

A culture that will never die

In identifying themselves as indigenous peoples, they do not mean to undermine the rights of anyone else, nor do they mean to undermine the global state system. According to Rebecca Adamson, an American Indian Rights activist, we are all indigenous people, and we have to reorganise to get along. All humankind is related to each other, each with a purpose, spirit, and sacredness. The rights of indigenous peoples are the same as the rights of all humans.

RIPAN KUMAR BISWAS

INDIGENOUS peoples have contributed the least to world greenhouse gas emissions and have the smallest ecological footprints on earth. Yet they suffer the worst impacts from not only climate change, but also hardship in education, employment, health, human rights, social and economic development, and everyday life. Precise estimates for the total population of the world's indigenous peoples are very difficult to compile, but at the start of the 21st century, there were at least 370 million indigenous people, including 5,000 distinct tribes spread across 70 countries, living relatively neutral or even carbon negative lifestyles. While not a large number when compared to the world population of 6 billion, it does have a substantial impact in lowering emissions. Compare this to the impact of the United States, with a population of 300 million -- only 4% of the world's population -- but responsible for about 25% of

world greenhouse gas emissions. But the global situation of indigenous peoples is not encouraging. In order to end their marginalisation, their extreme poverty, the expropriation of their traditional lands and the other grave human rights abuses they face, the UN General Assembly decided to celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on August 9 every year during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, declared on December 23, 1994, to commemorate the first meeting in 1982 of the UN Working Group of Indigenous Populations of the Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities of the Commission on Human Rights. In recognition of indigenous peoples' particular vulnerability to climate change and their important role in responding to it, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in its 2008 session will focus on "Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges." UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has asked member states and indigenous people to come together in a spirit of mutual respect. "Indeed, the suffering of indigenous peoples includes some of the darkest episodes in human history," he mentioned in his special message on the eve of this year's International Day of the World's Indigenous People. Indigenous peoples have a history and a culture that will never die. They have a consciousness of culture and brotherhood, though they remain on each country's fringes, marginal to each country's citizenship. They continue to suffer from discrimination, marginalisation, extreme poverty and conflict. They face dispossession of their traditional lands and livelihoods, displacement, destruction of their belief systems, culture, language and way of life, and even the threat of extinction. In identifying themselves as indigenous peoples, they do not

mean to undermine the rights of anyone else, nor do they mean to undermine the global state system. According to Rebecca Adamson, an American Indian Rights activist, we are all indigenous people, and we have to reorganise to get along. All humankind is related to each other, each with a purpose, spirit, and sacredness. The rights of indigenous peoples are the same as the rights of all humans. Indigenous peoples have fought for over 500 years against genocide, displacement, colonisation and forced assimilation. Throughout, they have succeeded in preserving their cultures and their identities as distinct peoples. But the ongoing fight over land and power has left indigenous communities among the poorest and most marginalised in the world, alienated from state politics, under- or un-represented by national governments. Today, indigenous peoples, who occupy some of the last pristine environments on earth, are at the forefront of the struggle against corporate globalisation and privatisation of natural resources. They want to be recognised for who they are: distinct groups with their own unique cultures and their own unique destinies, unaffected by the whims of their governments. They want to be protected from genocide, arbitrary execution, torture, forced relocation, or assimilation; they want to enjoy

their rights to freedom of expression, association, and religion. They want to be treated equally with respect to opportunities for education, healthcare, work, and other basic needs. Where such rights conflict with the needs of the state or other peoples, they want to participate as equals in an impartial and transparent process for resolving the conflict in a fair, respectful way. But they are inevitably going to disappear and some populations are facing extinction sooner than later. 18 of the 28 indigenous groups in Colombia have less than 100 members, "and are suspended between life and death." 50 indigenous people were killed and other forced to move to neighbouring villages, caves and mosques by the Ugandan Wildlife Authority in 2004. Indigenous peoples in Malaysia and Indonesia have been uprooted by the aggressive expansion of oil palm plantations for bio-fuel production. The recent cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, and the earthquake that struck southwest China, brought the world's attention to the plight of indigenous peoples in South and Central Asia, if only for a brief moment. The Rakia of India, the Peripatetics of South Asia, the Bhil of central western India, the Tharu of Nepal, the Dom of Northern Pakistan, the peoples and cultures of the Kashmir Himalayas, the

Hazara of Central Afghanistan, the Wakhi and Kirghiz of the Pamir Knot, the Badakhani of Tajikistan, the Lezghi of the Caucasus mountain range, the people of Tibet, and the Minhe Mangghuer of China; all remain stubbornly amongst the poorest of the poor. They are rapidly disappearing not only from natural disasters, but also from globalisation and its associated processes of imperialism and capitalism. Bangladesh is so culturally vast that it is easy to lose sight of how many indigenous peoples inhabit the region. Approximately 2.5 million are indigenous peoples belonging to 45 different ethnic groups. But according to a study of Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights, 61% of indigenous people still face discrimination, 42% are victims of corruption, and 19% have been evicted from their ancestral lands. Around 1.2 million indigenous people of the country are yet to be recognised as special or indigenous communities constitutionally, deprived of enjoying their rights and facing discrimination. Avoiding the path of armed conflict and finding a political solution to improve the condition of the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, the government set up a special ministry titled "Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs" on July 15, 1998 following a peace

accord signed between National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana-Samhati Samiti on December 2, 1997. Since the signing of the peace accord, there has been a catastrophic failure to implement the accord's terms. Arrests and intimidation of activists, and other human rights abuses continue. Land continues to be stolen from the indigenous people by both government agencies and by settlers. There is no one to put an end to human rights violations in the region or to ensure that those responsible for these



Indigenous people: Aren't they citizens of Bangladesh?

violations are brought to justice. Today, we have to acknowledge the contributions which indigenous peoples make to humanity through their rich civilisations. We must vigilantly uphold respect for their human rights. They should be integrated in the international development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals, in policies, programs, and country-level projects. We have to acknowledge their special stewardship on issues related to the environment and climate change. Ripan Kumar Biswas is a freelance writer based in New York.

Lemons and lemonade

To borrow an old adage: "If life gives you a lemon, make lemonade." Precisely such an opportunity to make some lemonade is presented by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol in the form of provisions for carbon trading.

NAVIL MANSUR CHOWDHURY

GLOBAL warming, climate change and their ilk seem to have become buzzwords for our intelligentsia in recent times. At any given time, we have several conferences, seminars and projects that give us the same bad news in different packages. This is, no doubt, fueled partially by generous funding from donor agencies and developed countries (guilt does loosen up the purse strings!). The upshot of this flurry in scholarly activity has been the clarification of a few facts that I will now proceed to bluntnly state:

- Bangladesh is going underwater, make no mistake about it, surely but slowly it will happen (if you believe the IPCC and Nasa reports).
- There is very little we can practically do about it (besides lamenting and venting our frustration at appropriate global forums).
- There is going to be a lot of funding for adaptation and mitigation to delay the inevitable (which partly explains our recent preoccupation with these issues).

Given the rather unpalatable set of climatic eventualities that we are

host country. Bangladesh has a two tier DNA consisting of the CDM board, which gives final approval after it has been recommended by the second tier CDM committee. The proposal is then put before the CDM Executive Board (EB), which is designated by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to approve the award of CERs. The applicant must prove that the project and the resulting emission reduction would not have happened anyway, i.e. establish "additionality." The projected future emissions in the absence of the project is recorded in a baseline to compare with the emission with the project in place. The case is then validated by an external auditor, known as the Operational Entity (OE), which has been approved by the UNFCCC. If a project is approved, the EB issues CERs, or carbon credits, where each unit is equivalent to the reduction of one metric tonne of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

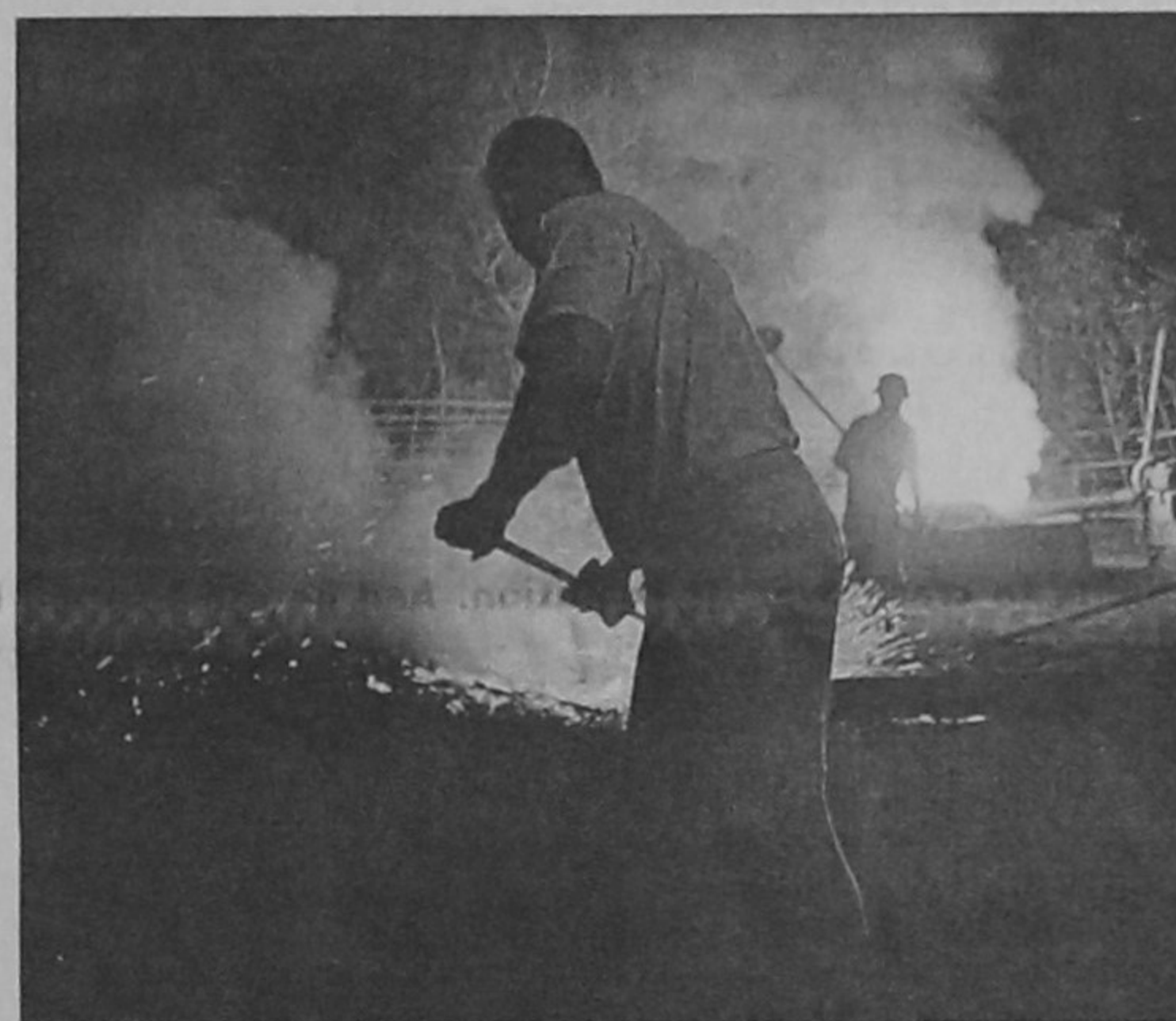
The process

A company from the developed country, or its local partner, that wishes to get credits from a CDM project must first submit the project for approval to the Designated National Authority (DNA) in the

host country. Bangladesh has a two tier DNA consisting of the CDM board, which gives final approval after it has been recommended by the second tier CDM committee. The proposal is then put before the CDM Executive Board (EB), which is designated by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to approve the award of CERs. The applicant must prove that the project and the resulting emission reduction would not have happened anyway, i.e. establish "additionality." The projected future emissions in the absence of the project is recorded in a baseline to compare with the emission with the project in place. The case is then validated by an external auditor, known as the Operational Entity (OE), which has been approved by the UNFCCC. If a project is approved, the EB issues CERs, or carbon credits, where each unit is equivalent to the reduction of one metric tonne of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

What's in it for us?

In the case of developed countries, emission reductions are infinitely cheaper to implement in developing countries as opposed to their own countries. The buyer of the



Trading in smoke?

CERs thus fulfills his emission reductions at a cheaper cost. But, given the bureaucratic tangles involved in getting a project approved by the EB, we have to be certain that the costs outweigh the benefits. In this regard, the seller (developing countries) also has sufficient incentive to participate as collaboration leads to transfer of "clean" technology and makes previously unfeasible environmentally projects financially viable. Given that funding under the CDM runs into the billions it is well worth our effort and time to see if we can get a piece of the pie.

Where do we stand?

CDM projects have had a quite start in Bangladesh, with several local NGOs implementing projects in areas such as landfill gas and composting, promotion of energy efficient lamps, solar energy, etc. These projects were implemented with the technical help and participation of developed countries and international NGOs. However, the number of projects being implemented or in the pipeline remains low. The absence of the industrial and corporate sector in CDM projects to a large extent is also felt. It can be safely said that the prospects of carbon trading have

not been able to capture the imagination of our businessmen, as they have in other countries. One of the stumbling blocks seems to be their lack of awareness about the possibilities under CDM. The CDM board has so far registered 1130 projects and issued over 170,493,201 CERs till date. For the 39 developed countries categorised under Annex B the first binding emission reductions must be achieved between 2008-2012. CDM thus takes on a new level of importance, with an acceleration in projects anticipated in the current period. Bangladesh could be one of the beneficiaries of this new period of carbon trading if we get our act together. The burden cannot fall on a few concerned NGOs but must encompass the government and the business sector as well. Policy makers must put in place more streamlined procedures in applying for national approval from the DNA, with the latter taking the lead in generating more innovative projects that attract investment from buyers of CERs. Waste management, afforestation, carbon sequestration and renewable energy are some of the potential sectors in which we can earn CERs. Some might ask if it is really worth the effort to develop these sectors? I mean, after all, we are going to drown. But at least we will have some lemonade to drink while we go down. Navil Mansur Chowdhury is a lecturer in the Department of Economics & Social Sciences, Brac University.

Every life is sacred

Here I have to give stress on the special responsibility of parents with an intellectually disabled child. These children being naturally slow learners, parents should assist them with love and patience in preparing lessons or in drawing and singing so that they can at least follow what is going on in the class. Parents should also teach them about personal hygiene, use of toilet, taking food, dressing, social behaviour and etiquette, and so on.

BADRUM NAWAZISH

WITH the universal acceptance of the concept of basic human rights, experts and social reformers are getting more and more concerned with the physically and mentally disabled people who are generally considered as burdens on the society. They have all along been neglected because of their inability to participate in normal social and economic activity, and very often fall prey to harassment and disgrace. Disability may be of different types, such as, visual, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual and multiple impairment. In this article, I will dwell upon intellectual disability in the Bangladesh context. From a study by HANDICAP International in collaboration with NFOWD, Bangladesh, it is seen that 5.6% of the people in Bangladesh have a disability of one kind or another. Among the persons with

disabilities, the percentage share of intellectual disability is 6.7. Intellectual disability is not a disease. It is characterised by both a significantly below average score on a test of mental ability or intelligence, and by limitations in the ability to function in areas of daily life. The deficiencies are demonstrated in communication, self-care, getting along in social situations and school activities. Intellectual disability is sometimes referred to as a cognitive disability, or mental retardation. Retardation may be classified in different categories -- borderline (IQ 70-79), mild (IQ 50-69), moderate (IQ 35-49), severe (IQ 20-34), profound (IQ under 20). In Bangladesh, the maximum intellectual disability is seen under the moderate category. Causes of intellectual disability are not precisely known, but experts hold that it can be caused by injury, diseases such as meningitis, a brain abnormality, which can happen before a child is born

or during childhood. Some causes known are genetic condition, and infections or birth defects that affect the brain, such as cortical atrophy. Other known causes are Down's Syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, and fragile X syndrome. In fact, intellectual disability may start any time before a child reaches the age of 18 years. Under expert handling and care, those in mild and moderate categories may improve enough to enter the mainstream of human activity. The world today is much more aware of the problems of disabled people than before. The UN Child Rights Convention clearly states that the disabled child must have effective access to education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment, and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to his/her achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his/her cultural and

spiritual development. Bangladesh government has also initiated positive measures in this line. Many NGOs and voluntary organisations have taken up projects for the development and rehabilitation of the disabled people. To improve the condition of the disabled people, there are now special schools, homes, vocational training programs, cultural and sports activities, social awareness programs, training of the parents and social workers, community based rehabilitation programs, and a few more such agendas. Apart from these institutional facilities, parents play the most vital role in supporting the development of the intellectually disabled persons. After the birth of a child, the parents should carefully observe the behavioural and intellectual level of the child, and if they find any unusual behaviour pattern they must consult a specialist. It has to be assumed that they will not feel ashamed of the retarded child or feel disgraced in the society; they must take care of the child like their other normal children. Intellectually disabled children must be allowed to interact freely with other children in order to develop adaptability, and get on well and cooperate with fellow beings. Social deprivation aggravates their mental state and makes them incapable of mixing with

people when they grow up. Parents should not forget that every person grows up in relation to other people, which means that every individual is a social being, that is, socio-individual human being. Our field experience shows that many parents are not at all aware of the intellectual disability of their children. Among those who know, many are found to be unsympathetic and impatient in dealing with this type of children. They even feel shy of facing society. Many think that their responsibility ends with sending these children to specialised schools and homes, and a good number prefer to keep them confined at home. This sort of treatment creates a psychopathic gulf between the disabled children and the parents, which proves most harmful in the long run. The seeds of development and improvement lie in the affection and close cooperation of the parents, but here many parents appear to be failing. Here I have to give stress on the special responsibility of parents with an intellectually disabled child. These children being naturally slow learners, parents should assist them with love and patience in preparing lessons or in drawing and singing so that they can at least follow what is going on in the class. Parents should also teach them about personal hygiene, use of

toilet, taking food, dressing, social behaviour and etiquette, and so on. They should take these children out with them on outdoor visits. As the child proceeds to adolescence, parental responsibility turns more critical. Specialised schools, homes and institutes are there to impart training, but parents have the most important role in this regard. They have to continuously support them so that they can function as independently as possible with self-confidence and a feeling of solidarity, both individually and socially in their integration in society. The parents are the guides of these impaired children, without whose direct involvement and cooperation no development program, however promising, will bring any fruitful result. There is no denying that parental responsibility in such cases involves a great deal of sacrifice, patience and commitment, and parents do everything for the sake of their children and the society. We too have our role to play as social beings. We have to remember what Dr. Everett Koop, Surgeon General of the United States, once said: "We're not just fighting for this baby, but for the principle that every life is sacred."

Why use a name when a number will do

Once met a guy called Jim Smith who didn't like his name. What's not to like about Jim Smith? "I'm invisible," he lamented. "It's the most common name in the English-speaking world," he said. "My name makes it impossible to find me on the Internet or in databases." I tried to find him through my computer. The US census bureau said there were 51,013 different Jim Smiths in the United States alone. Google found 796,000 references to the name "Jim Smith." But at least Jim's name is better than his brother's name, which is John Smith. "John's name is not only common but it sounds fake," he said. His brother has the following conversation all the time: "What's your name?" "John Smith." "Yeah, right." "I told him to bring John to Asia. He could settle in any city at random, and be the only John Smith there. This got him thinking. He asked me what popular fake names were used on this side of the planet. In China, watch out for the name Wu Ming Shi, I told him. It means "Mister No Name." In the Philippines, unnamed men are always Juan dela Cruz and unnamed women are Juanita dela Cruz. In Singapore, a convention has grown up to refer to any unnamed moron as Tan Ah Beng. Unfortunately, there are several real Tan Ah Bengs who are greeted with gales of laughter whenever they show their name cards. In Israel, ads for credit cards usually carry the name "Israel Israeli." I give them ten of ten for patriotism but zero for creativity. Spain is an odd one. Spaniards use the name Senor Fulano for the first anonymous person, and then Megano, Zutano and

Perengano in that order for his anonymous associates. Influenced by Senor Fulano, Indonesia and Malaysia use Si Polan. If your daughter gets a Malaysian boyfriend who introduces himself as Si Polan Bin Si Polan, be careful. It means "Anonymous, son of Anonymous." In tech-obsessed India, anonymous names are not allowed in court, but there was one case in 2006 when a judge agreed to hear a case against a man referred to only by his Internet protocol number (a web link's serial number prefixed by the letters 'I' and 'P'). Indeed, the Indians I know are so computer-obsessed that I wouldn't be surprised if they were all one day known by their IP numbers, and will greet each other with "Namaste [Greetings]. Are you IP 234567? I am IP 987654." (This would also work well in Hong Kong, where Ip is a common family name.) In the West, people without names are generally known as John Doe and Jane Roe. One of the most famous legal cases in American history, Roe v. Wade, is actually the fictional Jane Roe. (The real woman involved insisted on being anonymous, so respectable journalists don't include her actual name, which was Norma McCorvey.) I always felt sorry for one guy in Atlanta who was born John Doe. When he died in 2006, the newspaper obituary said: "For most of his 92 years, he had to show his marriage license or his driver's license to prove to suspicious hotel clerks and doubting hospital personnel that John Doe was his real name." I think we should all just use digits. From now on, please refer to me as Number One. Write to our columnist Number One via www.vittiachi.com.