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instruments as the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention (No. 107) of 1957, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights all of which have been ratified by Bangladesh. It would also be in tune with the spirit of the UN Declaration on the Rights Indigenous Peoples, which has been garnering growing support internationally, with even the few governments that opposed it in the UN General Assembly (USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) are now demonstrating a willingness to accommodate this document. This is the only international human rights instrument that was adopted with substantive indigenous participation, and with the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples from all the continents.

Constitutional recognition: A just cause in the national interest

Constitutional recognition as Adibashi is a just and reasonable cause grounded in a desire to achieve appropriate status with which Adibashis may access their rights, without discrimination. The Adibashis are among the earliest inhabitants of the country. When they started their settlements in the areas that they now live, they did not displace the Bangalee people. No wonder they are called "adibashi" in Bengali, implying 'original inhabitant'. The Chakmas, Manipuris, Lushais, Santals and several other adibashi peoples resisted British colonisation by fighting against the colonisers with their meagre arsenals in the 18th and 19th centuries, as did Bangalees. The Adibashis supplied the much-need cotton to their Bangalee brethren from their jum (swidden) fields, when cotton imports from foreign countries were unheard of. They fought alongside Bangalees in the war of liberation. They protected, and still protect, much of the forest resources of the country. They sacrificed their lands to give electricity to the nation through the Kaptai Dam. They work in factories in Chittagong and Dhaka and have proved their contribution to the national economy. They have produced soldiers, policemen, diplomats and bureaucrats to protect the national interest. It is time that the historical wrongs are righted, at least in part, through constitutional amendments. This would help protect adibashi identity and rights, which are additionally threatened by globalised market capitalism. It would also promote national unity, integrity and stability, and enhance Bangladesh's international image in the comity of nations.

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