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PHOTO: FIROZ AL SABAHA

Note: Panchagarh, where this photograph was taken, is the only place in Bangladesh from where you can view the Himalayas.

“What are men to rocks and mountains?”
— Jane Austen, author, *Pride and Prejudice*

SNAPSHOT

CONSERVATION

In the year 2011, conservation biologist and Co-founder of Creative Conservation Alliance Shahriar Caesar Rahman embarked on a journey with the Mro community of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. After spending years building a good relationship with the locals, helping them conserve their endangered reptiles, and also creating opportunities, Shahriar and his team has moved onto the next level. “Their means of income depended on the growth of their crops, which would take a very long time to flourish. With an increase in their population, their alternative would involve the encroachment of reserve forests and hunting the surrounding wildlife. Saving



**SAVING THE FOREST,
SAVING THE COMMUNITY**

NAZIBA BASHER
PHOTOS: COURTESY

our forests is our top priority. What most people don't realise is that the destruction of these forests will harm us the most. The absence of the forests and the wildlife inside will put us in grave danger. To save ourselves, we must first save our forests,” says Shahriar

Shahriar had struck a deal with the community – he would help them earn back their loss through alternate livelihood, if they assisted him in saving the environment and wildlife.

With this simple deal, not only was Shahriar successful in starting up the conservation of animals and the environment in a remote tribal area, but also reviving the cultural heritage of the community. Through this initiative, Shahriar gave back to the Mro community by enabling them to make and sell their own designed jewellery and other accessories. This project was piloted in collaboration with Jaatra.

Recently, in the beginning of October, Caesar's organisation, Creative Conservation Alliance, and bcraft, a social business focusing on fair trade crafts, launched a workshop, incubated by Bengal and with the support of clothing brand Aranya. Termed the Artisan Knowledge Exchange workshop, held in Cox's Bazaar, the aim is to create market access for the artisans who are making the jewellery and other products to sell into the mainstream



market. “We want to give market access, skills development and knowledge to the Mro community through this initiative,” says Nawshin Khair, Managing Director, bcraft.

The first part of the workshop was to understand and merge the locals' capabilities with those conducting the workshop. Designers from bcraft and Aranya were present, who would study the methods and skills of the artisans, and would also give their input. “They don't use our traditional methods of beading



necklaces together. While we use thread and needles, they use underground beehives to stiffen their beads together. We learned their process and they learned ours, so that we could come to a more effective process together,” says Nawshin. Through different ideas of design, the collaboration created some fusion jewellery to make the products more marketable. “We are also trying to reintroduce organic materials back to them to make sure there is creative enhancement.”

After the jewellery making part was over, they then moved on to the products that use bamboo weaving. “Making these products is a little difficult as they would have to bring in the raw materials from Bandarban. What we are trying to do is make the process of acquiring these raw materials easier for them.”

While the elderly women are the master's in this regards, Nawshin also believes that encouraging the youth to follow the path is extremely important for this initiative to be successful. “We have created a month-long production plan, after assessing the designs and the time used to make them. We're quite hopeful with this project, and with Aranya by our side helping us sell these products, we are hoping to raise more awareness and help this community further by alleviating their poverty.”

Shahriar, and the entire team working behind this workshop, aim to achieve some great things through this integrated approach. “Firstly, we want to bring financial empowerment to this community. With their poverty rate rising, this is what they need the most. Secondly, considering that these artisans

are mainly women, they are also getting empowered by becoming bread-earners for their families through this project. And lastly, we are not only saving the forest, but we are bringing them resources from within to enhance their work,” says .

With an initiative like this, we can not only hope to embrace the culture and traditions of the Mro community that is being revived, but we can also hope for them to thrive, flourish, and reach greater heights. ■

MAILBOX

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The Common Man's Art

I really liked the article titled “The Common Man's Art” published in *Star Weekend* on October 21, 2016. The article amazingly depicted the beauty and artistic value of the colourful paintings that we see on the frame of one of our most popular transports – rickshaws. I am a regular rickshaw passenger. However, when I go out to work during busy working days, I hardly get any time to notice the elaborate paintings on the plastic and metal coverings of rickshaws. The article has enabled me to relish these beautiful works of art that bear the untold messages of the psyche of our country's working class people. I really appreciate the writer for choosing such an interesting topic for the spotlight. *Al Mahmud Jatrabari, Dhaka*

The Mosque of Mohammadpur

Dhaka is called the city of mosques. For Bangladeshis, these mosques are more than mere place of worship. These mosques are part of the nation's culture and heritage that has been enriched by centuries of independent and prosperous Muslim rule. Many of Dhaka's mosques are more than centuries old that date back to the Mughal and Sultanate period. Interesting historical events and myths are entwined in these ancient structures. I would like to thank *Star Weekend* for featuring the Saat Gombuj Masjid in its article titled “The Mosque of Mohammadpur” published on October 21, 2016. Thanks to the article, I learnt a lot of unknown facts about Mughal period Dhaka and history of this beautiful mosque. *Mirajul Islam Keraniganj, Dhaka*



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

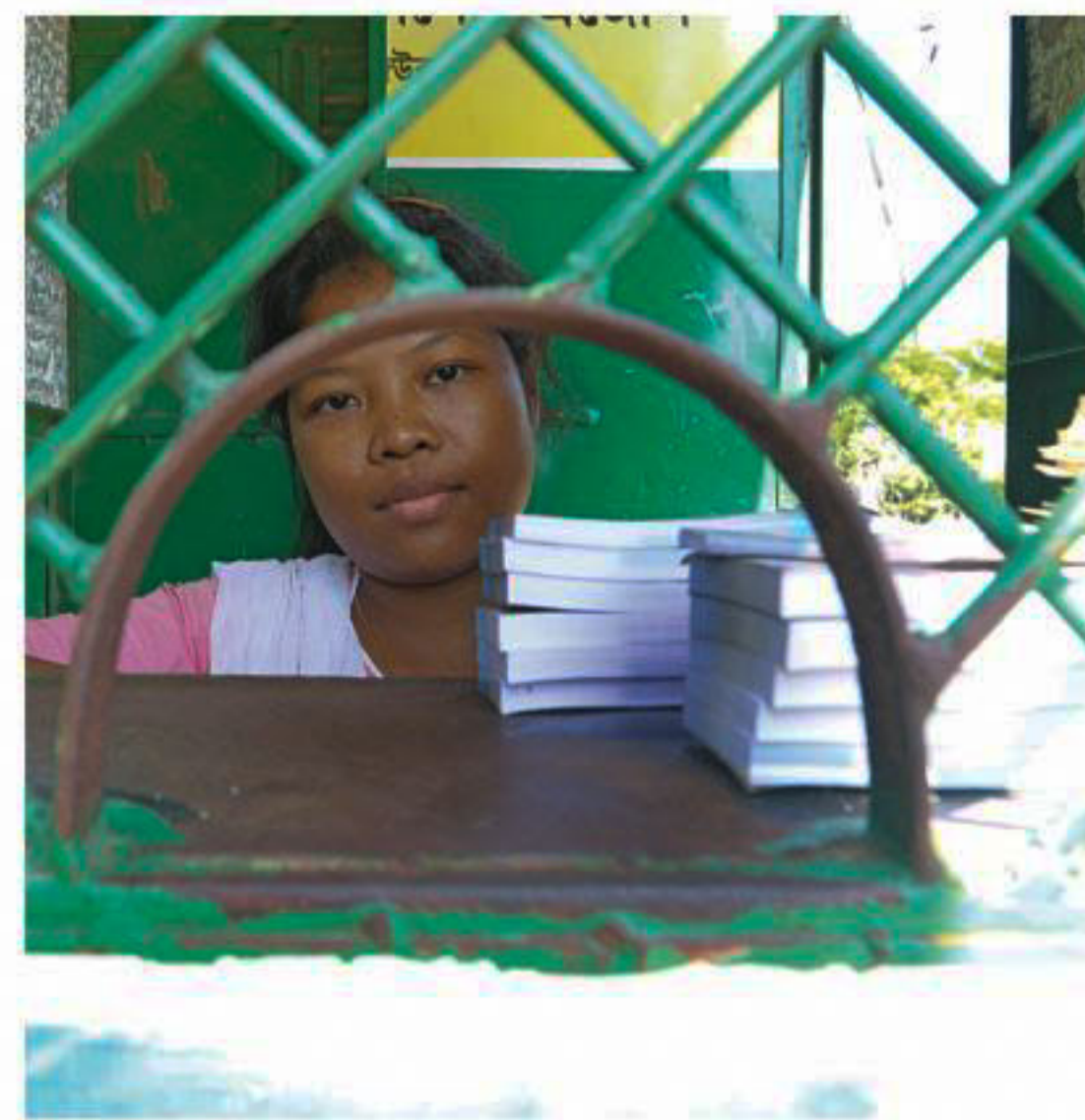


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A Wind of Change

It is quite surprising to see that female workers in Dhaka have been employed to sell bus tickets, which is usually considered a man's job as this particular job requires a lot of interactions with people from all walks of life. It is quite positive that we are trying to break the stereotypes created by our own male dominated society. However, we should also be careful so that these pioneering women who have showed their mettle to take this challenge do not become victims of stalking, harassment and discrimination. The article titled “A Wind of Change” published in *Star Weekend* on October 21, 2016 has already pointed out some important issues such as scarcity of necessary facilities such as food and sanitation for these workers. The concerned authority should take immediate steps to solve these issues. *Tapan Karmaker Banani, Dhaka*

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the *Star Weekend*.



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**Earthquakes Don't Kill People.
Buildings Do! Build Safe!**

