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## Indigenous peoples' expectations

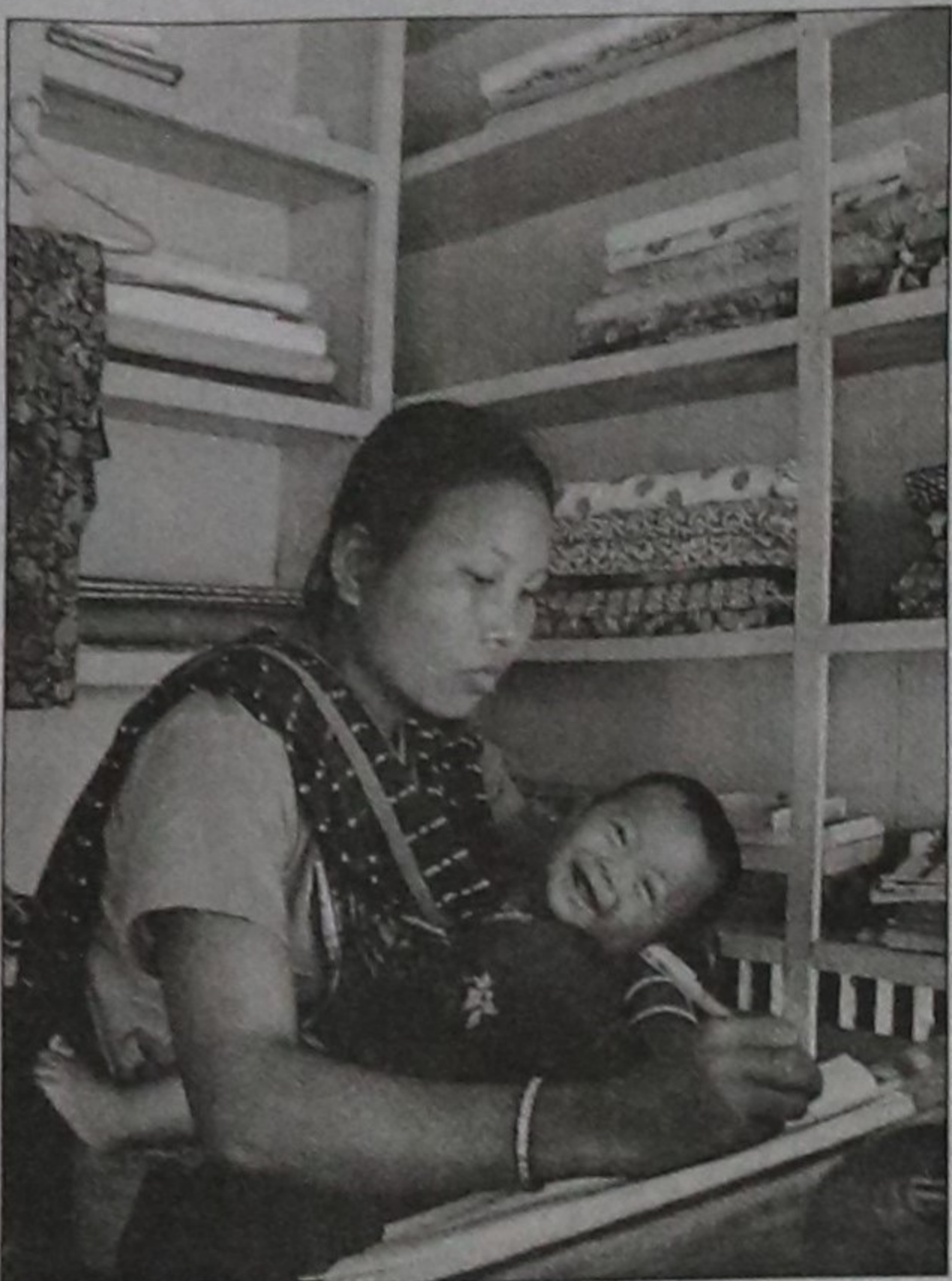


PHOTO: AMRUL RAJIV

It is estimated that there are 370 million indigenous peoples in more than 70 countries around the world. They represent over 500 languages and cultures. As per available information here in Bangladesh more than 45 indigenous communities can be found. They have been living here from time immemorial. The United State's Permanent Forum on Indigenous issue, an advisory body established by the Economic and Social Council in 2000, has been working with the mandate to address indigenous issues related to economic and social development, education, health and human rights. The UN declared an "Indigenous Decade" (1995-2005) and called upon all the countries to join hands in preserving and developing the unique cultures, religion and languages of indigenous peoples. Many countries came forward but the then government of this country did not support the declaration. Rather the government said, "There are no Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh." Such an irrational statement shocked the indigenous peoples in the country.

We do believe that this new government will work for the development of indigenous peoples and ensure that there will be no discrimination against any community.

Rasel Raymond Dio  
Bhatikar, Mymensingh

### Nury Vittachi's column

Nury Vittachi's struggle to break down the barrier of cultural stagnation and indefatigable effort to bring a way of expressing feelings through a humorous but standard way should be appreciated. Visiting the website www.vittachi.com I came to know about Asia's one of the most widely published writers. His dialogue based columns added a new frame in writing columns. His way of pointing fingers towards problems of our society is really unique. In a column named "We are all robots", he wrote that people can be incredibly stupid. There were some reasons behind pointing finger towards journalists. I think it would be bit better to say, "People (excluding me) can be incredibly stupid, because I have discerned the problem."

Humour should not be abused. In our subcontinent, especially in movies that are produced in this region, we often observe the effort to reflect sense of humour without maintaining standard. This proves again that people can be incredibly stupid. Once Tolstoy said, "Ignorance of general people is the source of power of rulers." This also proves that we can be stupid more than we can expect.

I would like to thank Nury Vittachi for discerning problems of our society and also for presenting them in a presentable way. After reading the first page of DS I go to the 'Point Counterpoint' in order to know if there is a column by Nury Vittachi.

Subir Das

Dept. of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering

Ahsan Ullah Hall, BUET Dhaka

### Cases against Hasina

Three extortion charges were filed against Sheikh Hasina in June 2007, which led to her arrest on July 16 that year. Those were the grounds for arresting her for nearly a year and on parole to date.

Sheikh Hasina may have "forgiven" these businessmen for making false accusations that put her in jail, but Bangladeshi citizens should be asking to answers to two very crucial issues. First, we must know the parties involved that intimidated these businessmen to file cases against Hasina. As citizens, we have the right to have access to such information. Secondly, we must account for the total expenditures (both direct expenses and personnel salaries) for running these cases in our courts, and make the conspirators and/or the accuser to pay the government for the amount spent.

The people have voted for a change in the 2008 national election. We want to see transparencies in the ways the government runs its business. It will be reassuring if the present democratic government probes into the aforementioned issues and make available for the public the information sought from their investigation.

Towhid Salam  
Los Angeles, California, US

### Obama makes history

Barack Obama has stepped into the history of America as the first black African-American leader swearing in as the 44th US President. We wholeheartedly congratulate Obama as the new American President and leader of the world and would like to remind him of the pledge 'Change We Need' he made with the people and urge him to follow the true democratic principles in governance and in maintaining foreign policies. Reasonably, we hope his pragmatic and efficient leadership will bring about qualitative changes.

The whole world with myriad hopes and expectations is eagerly looking forward to witnessing the sensible and rewarding leadership of Obama that will both reflect and meet the people's expectations to a great extent. We wish him the best.

Alamin Al Azad

Zahurul Haque Hall

University of Dhaka

### Obama's silence

Obama remained silent during the Gaza crisis. Barack Obama's chances of making a fresh start in US relations with the Muslim world, and the Middle East in particular, appeared to diminish with each new wave of Israeli attacks on Palestinian targets in Gaza.

Evidence is mounting that Obama is already losing ground among key Arab and Muslim audiences that cannot understand why, given his promise of change, he has not spoken out. Arab commentators say there is growing disappointment at Obama's detachment - and that his failure to distance himself from George Bush's strongly pro-Israeli stance is encouraging the belief that he either shares Bush's bias or simply does not care.

The Al-Jazeera satellite television station recently broadcast footage of Obama on holiday in Hawaii, wearing shorts and playing golf, juxtaposed with scenes of bloodshed and mayhem in Gaza. Its report criticizing "the deafening silence from the Obama team" suggested that Obama is losing a battle of perceptions among Muslims that he may not realize has even begun.

"People recall his campaign slogan of change and hoped that it would apply to the Palestinian situation," "The president-elect is closely monitoring global events, including the situation in Gaza," his national security spokeswoman Brooke Anderson said in a statement after the ground assault got underway. But she offered no further comment on the violence in Gaza and used a phrase repeated often by Obama and his aides: "Obama is 'committed' to achieving peace in the Middle East. That is the only extended comment from the president-elect's team so far. "Obviously, this situation has become even more complicated in the last couple of days and weeks... But it's something that he's committed to."

His muted response has already drawn the anger of some in the Middle East and Asia.

Peter C. Rebeiro  
Indira Road, Dhaka

### An open letter to PM

First of all, I would like to felicitate our honourable PM, Sheikh Hasina on her taking the leadership of the country. Your election manifesto was so forward-looking, innovative and visionary that most of the first-time voters were galvanized to support you and your party. Actually, the people of Bangladesh were passing through a very crucial time for the last seven years. We wanted a change. The people of Bangladesh voted for you with a great hope to shape up their destiny. But will they be able to do that? I strongly hope that you will play your due role in this regard. We want that you do nothing but fulfil your poll pledges. If you fulfil your commitments, we will not have any complaint against you and your government or party. I earnestly implore you to pay attention to the following demands:

1. Eradicate corruption from the country.
2. Ensure transparency and accountability in every segment of the government.
3. Let PSC, EC, ACC and the Judiciary work independently.
4. Do not politicise the administration and the police.
5. Do not indulge the BCL activists at all to ensure congenial atmosphere in educational institutions.
6. Do not favour your party leaders and activists unfairly.
7. Make parliament more functional and effective.
8. Do not endure any anti-social or anti-state activities in our country.
9. Revitalize our foreign policy and diplomatic ties with other countries to maximize our return.

10. Kick off a new political culture in our country.

11. Root out terrorism and militancy.

12. Do not allow corruption in government recruitments at all that worries us much.

The political contributions of your father and you are immense in Bangladesh. Your father liberated our country and we hope you will fight until your death to complete the incomplete tasks of your father. You have nothing to gain but many things to deliver to the country. Before I conclude, I would like to remind you of Robert Frost's "Miles to go before I sleep."

Molla Mohammad Shaheen

Shahbagh, Dhaka

### Arab leaders

It will be in vain for the Arab leaders to approach America on the issue of Palestine, as Israel is a disobedient son of the USA.

Israel won't stop its aggression even if the father calls upon it to settle the disputes. The Arab states will have to find the solution of this problem themselves.

Mohammad Faruk

Mohammadpur, Dhaka

### Where is the change?

The BCL clashes with their rivals in the educational institutions are really unfortunate and unacceptable. The present government has been sworn in power to bring about positive changes. We have been passionately and resolutely waiting to witness the change.

But we are watching a different situation in the educational arena.

Nasrullah

One-mail

## A new era begins



PHOTO: AFP

The world has happily witnessed the historic event of America's 44th president Barack Hussein Obama's assuming the office the other day. The vibrant inauguration programme, the historic presidential speech by the president and the teeming crowds of the people flocking around Washington D.C. and beyond marked the occasion to such an extent that people across the world are, as it appears, struggling to find the fitting term to attach to the day - the day's spirit! It is, as some tend to say, the most important day on this earth in this twenty first century with all its difficult twists and turns, as people across the globe have found a fitting leader with vision and clarity of thoughts and action in the 44th president of the USA.

The magnitude of expectations

that is generated from the people and embraced the leadership of the president is huge and multifaceted to meet, one understands.

President Obama's foreign policy, as experts think, will have a definite and concrete course to settle down some burning issues like Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza or Palestine Israel, to mention but a few; and re-establish or refurbish America's image to the wider world namely the Muslim world which went awry in the previous Bush era.

We wish him good health and a long life. Three cheers for the 44th American President Barack Hussein Obama!

Rafiqul Islam Rime  
Agrabad, Chittagong

### Poor decision making

I really wonder when the BCB and its selectors would come to a firm decision on captaincy. This man has all the excuses in the world to explain why Bangladesh is failing in the critical situations. He never told us about his own failure as captain, though. His funny comment is, "If we played better, so and so did better, we would have won the game!" He has failed as captain and is now gradually falling behind his potential as batsman too.

The efficiency of Ashraful is casting doubts on the whole BCB and selectors, including the coach.

Areader  
One-mail

### Lobbying by teachers

A recent article in your daily titled "Hectic lobbying for university posts" (DS Jan 21) reflects how politics has deeply entered into the public universities of our country. The report says that some pro-AL teachers of different public universities are now trying to get the posts of VC, pro-VC and other important posts by lobbying with the government high-ups. Unfortunately though, this has been the usual story of public universities where VCs, pro-VCs etc are appointed on the basis of their partisanship rather than on the basis of teaching experience, seniority and quality.

When teachers so blatantly involve themselves with political parties, just for securing the lucrative posts of the university, it does not bode well for educational institutions. We have seen how a former VC of RU (during the rule of the 4-party alliance) recruited teachers and staffs belonging to the ruling party of that time. We have seen how teachers have at times refrained from taking classes to be busy with the activities of political parties (with the ultimate sufferers being the general students). We also see how divisions have been created in the universities by forming certain coloured "panels."

If the teachers, who should be the ones guiding students in the right direction; the ones who should be giving moral lessons to students and building them up as responsible citizens, themselves indulge in immoral practices, then it is ultimately higher education that gets adversely affected. I am not saying that teachers cannot support any political party. They may support a particular party but that does not mean that they will try to use the influence of that political party to become VCs or pro-VCs. And they should not blindly speak for that particular political party and should

## Zionist aggression



PHOTO: AFP

Smoke rose above the Gaza strip as the Zionist entity Israel continued its assault on the Palestinians in the region. Schools, mosques and civilian buildings were being subjected to indiscriminate bombing from Israeli fighter jets. There are reports that Israel had even used unconventional weapons against civilians in Gaza. The world was witnessing another severe blow against the principles and values of humanity. Yet the international community could do nothing to stop Israel from killing innocent civilians. The UN Security Council, the job of which was supposed to ensure global peace and security, miserably failed to condemn Israel's disproportionate use of force in Gaza.

How long will the world tolerate these atrocities?

An entire population of 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza had been put under a blockade for months, creating a severe humanitarian crisis. We hear from international media that the people in Gaza have nowhere to go to, no place to seek refuge to save their lives. Children, women, elderly people - no one is being spared from being killed. Water supply, sewage system and electricity supply have broken down in entire Gaza.

This attack on Gaza and the subsequent silence of the world reminds us once again how strongly the Zionist lobby is in control of interna-

tional politics.

Mamun David Ebne Ahamed  
Student of A Level  
Oxford International School, Dhaka

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All of us are aware of the Israeli atrocities in Gaza and as the days pass its intensity had been increasing in the geometric progression. Every day women, children and ordinary people were being subjected to inhuman brutalities by the Israelis. There are condemnations, demonstrations and protests against these brutalities from all over the world except from the friends and allies of the Israelis.

The Arab world is divided on this issue. We in Bangladesh have expressed our condemnation and asked the Israelis to obey the U.N. resolution. In addition, we may assist the suffering humanity of Gaza with humanitarian aids such as medicines, foods etc. Donations from the people of our country may be collected and this may be sent to the needy people of Gaza though Bangladesh Red Crescent-International Red Cross.

The Daily Star being one of the leading national newspapers may take the initiative by opening an account for collection of donations from the people and do the rest.

Mohammed Omar Hadi  
Gulshan-2  
Dhaka

rather try to portray the truth. They must not bring politics into educational institutions. As for the education ministry, it must not appoint VCs on the basis of the teachers' support for the ruling party.

They should at first look for senior and good quality teachers who can act neutrally and keep themselves above the interests of the ruling party.

Wasif Wahed

Old DOHS, Dhaka

### Gulshan-Banani Bridge

A few days ago a resident of one of the houses around the new Tk 32 crore Gulshan-Banani Bridge wrote a long letter in the DS, describing how life for the nearby residents has become intolerable because of the shenanigans of the youth disembarking all around the bridge from expensive cars, who carousel loudly far into the night disturbing the peace of the area while indulging in their expensive "hobbies" - fast cars and faster women, loud music and louder stimulants from bottles and packs.

When this bridge was opened last year, it was a heaven sent opportunity for residents of Gulshan-1 and Niketon to go to their work places in Banani and Kemal Ataturk by rickshaws, because the only other way was restricted for rickshaws by making Mohakhali as a VIP road. But lo and behold!! Our traffic controllers have once again come up with the 'perfect' solution. BAN RICKSHAWS. In time perhaps, when there is a robbery or dacoity, they will BAN more rickshaws on more roads. If there is extortion or corruption, the blame will once again be put on the rickshawalas. I use the bridge regularly and can testify that very few rickshaws use the bridge and cause no obstruction, but now six traffic constables (mostly killing flies) have been deputed to keep the few shaws at bay. What a waste.

Traffic Jams, (compounded

into Jellies and Marmalade) have once again become the bane of those who venture out into Dhaka's road and DS carries a very pertinent letter from Afrin about one of the main cause of tailbacks - free parking on most roads, streets and lanes by the gas-guzzling monstrosities that have once again made their appearance. The gutless traffic cops are totally ineffective to bring any semblance of discipline on the roads or to impose existing traffic laws.

Our new popular government must realize and realize very soon that it was not the 1-2% car-owners who gave them their overwhelming mandate but the vast majority of poor people, 98-99%, like rickshawalas and those who use them for transport, who voted for Boat. If one of the first decisions of the government is to discriminate against the poor daily wage-earners and curtail their livelihood by measures clearly infringing on their rights then they have already begun to shoot themselves in the foot.

Food for thought: The rickshawala on which I was riding over the G-B bridge yesterday (because the cop saw the arm sling supporting my fractured arm and allowed my rickshaw to cross) asked me petulantly "Uncle, why are only the car-owners allowed to use this bridge, when it is the general public who paid for it by the taxes we all pay?" I could only laugh and say far from it, most of them do not even pay their fitness fees, road tax or income tax on their cars.

Sikander Ahmed  
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

### Don't blame cricketers

Last Friday we all witnessed an epic final which eventually turned into a tragic moment in the short history of Bangladesh cricket. After that I heard many people blaming our captain Ashraful for this defeat. He was barely getting any kind of support from the people who actually call

themselves or act like real supporters. But they don't realize how difficult it is to lead a team which is struggling so much for existence in the international arena. I agree that our team has lost a golden opportunity to win their first tri-nation cup. But people should accept it as a positive thing.

So I would rather urge people to start praising instead of blaming the team. Although our team has lost, some players are still performing quite well. So stop blaming them!

Abul Fatah Saad

Banani, Dhaka

### Pollution

Pollution is the most talked about issue these days. There are many reasons behind pollution of the environment. Smoke that comes out from the brickfields is a major reason behind such pollution. From the chimney which is used to burn raw bricks smoke comes out continuously and pollute the environment severely. But we cannot think of modern civilization without bricks. As there is no alternative to burning bricks we should be a bit careful in doing so for our own survival. Smoke mixes up with air & pollutes our environment if the chimney is not very tall. A tall chimney can minimize the harmful effect of smoke in the environment. When the chimney is high enough smoke that comes out vanishes in the steam & it can not pollute the environment as it does when the chimney is low. Again, in the brickfield there work children aged 10 to 15 years, though it is very risky. It is want of food that compels those children to do hard work while it is time to study & play. The owners of the brickfields are making money, showing no concern for the future of those poor children.

The owners should look into the matter.  
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