culture into the national curriculum, and education in mother tongue.

The foreign donors, education specialists, NGOs, and also the government have identified the important issue as easy access to school and quality education for indigenous children. The second primary education development plan (PEDP-II) included an overall situational analysis of primary education and sets some strategies and action plan for children of ethnic community.

This analysis focused on four main areas: lack of access, poor quality, cultural inappropriateness, and lack of the local control and involvement. It is obvious that the key factor in these problems is language. The Board of National Education program follows a common textbook for primary education and all of these textbooks are written in Bangla. These textbooks are appropriate for Bengali children but not for ethnic children. Thus large number of indigenous children drop

out from school because of their lack of command over Bangla and English.

Bangla, the major medium of instruction in the primary education curriculum, is little known to the ethnic children, thus it acts as a serious impediment for education for the ethnic people. A statistic published in Daily Ittefaq on October 22, 2005 shows that, the drop-out rate of ethnic children is about 70%. And lack of proper education in primary school causes terribly bad results at high school level.

In Bangladesh, one quarter of total ethnic population are children. The approximate number of four to ten year old children who are going to school or ready to start school is half a million.

The birth rate in Bengali community is much less than the ethnic community. Due to lack of proper education, the birth rate in the ethnic community is rising. The result is the economic and social crisis in the indigenous communities.

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen. The government of Bangladesh is responsible to ensure education by creating scope and opportunities for the every citizen. Since two decades under the National Policy of Education, Bangladesh government has taken a number of initiatives to raise the literacy level. But the government did not take a single mentionable initiative to ensure education for the children of ethnic community.

All initiatives which have been taken so far are by NGOs and other donor agencies in and outside of Bangladesh. Against this opinion, reference is clear as we look back to the peace accord of hill tracts that incorporated the provision for primary education irrespective of mother tongues of the ethnic peoples.

Near about 10 years have passed since signing but still no sign of initiative to execute the rule (Rule 33-Kha/2) underlined: "Education through mother language." Only education can enrich the lives of the indigenous people. But no initiative has yet been taken by the government. UN has mentioned clearly that language is the principle tool of education and that instruction should be in mother language.

It also declares that each and every child has right to education. But, if language becomes an obstacle for the pupil then the whole system of education will collapse and education will not spread out to all. As the mother language of ethnic communities is not Bangla, the language and content of the textbooks taught in the school is not familiar to their cultural circumstances. With all these obstacles no one can expect an effective atmosphere where an ethnic child can get proper education.

One survey throughout the hill tracts shows the rate of drop-out from school is up to as much as 40% due to language barrier. In 1994, with the financial aid of BRAC a research investigation was done on the "the possibilities of bilingual education for ethnic communities." This investigation revealed that language is the primary reason the ethnic children drop out from school.

This research initiative also highlights some other obstacles such as poverty, attitude of the teachers and other (Bengali) students, textbook, and the need to work.

One report on a comparative rate of drop-out children between Bengali and ethnic communities shows that, each year the rate of drop-out from Bangali community is 30% whereas the drop-out rate from ethnic community in the hill tracts is 70%.

In Rangamati 73% children get admission in school but 55% of students leave school before completing their primary education. In some remote areas like Thanchi in Bandarban there is no school. The report was also focused on obstacles like difficult geographical conditions, not having mother tongue as a medium of education, and poverty, which are the main cause of non-developed education system in that region.

In 1991, data from census shows 14.1% rate of education in ethnic community. This data gives us a clear conception that the number of female students is much less than the male students. A ethno-linguistic study executed by Fazle Rabbi, Unesco (2004) expressed the following rate of education among the ethnic communities in Rangamati:

Boam-25%, Chack-5%, Chackma-55%, Marma-20%, Tanchanggha-31%, Kheang-14%, and Tripura-30%.

A report by Oraon formation program in 1997 mentioned an average rate of education in greater North Bengal. In that

report the literacy rate in Oraon community is 14%.

There are a number of government primary school in the hill tracts and other ethnic community areas in Bangladesh. Though rules and opportunities are equal for children from ethnic and Bengali community, but in reality the children from ethnic community are often deprived of those rights.

Moreover, opportunities are too limited to give education to all children in ethnic communities. Still roughly fifty percent of ethnic children are staying back from any kind of education opportunity in the greater hill tracts region. However, children from ethnic communities are learning in their mother tongue in Tripura and Mizoram, the neighbouring provinces of India.

We also found very limited initiatives that have been taken from different NGOs to enrich system and the rate of education among the ethnic communities of Bangladesh.

Education without mother tongue is the major obstacle in primary education for multicultural students. To enrich and ensure children's mental and physical growth education through mother tongue is the most important factor for their development.

The goal of education for all will not achieved with out the priority policy for indigenous children's primary education through government initiatives. And we need a bridge between the education and mother tongue especially for our deprived indigenous communities of

Bangladesh.

Recommendations

- More schools in every village of indigenous community.
- Medium of primary education should be in mother tongue.
- Textbooks should be written in ethnic language.
- Recruitment of teachers must be from within the community.
- Ensuring supervision and monitoring with the support of the communities.
- Ensure cent percent attendants in school. If necessary, health and financial assistance (stipends) can be served.
- School calendar should be adjusted according to the local traditions, religion, work and weather.
- Need for special allocations from national budget.
- Government of Bangladesh should take responsibility for child education of indigenous community.

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Implications of US-India nuclear deal

SANDEEP PANDEY

THE US is having a difficult time trying to justify the US-India nuclear deal as part of which the 123 agreement has just been concluded, guaranteeing India full civil nuclear cooperation. As the text of the agreement has been released 3 days prior to Hiroshima Day (August 6), there is consternation among people believing in a world free of nuclear weapons.

After imposing sanctions on India, after its nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998, the US is ultimately according it the status of a nuclear weapons state under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty without formally saying so.

The US is willing to do business with India in nuclear technology and materials, as it is with any other nuclear weapons or non-nuclear weapons state, which is a party to the NPT. As a non-signatory state, India is not supposed to derive this privilege.

However, under the deal, India is being given the benefits which have been made available to some very close allies of the US, like Japan or EURATOM, making other NPT members wonder about the utility of their acceding to the Treaty.

The US seems to be more worried about the business interests of its corporations than about the more worthy cause of disarmament, and it has once again proved that to maintain its global hegemony it does not mind throwing all national and international norms and laws to the wind.

With Nicholas Burns, the chief diplomat-architect of the 123 agreement, hinting at subsequent non-nuclear military cooperation with what he describes as a "soon to be the largest country in the world," we are going to see more of a unipolar world, posing a threat to the smaller countries around the world, especially the unfortunate ones out of favour with the US Government.

It is quite clear that US wants to court India as a strategic ally, with the objective of developing joint military capabilities and perhaps even establishing military bases on Indian territory, and it is willing to play along with Indian nuclear ambi-

tions.

The recent stop-over of the US nuclear powered aircraft carrier Nimitz, recently deployed in the Persian Gulf as a warning to Iran and possibly carrying nuclear weapons, at the port of Chennai, in violation of India's stated policy of not allowing transit of foreign nuclear weapons through its territorial waters, is a sign of things to come.

At the preparatory committee meeting for the 2010 NPT review conference held in May-June, in Vienna, the New Agenda Coalition countries, Ireland, Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden and Japan have urged India, besides Pakistan and Israel, to accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states in order to accomplish universality of the Treaty.

Under the Treaty a nuclear weapons state has been defined as one, which has manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive devices prior to January 1, 1967.

It would really be a misnomer to call India -- and Pakistan and Israel -- as non-nuclear weapons states. So, the US is doing the next best thing. It says that by signing the deal with India it is bringing India into the non-proliferation regime, as more of its nuclear facilities will now be subjected to IAEA safeguards.

As part of the negotiations, India has agreed to bifurcate its nuclear activity into clearly identified civilian and military categories, with the provision of the former being open to IAEA inspections.

The US has agreed upon this India specific deal as an exception, in spite of resistance from within and without, because it thinks that India has not contributed to proliferation.

It is a different matter, though, that by conducting nuclear explosions twice India has violated the global non-proliferation regime, instigating Pakistan to do the same. North Korea was also emboldened to come out of NPT because of India's brazen transgression.

India has consistently refused to sign the NPT, CTBT or FMCT. It is amazing how India has come this far with the US, outraging the modesty of the international community, and

extracted significant concessions in the deal.

Against the spirit of the Henry Hyde Act, if India decides to conduct another nuclear test or violates IAEA safeguards agreement, the US will not immediately exercise its right of return of materials and technology but, giving due considerations to the circumstances which prompted India's action, will ensure the continuity of India's nuclear fuel supply from other sources around the world.

The text of the 123 agreement has even gone as far as identifying France, Russia and the UK as potential suppliers in the eventuality of the US terminating its supply. And even if the US exercises right of return, India will be suitably compensated. Moreover, the US would support India in building up a strategic nuclear fuel reserve, ensuring that India will not be stranded like it was when fuel for the Tarapur plant was stopped after India's first testing.

The issue which clinched the 123 agreement was India's offer to subject a new reprocessing facility, which will be built exclusively for this purpose, to IAEA safeguards in return for the consent to reprocess the spent fuel, even though the US president is on record as saying that enrichment and reprocessing are not necessary for a country to move forward with nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. India will be free to maintain and develop its nuclear arsenal.

The deal will not have any impact on this. In fact, with external resources available for its nuclear energy programme, it will be able to divert its internal resources for strengthening its strategic programme. 8 nuclear reactors out of 22, and an upcoming Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor, will remain dedicated for military purposes, outside the purview of IAEA.

Hence, in essence, India will enjoy all the powers of a nuclear weapons state under the NPT, especially if the Nuclear Suppliers Group of 45 countries also yields to the US-like concessions to India.

The US is going to campaign with the NSG to engage in nuclear trade with India after it has helped India sign an agreement with IAEA on safeguards, because it has to seek another approval of the Congress before



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US and India, the nuclear allies.

the deal can be considered final.

It is intriguing how Australia, Canada, South Africa, and others, are only too willing to go along with the US desire so that they can do business with India, giving up their long standing commitment to non-proliferation.

23 US lawmakers wrote a letter to the US president on July 25, expressing concern over India's growing ties with Iran, including the domain of defence partnership. It must be remembered that India is considering a very important deal with Iran on the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline.

Considering that the energy information administration of the US has, in its International Energy Outlook 2007, predicted that the largest proportion of the new capacity addition for electricity generation until 2030 will be in the form of gas fired technologies, which are also better from the point of view of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it is more likely that India will give equal if not more importance to its relationship with Iran. The deal with Iran is also one of the rare instances where Indian and Pakistani interests converge.

Hence, it should not surprise anybody if the gas pipeline deal with Iran dominates the nuclear deal with US in the Indian and regional context, at least for a couple of decades to come. India claims that with this deal the global order has been changed. And it is right. It has upset the non-proliferation regime. Globally and regionally, it is going to lead to reconfiguration of forces, possibly leading

to a renewed arms race.

The National Command Authority of Pakistan, which oversees the nuclear programme there, chaired by President Musharraf, has already expressed its displeasure at the deal and pledged to maintain (read upgrade) its credible minimum deterrence. Pakistan views this deal as disturbing the regional strategic stability, and has asserted that it cannot remain oblivious to its security requirements.

An International Panel on Fissile Materials report predicts at least four to five times increase in India's weapons grade plutonium production rate. The present Indian stock is estimated to be sufficient for about 100 nuclear warheads. This is obviously alarming for Pakistan.

What India and Pakistan need, in the interest of the people of the sub-continent, is a mutually reassuring deal to suspend the nuclear arms race rather than something which will fuel the nuclear fire. The peace process undertaken by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Pervez Musharraf is in danger of being eclipsed by the US-India nuclear deal.

Sandeep Pandey received Ramor Magsaysay Award for emergent leadership in 2002.

SARWAT CHOWDHURY

I have read with interest the recent two-part write-up (August 4 and 5) in the Daily Star, advocating open-pit coal mining, which was apparently based on your correspondent's recent visit to Germany. I find that the report was based on poor judgment, if not actually biased, and the comparison between Germany and the prevailing situation in Bangladesh is also flawed.

Unlike Germany, the population density in Bangladesh is very high (a fair resettlement of the people displaced by open-pit mining will be very difficult), and the environmental impacts of open-pit coal mining on our limited arable land, water bodies, and underground water tables will be

understand that subsidising coal production in our country will be difficult, and will hardly meet the urgent need for more viable sources of energy. From that perspective, Germany is not a good example for Bangladesh to emulate, either.

This is a crucial time for our nation, and it is important that policy decision makers are not influenced by incorrect reporting. In the write-up, the omission of the viewpoints/interviews of the local stakeholders (people who actually were affected by open-pit mining in Germany) is also noticeable, and so is the strong message coming from the mining company itself.

As such, the report does not read like the kind of thoughtful journalistic piece we would



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Open pit mining can have negative impact on the environment.

far-reaching, both in terms of area and time.

Besides, environmental laws and regulations with regards to coal mining are non-existent in our country, and there are no national companies capable of carrying out safe mining yet.

While the reporter describes the practice of open-pit coal mining as a very positive experience in Germany, he fails to note that such coal mining is highly subsidised in that country, with domestic coal production declining; Germany actually imports coal from other countries.

Compare that with Bangladesh, and readers can

expect from a highly respected newspaper like the Daily Star.

I would urge the reporter concerned to broaden his research and produce a balanced addendum, and not be swayed by his visit to the sites chosen by a company that is very interested in open-pit mining in Bangladesh, which actually will provide very little financial gain for our country.

With climate change affecting our homeland directly, we need to be very cognisant of the harmful affects of usage of fossil fuels, and the fact that coal-fired power plants are one of the primary sources of global warming. Our energy choices must be mindful of this

issue for the sake of our future generation.

Open-pit coal mining is not a good idea for present day Bangladesh, and the ecological, economic, and human consequences of such a move would be very dire indeed. We need to keep our coal reserve and develop our capacity for coal mining, and build regulatory mechanisms for safe extraction through alternative methods that are being developed elsewhere. However, all this will take time, and the planning and implementation should begin now.

While our national coal policy is being finalised, we need to make sure that this is done as part of a long-term, integrated energy strategy that provides a thorough assessment of both natural gas and coal, and incorporates greater emphasis on renewable energy sources (solar, biogas etc) and energy efficiency (in household, industrial, and transport usage of energy).

In the short term, to meet our current energy crisis, we need to concentrate on proper usage of our precious natural gas resource, and make sure it is no longer wasted in preventable accidents (such as the Titas accident, Tengratila and Magurchura gas blow outs), or in the implementation of wrong foreign investment proposals (which provide little financial gains for our country while our valuable and limited natural resources are exported).

In a June 23 article published in the Daily Star, the Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) Energy Panel expressed such sentiments with regards to the national coal policy, and made similar suggestions.

I hope our national policy makers will take note of these suggestions, and our coal policy will be finalised as part of a sound, pro-people, and pro-environment holistic national energy strategy.

Dr. Sarwat Chowdhury, a member of Energy Panel, Bangladesh Environment Network, writes from Lusaka, Zambia.