

Ethnic minorities facing diverse challenges



This has prompted recent efforts from the government, NGOs and missionaries to make primarily education comparatively more accessible. However, children from extremely poor adivasi families face different barriers in school.

Government primary schools use Bangla as the language of instruction, English is also taught, but there are rarely primary school provisions for instruction in any adivasi language, making it difficult for adivasi children to compete at school in Bangla with their Bengali classmates.

Coupled with existing social and cultural differences between adivasi and Bengali, a disproportionately high number of adivasi children are illiterate, leading to high drop-out rates among adivasi children, thereby increasing the likelihood of low wages in adulthood.

Political barriers

Finally, extremely poor adivasi communities face distinct political barriers to their development. While the extreme poor across Bangladesh rarely attain significant positions in local-level politics and power structures, the adivasi are particularly affected by political marginalisation. Even in areas where they make up a reasonable proportion of the population, they generally struggle to compete for political representation, lacking the necessary money, education, experience and political networks.

While in recent years, some adivasi leaders (for example in the Barind Tract region) are coming forward to run in Union Parishad elections -- with the support of some NGOs and Christian Missions -- this is not enough to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable adivasi are mainstreamed in the local political agenda.

The "extreme poor" are not all alike

Thinking of the extreme poor as a homogeneous group of needy citizens for whom there is simple set of possible development interventions does a disservice to the variation in experiences of groups in extreme poverty.

The specific challenges facing adivasi people in extreme poverty remind us of the importance of policy-making that is nuanced and sensitive to the particular social and economic constraints of different groups. At least for those extremely poor adivasi people, policies designed to link them to the mainstream of Bangladesh's development initiatives will be fundamental for them to lift themselves out of extreme poverty.

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JOHNATHON PERRY

EXTREME poverty is common in Bangladesh, but the experiences of the different groups of people who live with it are not all the same. We must not forget that while there are common characteristics of life in extreme poverty, some groups of people face very specific challenges to their ability to live with security and dignity.

Policy-makers and the public alike need to be sensitive to these differences when considering how to help "the extreme poor," and must avoid lumping these divergent experiences together.

The extremely poor non-Bengali (other terms include "ethnic minority" or adivasi) population of Bangladesh are a case in point. Their experiences of life at the very bottom differ a good deal from their Bengali counterparts, and they face particular challenges in escaping the vicious cycle of extreme poverty

and marginalisation. As such, empowering adivasi people to lift themselves out of poverty will require a tailored set of policies designed to address their specific constraints.

Exactly this kind of nuanced approach to development policy-making should be at the heart of the government's Millennium Development commitment to the eradication of extreme poverty by 2015.

Trouble with jobs

Most extremely poor households face job worries, due to things like seasonal changes in demand for agricultural day labour. For adivasi people, this insecurity is made worse by the fact that they are often paid less than Bengali labourers for the same work -- while adivasi women are paid at a lower rate again. As a result, adivasi households and particularly those that are headed by women are vulnerable to the effects of fluctuations in labour demand and health shocks. This

desperate situation forces many adivasi to sell their labour in advance -- for an even lower rate -- during the lean seasons, and work for longer hours just to feed their families.

Migration pressures

For many extremely poor people, a lack of jobs forces migration to find work in neighbouring areas, with some even taking temporary residence in other districts and sending money back to the household.

Adivasi workers tend to migrate less than their Bengali counterparts because of worries -- based on past experiences of discrimination -- that if they leave their living place to find work, their land or homestead might be occupied by others illegally and they might end up homeless.

Certain cultural beliefs also play a part; namely that their ancestors lie with them in their homestead so that if they leave their home the ancestors will be displeased and migrants will suffer dire consequences. This means extremely poor adivasi are less able to move to find better wages, making their situation even more perilous.

Challenges at school

In general, educational facilities for the extreme poor are limited and of poor quality.

Tugboat diplomacy going wrong for Japan



tugging off of the Chinese boat to a Japanese island and arresting its crew members was a step with a far reaching consequence that might sour the relationship between China and Japan to the point that had not been seen in the recent past.

The two countries subsequently started exchanging verbal salvos over the issue, which continued for more than two weeks, further straining the relationship. Japan claimed that the clash in the deep sea had nothing to do with diplomacy, as the matter was being handled by the country's legal system since it was a case of creation of obstacles in the execution of official duty in its own maritime zone.

China, on the other hand, has taken the issue as a serious breach of diplomatic conduct on part of Japan, as officials in Beijing claimed that the Japanese coast guard had violated the sovereignty by taking control of a Chinese vessel in waters claimed by the country. The Chinese authorities also threatened to take actions that would have serious consequences on diplomatic and economic ties between the two countries unless Japan unconditionally released the captain of the fishing boat without any delay.

The Chinese threat did not remain confined only to words. The government of China promptly announced that it would suspend all high-level negotiations with Japan and also take economic measure to counter the Japanese offensive.

No doubt, the Japanese side did not expect such strong reaction on part of China. The dispute over Senkaku Islands is an ongoing issue and both countries had agreed earlier to initiate joint exploration of deep-sea resources in areas around the island chain. For Japan, the intrusion of a Chinese fishing vessel inside the zone Tokyo claims to be in its territory might also have provided an opportunity to show that the country would not hesitate to counter any act that it sees as a provocation.

For China too, the quick harsh action taken by Japan might have prompted the leadership to display China's growing assertiveness and hence the unusually strong reaction that Beijing had shown over the issue. China has not only suspended high-level discussions with Japan, but also moved forward to take punitive actions to harm Japan economically.

According to Japanese official sources, China has already stopped shipment of rare

earth metals to Japan. Rare earth metals are considered a key factor for Japan's industrial sector and are used for the production of hybrid and electric vehicles as well as in home appliances. Japan depends on China for most of its rare earth metals.

Things were later complicated further by some other actions taken by the Japanese side. Responding to the Chinese reaction over the dispute surrounding the arrest of the fishing boat captain, Japan's new tourism minister all on a sudden announced last week that he was cancelling a scheduled meeting with the vice chairman of the China National Tourism Administration, who was visiting Japan to attend a meeting of tourism ministers of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

Beijing was obviously displeased with the decision, and this might have prompted Chinese authorities to call on travel agencies to refrain from selling and promoting tours to Japan. The fallout will hit Japanese tourist industry hard as the industry was hopeful that Chinese travellers would give a much-needed boost to revitalising Japan's tourism sector. Chinese visitors spent an estimated \$594 million between April and June, accounting for 22% of the total spent by all foreign tourists to Japan during the period.

The decision to release the captain of the Chinese fishing trawler might have contributed to defusing the tension for the time being. But it also triggered a few other questions to pop up at a time when China is increasingly showing greater interest in solving disputed issues on Beijing's terms. The question of Senkaku Islands that the two countries could successfully avoid until now will probably no longer remain in the dark, as has been reflected by the Chinese demand for apology and compensation.

The Japanese leadership is well aware that giving in to Chinese demand would open a Pandora's Box, paving the way for China to claim legitimacy over the Islands. Hence, there was a statement issued by the Japanese foreign ministry saying clearly that "Senkaku Islands are now under the valid control of Japan and there exists no territorial sovereignty to be resolved concerning the islands." The indications are clear enough that the fallout of ill-planned tugboat diplomacy might continue at least for the time being.

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Breaking the administrative impasse

If the current bad feeling between bureaucracy and the elected representatives continues or deteriorates more it will jeopardise the whole of the administration, which may even come to an impasse. This is certainly not desirable either for the government or the bureaucracy.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

EVER since the assumption of power by the AL-led government we have heard complaints about unacceptable slowness in implementation of its decisions by the administration. It is difficult to say how far politicisation is responsible for it. There are other reasons, which need to be closely attended to.

They are mainly, (a) non-utilisation of the capability of some efficient officers because of their suspected political leaning; (b) allowing placement of less efficient officers in important positions, mainly because of their political affiliation; and (c) reported violations of the principles of promotion.

Needless to say, attainment of the various goals of the government cannot be achieved without good governance, which is possible only through good administration. In a democracy, particularly in a parliamentary democracy, there must be a clear and good understanding between the party/parties in power and the bureaucracy.

In Bangladesh, we are facing some sort of crisis in attaining good governance. What is happening is not totally surprising because we are still a young democracy. Therefore, we need not be alarmed because we should be able to find some good solution to this crisis soon.

Bureaucracy is power. Through its effective utilisation the government may achieve many successes. In case of failure to utilise the capability of the public servants, however, it has to pay rather heavily. Briefly speaking, due to absence of democracy for long periods, the bureaucrats find it rather difficult to adjust to a democratic government. We are sure they will be able to overcome this difficulty within a short time.

Immediately after attaining power in 1991 BNP did a great deal of damage to the principle of seniority in case of postings and promotions. This indiscreet step by BNP resulted in severe damage to the morale of the bureaucracy in general.

The present government has a number of goals to attain. But in more than 18 months it has not been able to show enough capability to achieve these goals. What is needed is much more speed by the administration to complete the tasks relating to implementation of decisions.

An unhappy situation for the government is looming large rather quickly because of misunderstanding between members of parliament and the bureaucracy. Some senior and leading politicians do not hesitate to blame only the bureaucracy for delay in implementation of government decisions. Due to such an attitude of people's representatives the bureaucrats are passing an uneasy time.

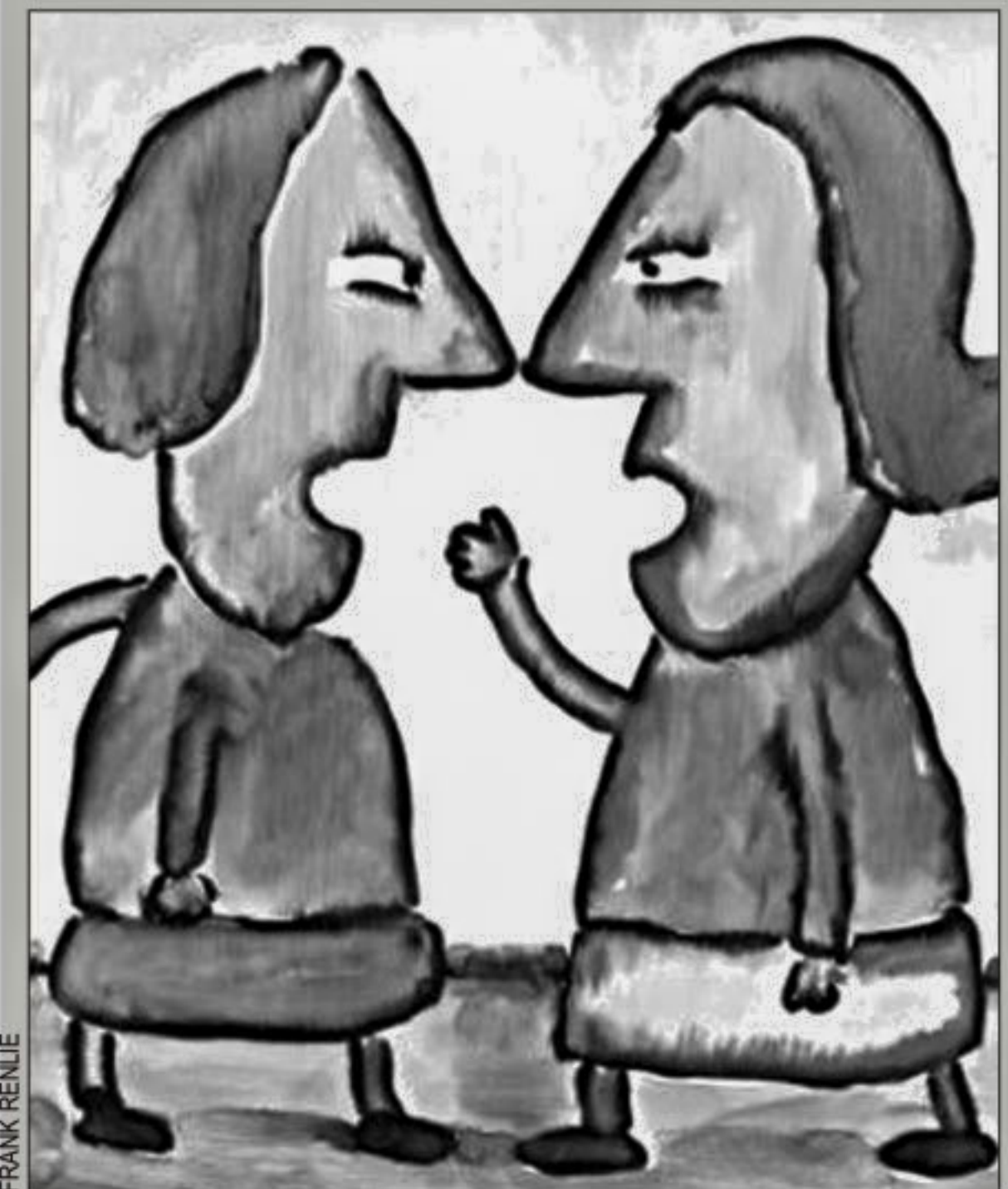
Harassment of government servants by activists of the party in power is increasing alarmingly. The saddest of such incidents happened in the district of Pabna, where it has been reported that even the deputy commissioner has been assaulted and 26 officers from the same district prayed for their transfer to other places to avoid harassment by the activists.

Efficient running of the administration needs wholehearted cooperation from the bureaucracy. Without proper cooperation from bureaucracy there cannot be formulation of good policies or their execution. The members of parliament must realise that undue pressure on the bureaucracy results in breaking of service discipline, which results ultimately in encouraging corruption and graft.

Ours is a new democracy and we are determined to establish democracy on firm footing as quickly as possible. If the current bad feeling between bureaucracy and the elected representatives continues or deteriorates more it will jeopardise the whole of the administration, which may even come to an impasse. This is certainly not desirable either for the government or the bureaucracy. Let the government allow the bureaucrats to play their proper role as neutral, fair and responsible public servants.

For resuscitating the administration we think close attention at the highest level is necessary. To create a new bureaucracy capable of adjusting well with democratic governments it is time for an administrative reform commission be set up. Time is short. Inordinate delay may result in pushing Bangladesh toward becoming a "failed state."

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FRANK FRIEDEL

MONZURUL HUQ

IT happened just before the ruling Democratic Party of Japan was about to make the choice of its leadership. The time was crucial for the party in power and hence there was a need to show some kind of a decisive standing on part of those who were in charge of running the show.

A Chinese fishing trawler approached a disputed island-chain in East China Sea that has been under Japanese control, but claimed by both China and Taiwan. Japanese Coast Guard vessels patrolling the area spotted the approaching Chinese trawler and sent warning signals for it to stop. The Chinese boat ignored the warning and as the coast guard vessels tried to block its way, it deliberately rammed into one of the Japanese vessels.

This prompted the Japanese Coast Guard to take control of the Chinese vessel and arrest its crew for obstructing the execution

of official duty. The fishing boat along with the arrested crewmembers was later tugged to the remote Japanese island of Ishigaki in Okinawa prefecture where public prosecutors started questioning the crews, without realising the massive fallout the incident was to create soon after.

The Japanese authorities later decided to release the crew except the captain, who all along claimed that he ordered the ramming of the Coast Guard vessel as he saw it as a violation of Chinese sovereignty on part of Japan by sending its ships to the areas that China considers as part of its own territory.

The timing of the incident was not propitious for the Japanese leadership as the ruling party was deeply involved in the leadership race. As a result, the initial reports of the incident were partially overshadowed as the main focus of attention of the media and the public was on whether Prime Minister Naoto Kan would survive the challenge or not.

However, it soon became clear that the