

Losing mother tongue

FROM PAGE 16 children would not forget their mother tongues.

"We have our own alphabet but most Chakma people cannot enjoy our literature as they did not learn to write and read Chakma letters. They can, however, speak in it," said Trinad Chakma, a student of Dhaka University.

Trinad is one of the indigenous students who have published posters of Chakma alphabet to promote their language on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day today.

The Marma people also have their own alphabet. The Monipuri once had their own alphabet but now they use Bangla letters for writing. Other communities including the Bom, Garo, Hajong and Mro use the Roman or Bangla alphabet for writing.

A recent research shows that four indigenous languages—Bangli, Kurmi, Rajbangshi and Bhojpuri—out of 68 are forgotten now because of negligence and lack of practice. Nobody now speaks in these languages although people from these communities are present in the society.

The research conducted by Mohammed Rafi, a teacher of BRAC University, shows that 51 indigenous languages including Bede, Pahari, Bagdi and Sardi are threatened with extinction.

Sohel Hajong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Chhatra Sangram Parishad, said most people of their village in Sherpur do not speak in Hajong language.

"Each of our villages has around 10 families. Being a small community, we are becoming the victim of the majority of Bangla language," he said.

The indigenous people have long been demanding primary education of their children in their mother languages, but not much has been done so far.

Only two non-government primary schools in Godagari upazila of Rajshahi are teaching in Santal language.

The first school to teach in Santal language was opened in 1999.

A total of 475 Santal students are studying in these two schools," said Rabinranath Soren, secretary general of Jatya Adivasi Parishad, adding "We run the school on donation."

According to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord signed between the Janasanghati Samity and the government in 1997, three hill district councils were given authorities to arrange primary education for indigenous students in their own languages.

The Rangamati District Council arranged teachers' training on the Chakma alphabet. The Bandarban District Council translated textbooks up to class III in Marma and Bom languages but the students have not got those books as the council is yet to get the approval from the National Curriculum and Text Book Board.

With the help of Tripura Welfare Society, the Khagrachhari District Council published a book for children in Tripura language but that is also not being used at schools mainly because of lack of government initiative.

Mohammed Rafi in his book titled "Household Census of Small Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh" showed that 52.3 percent indigenous people want to teach their children in their own languages along with Bangla.

Many indigenous people are anxious about their next generations.

"Both of my sons speak in Bangla as all my neighbours are Bengalee and the medium of education is also Bangla. They did not learn Tripura...They are not even interested in it," said Dipol Tripura living in Feni.

The workshop owners will be tried as per the Explosives Act, he said, adding "Maximum punishment for the offence is 20 years' jail and Tk 50,000 fine."

The officials said that the drive would go on.

When used as CNG cylinders with motor vehicles, substandard cylinders run high risks of blast that may claim innocent lives.

According to Society for Urban Environmental Protection (SUEP), an NGO, 18 accidents related to substandard CNG cylinders left at least 17 people killed since January 2007.

The conversion rules say that CNG cylinders have to have the capacity to contain 3,000 pounds per square inch (PSI), while locally made cylinders or those meant for oxygen and carbon dioxide can hold only 1,000 PSI.

"Therefore, during filling CNG, such cylinders may blow up," explosives expert Nurazzaman said.

Businesses and officials concerned said many motor vehicles fitted with substandard cylinders run the risks of explosion as well.

Bangladesh CNG Filling Station and Conversion Workshop Owners' Association leader Abdullah Al Mamun said that they believe over 100 unauthorised CNG conversion workshops are operative across the country.

There are 210 licensed CNG filling stations and 110 CNG conversion workshops in the country, mainly on the peripheries of the cities and towns, he added.

The award recipients are Dr Nazma Chowdhury (Research), Khandokar Nurul Alam (Music), Wahidul Haq (Music, posthumous), Shamsundar Boishnob (Music, posthumous), Shefali Ghosh (Music, posthumous), Professor Dr Mozaffar Ahmad (Education), Khaleque Nawaz Khan (Language Veteran, posthumous), Professor Dr Zohra Begum Kazi (Social Work, posthumous) and Kabi Diwar Khan (Literature).

The award carries a gold medal, a citation of honors and a cheque for Tk 40,000 each.

Professor Mozaffar Ahmad spoke at the function on behalf of the recipients.

Cultural Affairs Adviser Rasheda K Chowdhury chaired the function conducted by Cabinet Secretary Ali Imam Majumder.

The deputy speaker, advisers, special assistants to the chief adviser, distinguished personalities, academics, poets, writers, singers and cultural activists were present.

The chief adviser said his government is going ahead towards holding a free, fair and acceptable election alongside keeping the country's economic activities in motion.

He noted that they had already embarked upon the journey on the path towards good governance through necessary reforms in various areas but said it needs cooperation, overall participation and awareness of all for further advances.

"And honest, competent, benign and dedicated persons will lead the nation and grace various seats as real representatives of the people."

The chief adviser urged all irrespective of party and opinion to work together to establish a progressive and democratic society.

Prof Mozaffar said economic emancipation has not been attained as participatory democracy is yet to be established.

With votes counted in 258 out of 272 constituencies, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Sharif's party had a combined total of 153 seats, the election commission said. The former ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Q and its allies together had 58.

Results also showed a near total defeat for hardline Islamic parties that under the previous administration ruled Pakistan's North West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan.

A hostile parliament threatens the political survival of Musharraf, who could theoretically face impeachment if the opposition gets a two-thirds majority.

Analysts said Musharraf's most likely strategy would be to woo Benazir party and split it from Sharif's by preying on the one-time rift between the ex-prime ministers.

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