

What do D-8 and G-8 promise?

Leaders from the D-8 group of developing nations adopted an ambitious 10-year blueprint that will substantially increase trade between the countries. The leaders have agreed to the roadmap, a Malaysian foreign ministry official involved in the negotiations said. The pact said: "It is a guideline for a vision and framework for enhancing cooperation. It covers sectors like investment, agriculture, energy, tourism, transportation, and banking and finance."

MD. MASUM BILLAH

THE first week of July this year witnessed two significant summits organised by both developed and developing countries, known as D-8 and G-8 groups, which were held in Malaysia and Japan respectively. The first one was a significant gathering of government leaders of some of the largest Islamic countries -- Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt and Nigeria.

Leaders of the world's eight richest industrial powers -- the USA, Japan, Germany, UK, Italy, Russia, France and Canada -- attended the G-8 summit. They vowed to bring down soaring oil prices and food prices, but failed to bridge the deep difference with poor nations on how to fight climate change.

This group wrapped up three

days of talks by inviting leaders of emerging economies such as China and India for a special session summit on global warming. Bush hailed the summit as very productive, and said: "I'm pleased to report that we have had significant success."

Leaders from the D-8 group of developing nations adopted an ambitious 10-year blueprint that will substantially increase trade between the countries. The leaders have agreed to the roadmap, a Malaysian foreign ministry official involved in the negotiations said. The pact said: "It is a guideline for a vision and framework for enhancing cooperation. It covers sectors like investment, agriculture, energy, tourism, transportation, and banking and finance."

Malaysia's central bank governor Zeti Akhtar Aziz said that the D-8 nations were on track to achieve their goal of boosting intra-group trade by 10% to 50% by 2018. The trade agree-

ment details economic activities that nations will pursue over the next decade.

To further promote economic ties, the D-8 members agreed to simplify visa procedures for business people from member states, which will facilitate economic and trade relations. This point was raised by Chief Adviser Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed who said: "D-8 should take tangible measures so that people of the group could travel to every member country without visa. Against the backdrop of current global food crisis, we should establish a food fund to enhance our collective food security."

The D-8 forum was actually established by eight Organisation of Islamic Conference member countries to share development and population characteristics to promote economic cooperation and development, especially in agriculture, industry, energy and trade, to

enhance cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, rural development, human resource development, science and technology, agriculture and health, and to improve the economic status of member states. The summit is held once in every two years discussing various economic issues facing the bloc countries.

Last year, total D-8 trade was \$1 trillion and intra-trade was about \$60 billion. We believe that this cooperation will open more opportunities for us. We believe that the forum will continue to enhance economic cooperation in the true sense of the term in the present perspective of the changing global situation, which has brought hard days for the member states of the group mainly because of sky rocketing prices of commodities.

The chief adviser further said: "We need to develop mechanisms not only to address short term supply of stocks but also to strengthen cooperation to increase agricultural productivity." He called for establishment of a D-8 Free Trade Area, and forging of a preferential Trade Agreement. Trading among these countries amounts only 9% of world trade. The figure is definitely very

poor, and calls for reasonable enhancement. We should collectively explore and implement capacity building to ensure growth of the member states." These important issues were discussed in the sixth summit of D-8 group.

The largest Asian business tiger, Japan, hosted the G-8 summit. They decided on some key points with respect to climate change, which is one of the most burning issues of the present time.

G8 leaders agreed on the need for the world to cut carbon emissions by at least 50% by 2050, and for each nation to set its own target for the shorter term. But the European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso defended the summit outcome. He said: "It is quite wrong to see this in terms of a confrontation between developed and developing countries. Of course, we accept the lion's share of responsibility, but this is a global challenge which requires a global response."

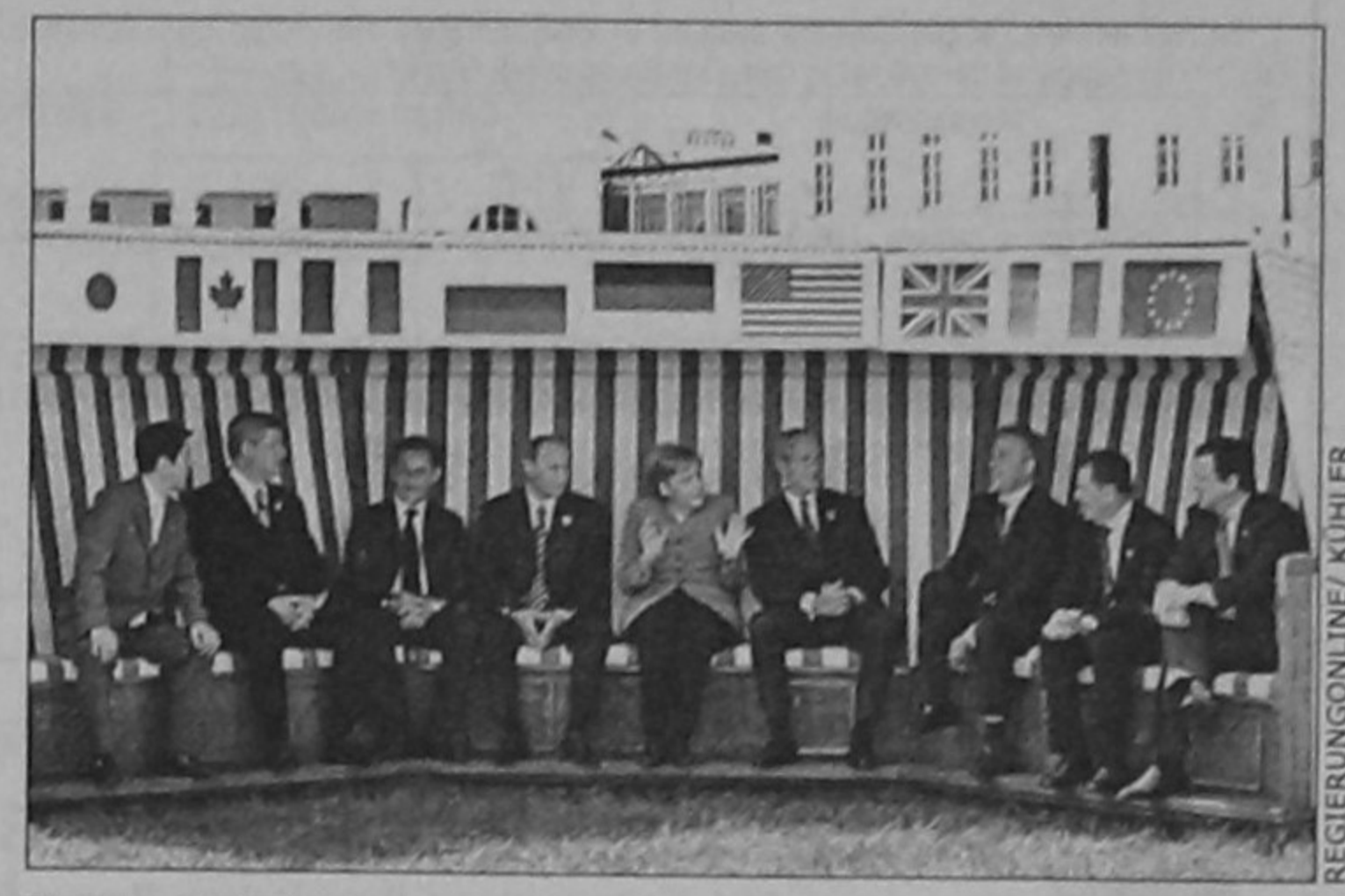
We also think so, but the greater responsibilities go with these industrially developed countries. They must take the initiative, and pragmatic steps. Of course, this statement is a step forward from last year's call to consider seriously such

long-term cuts. But environmentalists and developing countries denounce the deal as toothless. Still, we hope for the best. At least the rich countries have started to think about it.

The leaders expressed "serious concern" about rising food prices. They called on nations with sufficient food stocks to release some to help others cope with soaring prices, and said it was imperative to remove export restrictions. G8 leaders also called for an increase in oil production and refining capacities to help rein-in soaring crude prices.

The nations renewed a commitment made three years ago to double aid for Africa to \$25 billion by 2010, and to look to further assistance after 2010. The leaders set a five-year deadline to commit \$60 billion in funding to help the continent fight disease, including pledging 100 million mosquito nets by 2010, which officials hoped would prevent thousands of deaths from malaria. They also vowed to resist protectionist pressures and expressed "strong will" to work toward a breakthrough in free trade talks.

G8 leaders voiced grave concern about the violence-marred re-election of President Robert



The powers that be.

Mugabe. They warned of further action, including financial measures, against individuals behind the violence. The leaders urged Iran to end its uranium enrichment activities in line with UN Security Council resolutions, and called on Tehran to respond positively to international mediation. They urged North Korea also to abandon nuclear weapons and cooperate in the verification of its dossier of nuclear programs.

When the G-8 nations account for two-thirds of the world's gross domestic product, it attaches

utmost importance to boost the economies of the developing nations, which are limping in poverty. They must keep their promises.

As these leaders lord over the decision making process of the countries, they must show a rational and neutral attitude towards all. Iran, India, North Korea and Israel must receive the same treatment from them. Their double standard does not offer any tangible solutions to the burning issues of the world.

MD. Masum Billah is a specialist in Brac Education Programme, PACE.

Indigenous people of Bangladesh

The diversity of our culture due to the presence of indigenous communities is providing extra vigour to the national fabric of Bangladesh. Moreover, indigenous people are the original inhabitants of our country. So, they have the same right we have over Bangladesh, if not more.

G. M. QUADER

THE terms "indigenous people," "indigenous ethnic minorities," and "tribal groups" are used to describe social groups that share similar characteristics, namely a social and cultural identity that is distinct from dominant groups in society.

United Nations human rights bodies, ILO, the World Bank and international law apply four criteria to distinguish indigenous people:

- Indigenous peoples usually live within (or maintain attachments to) geographically distinct ancestral territories.
- They tend to maintain distinct social, economic, and political institutions within their territories.
- They typically aspire to remain distinct culturally, geographically and institutionally, rather than assimilate fully into a national society.
- They self-identify as indigenous or tribal.

The situation of the indigenous people in the world is not encouraging. According to an estimate, there are about 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries. Individual groups practice their uniqueness, different from those of the dominant communities they live in. They are the descendants of those who originally took up habitation in a geographical location. Other settlers, who came through conquest, occupation, encroachment, or other means, gradually joined them.

Ultimately, when and where

these intruders and occupiers became more dominant than the original population, the indigenous people were displaced and driven away from their ancestral homelands. Today, these indigenous populations throughout the globe, including Bangladesh, are facing similar problems and are fighting for their land and way of life.

Bangladesh has quite a few varieties of indigenous communities living in various parts of the country. Though the total indigenous population is about one million, or less than 1% of the total population, it consists of 45 indigenous communities using about 26 different languages.

Most indigenous people live in the rural settings of Chittagong Hills and in the regions of Mymensingh, Sylhet and Rajshahi. Most of the tribal people are of Sino-Tibetan descent, and have distinctive Mongolian features. These indigenous people differ in their social organisation, marriage customs, birth and death rites, food, and other social customs, from the people of the rest of the country. In the mid-1980s, the percentage distribution of tribal population by religion was Buddhist 44, Hindu 24, Christian 13, and others 19.

Each indigenous community, however small it may be, has a distinctive culture and heritage. The leaders from those communities express concern that those are fading away due to lack of government patronisation and aggressive activities by sections of local people. They complain that their rights are often violated both by

the government and by Bengalis. These can be protected only if the government shows more awareness and sensitivity to indigenous causes and comes forward and take steps.

How the indigenous people were forced to lose their dominance in their own locality is shown in the table as a progressive decline of indigenous population in context of the total population in Chittagong Hill Tracts over a period of time (see table).

Problems faced by the indigenous population of Bangladesh may be categorised as follows:

- In addition to facing discrimination due to their ethnicity, members of indigenous communities face hardship in education, employment, and everyday life.
- Lands of the indigenous peoples have been encroached upon and settled by newcomers. With little legal protection, indigenous peoples can rarely recover the lands they traditionally occupied. Sometimes government agencies in the name of development work take over lands belonging to the indigenous people.
- All over the north of Bangladesh, indigenous people say they are concerned about what they call encroachment onto their traditional homelands by Bengali settlers.
- Indigenous communities are mostly situated in remote, rural areas, where they lack infrastructure and access to larger markets.
- Indigenous communities have also played a historically important role in environmental



Census Year	1872	1901	1951	1981	1991
Indigenous	61,957	116,000	261,538	441,776	501,144
(%)	(98%)	(93%)	(91%)	(59%)	(51%)
Non-Indigenous	1,097	8,762	26,150	304,873	473,301
(%)	(2%)	(7%)	(9%)	(41%)	(49%)
Total	63,054	124,762	287,688	746,649	974,445

Land of my children?

protection. Traditional livelihoods in indigenous communities may depend upon agriculture and raising animals. Environmental damage, therefore, is having a severe impact on their economies.

- Land reform and property laws have restricted some indigenous groups like Khasis at Moulvibazar or Garos at Modhupur, making their traditional occupations untenable.
- As they are mostly marginal-

ised, indigenous and tribal peoples lack clout in national and even in most local governments, with the limited exception of local governments of Chittagong Hill Districts. Their interests and needs are often ignored by decision-makers.

- Years of discrimination have cast the indigenous people into poverty, thus further damaging their chances at empowerment and opportunities to improve their situa-

tion. Bangladesh is a poor country. But, it may not be wrong to say that, with very few exceptions, Bangladesh's indigenous peoples are by and large the poorest among the poor. It cannot be denied that they face discrimination in education, employment, and civil rights. Decades of violence between indigenous-led insurgencies and government security forces in the Chittagong Hill Tracts gave rise to social tensions there which still persist despite the signing of a peace accord nearly ten years ago. Allegations of serious human and civil rights abuses against members of indigenous communities surface every now and then.

The diversity of our culture due to the presence of indigenous communities is providing extra vigour to the national fabric of Bangladesh. Moreover, indigenous people are the original inhabitants of our country. So, they have the same right we have over Bangladesh, if not more.

The newly elected Australian prime minister recently apologised to the indigenous people of Australia. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told parliament: "We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering, and loss on these our fellow Australians."

Should we continue to neglect our fellow Bangladeshis, the indigenous people, and continue not doing what should be done for them, and be compelled by our conscience to offer similar apologies in future? Would asking for apology in future absolve our irresponsible acts today?

G. M. Quader is a former Member of Parliament.

A tool of revolution

The strategic brilliance of Facebook lies in the fact that it is a combination of the cyberworld and the real world. When Facebook revolutions work, it's not because activists manage to bridge the social network and the real world. Facebook is not a cyberworld; it is the real world expanded on the Web.

LILY HUANG

ON April 6 in El Mahalla, Egypt, thousands of people showed up for a demonstration in solidarity with striking textile workers to protest skyrocketing food prices. It gave many participants a nostalgic whiff of the bread riots of 1977, but what enabled that unexpected return to the past was a phenomenon of the future: a Facebook group for the event numbering more than 75,000 members. The precedent emboldened activists to start another Facebook group to stage a second protest to coincide with Hosni Mubarak's 80th birthday on May 4.

With tens of thousands flocking to the Facebook page, activists were anticipating another day of triumphal havoc. On May 4, however, the streets of Cairo were quiet.

What happened? Facebook was supposed to be a revolutionary tool of organisers, a powerful new way of tapping a global support network of dissidents and uniting them in opposition to harsh governments. In Egypt, however, the agitators are a disillusioned bunch. The failure of their "click-here activism," says a Cairo human rights expert who spoke anonymously because of the sensitivity of the issue, has shown "the limitations of social-networking sites as a tool for organising real-world protests."

This kind of disappointment is common to new technologies, which often seem to change the world and at the same time leave it much like it was before. As the Egyptian activists learned, a social network, just by virtue of being online, can't always hold together a "real world" movement. Facebook

creates opportunities -- it gives people the chance to write their own golden ticket -- but it is not to be confused with the tickets themselves. So what exactly is Facebook good for, and what are its limitations?

When what you want is exponential growth for your cause, nothing beats Facebook: the network is designed for a good idea to spread faster and farther than a single person can ever fathom. Think of a Facebook group as a growing body of water. For that water to accumulate pressure, it needs more infrastructure -- the better constructed the conduit, the more directed and powerful the flow.

While 19-year-old Alex Bookbinder's group supporting Burma's persecuted monks swelled to more than 300,000 members, the organisers sought

additional channels for their cause. Partnering with formal advocacy groups Amnesty International and the Burma Campaign UK, they successfully coordinated marches worldwide last fall, sending thousands onto the streets in London, Paris, Melbourne, Seoul, Taipei, Vienna and Washington, D.C. Mark Farmaner, who directs the Burma Campaign UK, affirmed that the Facebook activists transformed the global effort: "They're able to do things that we can't."

At its core, Facebook is built on information exchange, or, as founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg will tell you, "relationships." When it comes to solidifying already existing relationships, it can be invaluable. This was exactly what a Canadian group of small investors needed. "Canaccord and Other ABCP Clients," popularly known as "grannies on Facebook," lost their retirement savings when their brokers blew their investments on asset-backed commercial paper.

Their Facebook group helped them share grievances and make an informed argument. In April, "300 raging grannies" crashed a

financial-restructuring meeting in Vancouver, reported Brian Hunter, the group's creator, where their opponents "got their heads handed to them." Canaccord and other investment brokers pledged to reimburse the grannies in full.

The strategic brilliance of Facebook lies in the fact that it is a combination of the cyberworld and the real world. When Facebook revolutions work, it's not because activists manage to bridge the social network and the real world. Facebook is not a cyberworld; it is the real world expanded on the Web. "Facebook is there to help people share information the same way they do in the real world," says Zuckerberg. "On Facebook, these real connections become more efficient and people get more value out of all their relationships." Although the groups themselves are composed of real people, the connection happens in cyberspace -- with lightning speed and no regard to physical boundaries.

If the basic unit of the Internet is the byte, or character, then Facebook's unit is the individual -- creative, dynamic, proactive. This unit itself is something of eminent

value, upon which Facebook can trade ad infinitum with every connection made, every blip of activity broadcast across the network.

Facebook may be the messenger, but it's the users who write the message. In fact, they can write entire applications and run them on a platform that is, by design, connected to millions of people, of like and unlike minds.

Clearly the Egyptian authorities recognised the organisational power of Facebook, which is why 27-year-old Ahmed Maher Ibrahim, an organiser of the Facebook group for the failed strike, was taken to a police station for 12 hours and beaten up. At one point, officers demanded that Ibrahim hand over the password to the Facebook group. How much the authorities understood about Facebook, and ultimately whether they'll be able to stem its use as a tool of activists, are hard to say. When Facebook delivers a message that brings Egyptians out into the streets, we may find out.

THIS is an open letter to Cheung Kong, Swire Properties, CapitalLand, DLE, Excellence Group, Wharf Holdings and all the other major property developers in Asia.

I was standing outside a fancy marble, glass and steel office block when I noticed a wrinkled old lady taking a photograph of a wrinkled old man. All together now: Ahhhhh. Who says love doesn't last? It was SO sweet.

But not everyone thought so. Beefe uniformed guards raced up and told them that this sort of outrageous behaviour was strictly banned from anywhere in the vicinity of their building.

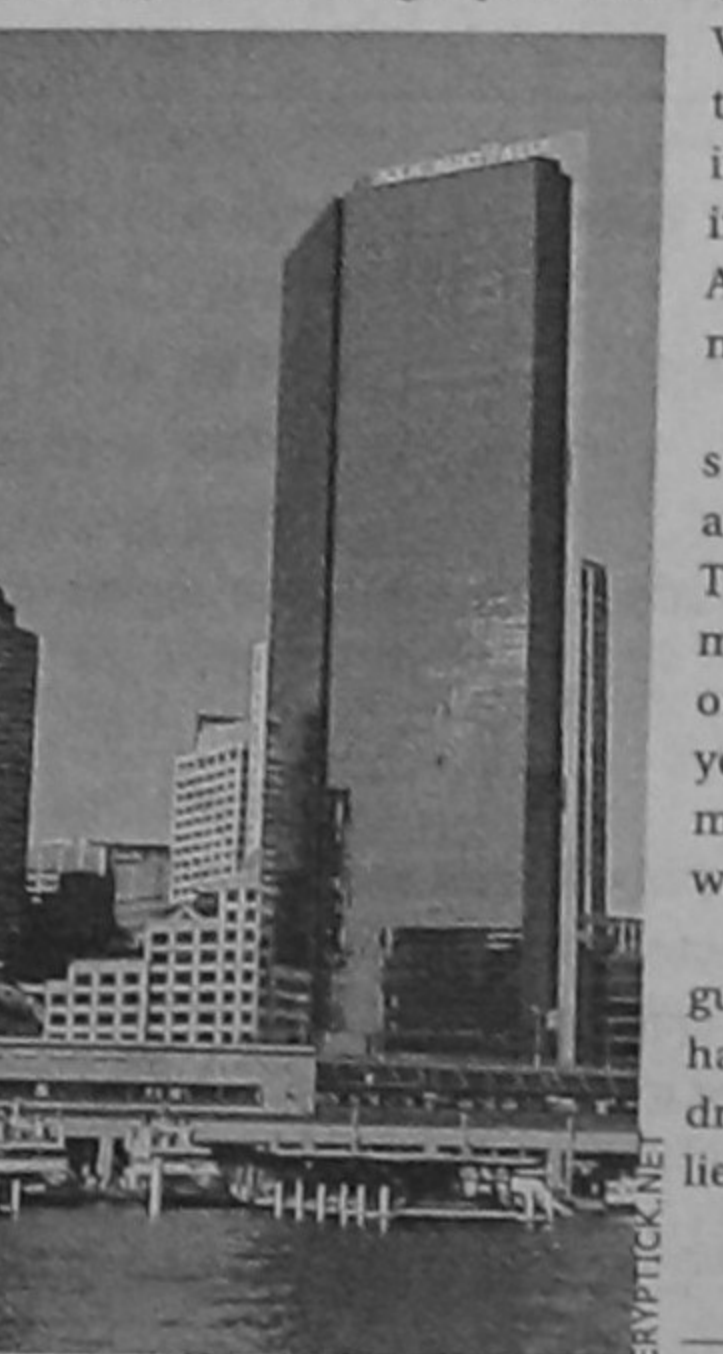
I couldn't hear exactly what they were saying, but it must have been something like: "How dare you use your enormously powerful five-millimeter camera flash against our massive, mile-high tower of marble and steel. You might hurt it."

The elderly couple apologised and moved away with unsteady, Bambi-like steps.

This happens all the time. I've been ordered away myself from chic glass towers for various crimes: taking photographs, sitting on a wall or (and this happens every week) for being in charge of children who were -- shock horror -- acting like children.

Well, I'm fed up of it. So here goes.

Dear Property Developers, listen up. I am talking to you. Yes,



A picture won't break the building!

You. Sit down and hear this. You have built glittering edifices in cities all over Asia which are designed for international yuppies rather than the average noxious resident like me, but that's okay.

You have replaced our noodle shops and local stalls with chain stores at which we can barely afford to buy a cup of coffee, but we won't complain about that.

Your buildings are closed cities in themselves and have no connection with the ancient communities around them, but we'll let you get away with that.

But there is one fact we need you to get straight. You don't own the city. We, the people, own the city. If we want to take photographs of ourselves in our city, we have a right to do so. If you build a big glass tower in the background of our photograph, that's not our fault -- it's yours.

If we want to walk through our city wearing lungis or sarongs or shorts, we can. You have no right to send us away or tell us to come back in Western suits. Your Manolo Blahnik brogues have been trendy for 30 years. Our preferred footwear -- bare feet or simple sandals -- have been a classic fashion statement for three and half million years.

Your yuppie hobbies of walking around staring at a 2.8 centimeter screen or talking to dangling wires are becoming increasingly popular, despite the fact that they make you look Very Silly. But our habit of squatting on our haunches and chewing a blade of grass while watching the world go by has been an Asian hobby since time immemorial. Let us be.

If our little ones want to squeal and shout and jump around in our city, they can. That's what children do. You may have been one yourself once, although if you tell us that you were formed from ready-mixed concrete and steel, we will believe you.

So call a meeting of your guards and tell them to stop harassing old folk, small children, idling lovers, young families, or anyone else.

You don't own the city. We do. Signed, an ordinary Asian.

Our columnist also owns a patch of cyberspace. www.vittachi.com.