

# One year after the Mros’ long march in Bandarban, has anything changed?



HANA SHAMS AHMED

Hana Shams Ahmed is a PhD candidate at the Department of Social Anthropology at York University, Canada.

IN February 2021, hundreds of members of the Mro community marched from Chimbuk Hill to Bandarban town, protesting the construction of a five-star hotel. This was a follow up from the earlier “cultural showdown” by hundreds of Mro villagers in November 2020 and many statements from concerned national and international human rights groups urging the government to discontinue the project. The plan for the construction of the hotel was a collaboration between Sikder Group, the Marriott five-star hotel chain and the Bangladesh security forces. On the other hand, the long march was the culmination of a collaboration between young Mro students and activists and many other politically conscious activists around the country. The message was simple. The construction of such a massive tourist resort with cable cars, swimming pools and other modern tourist attractions would be extremely harmful with consequences for the environment and the people of the area, in addition to causing the eviction of hundreds of Mro families from the villages directly affected by the constructions as well as families living in neighbouring villages.

According to Chittagong Hill Tracts Citizen’s Committee’s information, the security forces have cordoned off about 500 acres of land to build the resort. Once completed, it is feared that the project will directly evict 150 Indigenous Mro families, and 250 more Mro families spread over 1,000 acres of land in the vicinity will be affected indirectly. The local Mros no longer have access to the cordoned-off area they had been collectively using for years.

It’s been a year since the long march and the uncomfortable silence around the

protests is reminiscent of the silencing around many developments in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Such a silence after a sustained campaign against an injustice can wrongfully be perceived as an indication of some form of resolution—that the grievances that led to protests have been settled. Unfortunately, the political

PHOTO: COURTESY



situation in the Hills in general and Bandarban in particular is not quite so simple. Bandarban is a geopolitically important location. It shares international borders with India and Myanmar and adjoins with Chattogram and Cox’s Bazar. Borders are volatile geographical spaces all over the world and a certain level of volatility comes with sharing borders with these two nations that have a very politically changing relationship with Bangladesh.

At the same time, despite having the highest concentration of security forces in the country, there are many armed groups in this area. Surveillance over Jumma activists is very high. The long march by the Mro villagers and the subsequent letters of concern regarding the construction of the resort from human rights organisations, including the International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, Amnesty International, International Work Group for Indigenous

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Affairs, and the United Nations led to the further beefing up of this surveillance. Following the long march in February 2021, a group of Mros were seen standing uncomfortably for a photo with signboards that said they welcomed tourism in Bandarban. Since then, there has been very little reporting of what is actually happening on the grounds

regarding the construction of the resort.

In many states, protest carried out by local citizens and the rising together of people for a single cause are considered dangerous. A people’s movement is seen as a threat to the very existence of the authority. These uprisings and movements need “managing”. Movements for the self-determination of the Jumma have always been a matter of “management” by the security forces. Tourism by itself is not the evil. But there are many other things that need to be resolved in the Hills before there is an environment where business/tourism can be fair and not predatory. The land disputes resulting from the bringing in of settlers in the 1970s and 1980s in these Hills are yet to be resolved. Many Jumma communities have been uprooted from their homeland, and the complicated ways in which land dispossession has subsequently taken place makes the task of the Land Commission very difficult and

lengthy.

The slow process of the Land Commission over the years also demonstrates the lack of any political will to resolve these disputes. Apart from that, Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. Big constructions such as a modern five-star hotel and resort need to consider the vulnerability of the region and its people. The destructive hill-cutting for development and construction forces many Jummās to live in precarious geographical spaces, leaving them vulnerable to landslides. In 2017, one such landslide killed 126 people, mostly Jummās. The mindless extraction of stones and monoculture in the region has also already done irreversible damage to the region. Jummās who have lived in the hills for generations talk about how the *jhirs* have dried out and how they need to look for new places to find water. Added to all of these woes is the reckless behaviour of Bengali tourists who have little regard for the land and environment and end up leaving huge amounts of waste in tourist areas.

What started in November 2020 with the “cultural showdown” in Bandarban, culminating in the long march in February 2021, were expressions of decades of discontent over land dispossession and evictions faced by the Indigenous Jumma, and a refusal against a greedy capitalist state-led aggression of land that would lead to large-scale displacements. The silence that prevails over the issue now is not an indication of calm and quiet business as usual. This silence is part of the larger silencing of critical voices all over the country that is the hallmark of authoritarian states. The silence in this region has the added layers of the region-specific geopolitical importance that is dealt with using more powerful tools and facilitated by the general censorship that has prevailed in this region for decades. After half a century of independence of our country, we need to ask ourselves how long we will continue to ignore this silence, and we need to revive democratic forces and seek justice for all the people of this country.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Improve our public universities

Every one of us have heard from at least one person that they would like to study abroad. Yes, it is true that every student has their own preference. And every person deserves to live a stable life, pursue a rewarding career path and for that, higher education is very important. But why do so many students prefer going to universities in other countries, rather than in our own country?

It is because of the state of our universities. Most of our public universities are not funded well enough. Then there is the factor of unequal distribution even among these universities. Therefore, our universities are failing to provide many of the facilities that are available in universities abroad.

The job market in our county is not stable. There aren’t many promising prospects for students, particularly those who graduate from universities in Bangladesh. And that is another major problem which has not been addressed.

Our students are good enough to compete in the best universities of the world. So why should they settle for studying at universities in our country that cannot compete against foreign universities in terms of the standard of quality education?

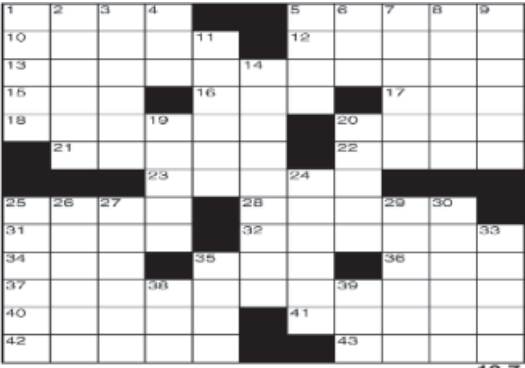
It is a great shame that we continue to lose our best minds simply because we refuse to acknowledge and fix these problems at our public universities. By ignoring these issues, we are, in fact, pushing these people out of the country.

Students are the future of a country. If we continue to lose the best ones to other countries, the growth that we are currently witnessing will eventually decline. It is high time we recognised this. Policymakers urgently need to focus their attention and solve this problem, as it will most definitely have a positive effect on many other aspects of our nation’s development and future.

Nushakha Israt  
Jahangirnagar University


## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 Sailor’s call
- 5 Accumulate
- 10 Gold sources
- 12 Treat, as a turkey
- 13 Gaping
- 15 Good times
- 16 Make a choice
- 17 Busy one in Apr.
- 18 Craving
- 20 Conceited
- 21 Japanese noodles
- 22 Travel stops
- 23 Grill waste
- 25 Con man’s con
- 28 Gibson garnish
- 31 Atlantic catches
- 32 False
- 34 Sound of delight
- 35 Toronto-to-D.C. dir.
- 36 Paris pal
- 37 Kindly
- 40 Blender setting
- 41 Plow pioneer John
- 42 Ignore the limit
- 43 Smell
- DOWN
- 1 Spoken
- 2 “Night-hawks” painter
- 3 Black Sea port
- 4 Longing
- 5 Touch on
- 6 Small rug
- 7 Depth charge, in slang
- 8 Intercede
- 9 Some cars
- 11 Campfire treats
- 14 Realtor’s showing
- 19 Mosque leaders
- 20 Drop in on
- 24 Group of nine
- 25 Reporters’ exclusives
- 26 Confine
- 27 Stick
- 29 Gave an address
- 30 — uno
- 33 Down source
- 35 Storage spot
- 38 Maiden name label
- 39 Old auto



## WEDNESDAY’S ANSWERS





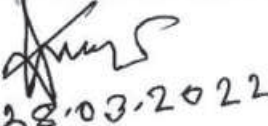
**Bangladesh Election Commission**  
**Election Commission Secretariat**  
Nirbachan Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka  
[www.ecs.gov.bd](http://www.ecs.gov.bd)

**Tender for Works (Sound System)**

Tender Notice No-17.00.0000.029.70.185.22(১৯ খন্ড)- 95

Date: 28-03-2022

1	Ministry/Division	Election Commission Secretariat				
2	Agency	Election Commission Secretariat				
3	Procuring Entity Name	Secretary, Election Commission Secretariat				
4	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka				
5	Invitation Ref No.	17.00.0000.029.70.185.22(১৯ খন্ড)-95				
6	Date	28-03-2022				
7	Procurement Method	National Competitive Tender (NCT). Open Tendering Method (OTM)				
8	Budget and Source of Funds	GOB (Revenue Budget)				
9	Tender Package Name	Supply of Goods (Multiple Lots)				
10	Tender Package No.	ECGD09				
11	Tender Publication Date	28-03-2022				
12	Tender Last Selling Date	17-04-2022				
13	Tender Submission Date and time	18-04-2022 12.00 PM				
14	Tender Opening Date and time	18-04-2022 12.30 pm				
15	Name & Address of the Office(s)	(a) Selling Tender Document Senior Assistant Secretary, Common Service-2, Election Commission Secretariat, Nirbachan Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka. (b) Receiving Tender Document Senior Assistant Secretary, Common Service-2, Election Commission Secretariat, Nirbachan Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka. (c) Opening Tender Document Deputy Secretary (Jonobal Babostapona), Election Commission Secretariat, Nirbachan Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka.				
16	Eligibility of Tenderers	Bidders that fulfill the criteria described in the Tender document.				
17	Brief Description of works and Related Services	digital conference system central unit, table top chairman unit, table top delegate unit, electronic gadget (digital voice recorder), amplifier(175w-300w), mixing console, wireless microphone, ceiling speaker, xlr connector, microphone & speaker cable				
18	Item No	Identification of Works (sound system)	Price of Tender Document (Tk)	Tender Security	Completion Time in month/Years	Location
	1.	DIGITAL CONFERENCE SYSTEM CENTRAL UNIT	Tk. 1,000/- (One Thousand Taka)	Tk.52,000/- (Fifty Two Thousand Taka)	03(Three) Years	Election Commission Secretariat, Nirbachan Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka
	2.	TABLE TOP CHAIRMAN UNIT				
	3.	TABLE TOP DELEGATE UNIT				
	4.	ELECTRONIC GADGET (DIGITAL VOICE RECORDER)				
	5.	AMPLIFIER( 175W-300W)				
	6.	MIXING CONSOLE				
	7.	WIRELESS MICROPHONE				
	8.	CEILLING SPEAKER				
	9.	XLR CONNECTOR				
	10.	MICROPHONE & SPEAKER CABLE				
19	Name of Official Inviting Tender		Mohammad Mahbub Alam			
20	Designation of Official Inviting Tender		Senior Assistant Secretary			
21	Address of Official Inviting Tender		Common Service-2, Election Commission Secretariat, Nirbachan Bhaban (2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor), Agargaon, Dhaka.			
22	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender		Phone : 02-55007539		Fax No: 55007515	
23	Tender Security		Tender Security must be in the form of Pay Order in favor of Secretary, Election Commission Secretariat, Dhaka.			
24	Special Instruction		Supplier must submit distributor authorization letter for ( Item 1-10)			
25	The procuring entity reserves the right to reject any or all Tenders.					



28.03.2022

**Mohammad Mahbub Alam**  
Senior Assistant Secretary  
Phone : 02-55007539  
E-mail: [ecs.seba@gmail.com](mailto:ecs.seba@gmail.com)

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