

An environmental and livelihood crisis in Bandarban's Lama

Influentials are creating a crisis for marginalised villagers in three Jumiya neighbourhoods



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Langkom Mro Para, Joychandra Tripura Para and Rengen Mro Para are three Jumiya neighbourhoods located in the Soroi union of Bandarban's Lama upazila. They are home to 39 Jumiya families whose main occupation is *jhum* cultivation, but they also work as day labourers to make ends meet. Despite working hard, there is little comfort in their lives. According to locals, the influential Lama Rubber Industries Ltd has been disrupting their day-to-day lives, which is why the names of these three neighbourhoods have made headlines in recent times.

On April 26 this year, about 400 acres of *jhum* orchards and natural forests in the area were set on fire,

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) formed committees to investigate the incident. People from across the country came forward with food assistance for the people of these three neighbourhoods.

During that time, I visited Lama for the first time as a member of a citizens' group in May. We became particularly worried to see the malnourished, sick children in these neighbourhoods. We spoke with a number of children of school-going age and learnt that most of them did not go to school. The overall quality of life of the residents was not very promising – it was evident that the population was suffering due to poverty. We witnessed an



Jumiya families at Soroi union in Bandarban's Lama upazila have been living in fear since their *jhum* orchards and forests were set on fire in April this year.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

It is most unfortunate that 25 years after the signing of the CHT Peace Accord, the people of these three Jumiya para are still living in fear of being evicted. Had the CHT Peace Accord been implemented, such incidents would not have happened, and these people would have gotten back their land rights.

forcing the 39 Jumiya families to suffer from acute food shortage. This also damaged the natural environment and wildlife. Locals alleged that the people who started the fire were from the Lama Rubber Industries. After the incident was widely reported in the media, the local administration and other authorities finally woke up. The

acute shortage of safe drinking water. We also learnt that people of all ages often suffered from diarrhoea, and death by diarrhoea was quite common in these neighbourhoods. People here have been literally living in darkness as they are not connected to the national power grid. Even before the effects of the fire

faded, a group of terrorists attacked Rangdhajan Tripura, an organiser of Bhumii Rakkha Andolon in Soroi union, in July. He received treatment at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) for several days for head injuries. What happened next worried us even more. On September 6, a stream in Rengen Mro Para – the lone water source in the neighbourhood – was poisoned, killing crabs, shrimps and small fish of various species, according to a report by *The Daily Star*. People of the Mro villages could not use the water for about a week and somehow survived by sharing what little water they had stored previously. In both these incidents, allegations were raised against Lama Rubber Industries.

On May 20, when we visited the three neighbourhoods, we promised

to build a pre-primary school for the underprivileged children. We ran a long campaign from June to September 7 on social media to raise funds for its construction, which we decided would begin on September 17 – Education Day. People of the three Jumiya *para* also started taking preparations accordingly. I, along with two professors of Dhaka University, Dr Sadeka Halim and Robayet Ferdous, Chief Executive of Nagorik Udyog Zakir Hossain, and poet Shahed Kayes, prepared to go to Lama.

As the date neared, vested quarters started spreading propaganda on Facebook using many accounts, a number of them anonymous. One quarter in Lama said our team would not be allowed to enter Soroi. They spread a rumour that the CHT Commission headed by Sultana

Kamal would come to Soroi, but they had nothing to do with our delegation. Under such circumstances, we reduced the size of our team. Only Zakir Hossain, Shahed Kayes and I left for Soroi from Dhaka. But we could not reach our destination. On September 17, the road leading to the three *para* was blocked. Our car was searched by people carrying sticks.

Amid such a situation, we again learnt that miscreants had cut down more than 300 banana seedlings of a *jhum* farmer in Rengen Mro Para on September 24. Rengen Karbari, the chief of Rengen Mro Para, alleged that people associated with the rubber company felled the banana saplings. The news was published in the media and there was widespread criticism on social media. We also learnt that the people of the rubber company were allegedly obstructing the

school's construction with assistance from police. They apparently made false allegations to the police that the villagers were building the structure on the company's land. But in reality, the location for the school is in the middle of the three neighbourhoods. The rubber company's plantation is far away from that place.

It is evident to us that the rubber company is quite influential. A lot has been written in the newspapers about their misdeeds, yet no one can touch them. We have yet to hear of any legal action taken against them for their many misdeeds. It seems the rubber company's main goal is to evict the residents of the three Jumiya neighbourhoods. It is most unfortunate that 25 years after the signing of the CHT Peace Accord, the people of these three Jumiya *para* are still living in fear of being evicted. Had the CHT Peace Accord been implemented, such incidents would not have happened, and these people would have gotten back their land rights. Also, if the CHT Land Commission could carry out their activities properly, these people would have ownership of their land.

However, the NHRC is working to protect their rights. We learnt that the Bandarban zilla parishad has questioned the legality of the lease given to the rubber company in their investigation report on the April 26 fire. The lease was granted to the company without the consent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council and Bandarban Hill District Council, which is a clear violation of the CHT Accord and the country's law.

It is clear that an influential quarter in the region doesn't care about the CHT Accord and the laws created accordingly. By flouting the law and ignoring the decision of the NHRC, they have been pushing the people of the three neighbourhoods in Lama's Soroi union into an extreme livelihood crisis. We want this crisis to end once and for all.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

What Makes a Fascist?



Jan-Werner Mueller, professor of politics at Princeton University in the US, is the author of *Democracy Rules*.

JAN-WERNER MUELLER

Almost exactly a century after Fascist leader Benito Mussolini's March on Rome and ascent to the Italian premiership, a politician whose party descends from the original Fascists, Giorgia Meloni, has been appointed as Italy's prime minister. Are we witnessing the return of lower-case fascism – a political phenomenon that has resonated far beyond Italy since 1922?

While there is nothing wrong with asking the question, throwing around the F-word too liberally could make it easier for far-right leaders to claim that since their critics always exaggerate, they also must be inflating the threat to democracy. Predictably, Meloni took great pains to distance herself from fascism in her maiden speech to parliament.

Yet, in considering the question of fascism today, one must remember that it has gone through different phases. While there are no fascist regimes in Europe or in the Americas today, there certainly are some parties – including the governing ones – that could shift gradually in a more fascist direction.

Like any political belief system, fascism can be expected to evolve. Liberalism today is not what it was a hundred years ago, and conservatism – not to be confused with a reactionary or even strictly orthodox stance – finds its very meaning in carefully adapting to changing circumstances. What defines these systems are basic value commitments that should be recognisable over time. Liberals tell stories about freedom; conservatives dwell on the perils of rapid change and the limits of

human reason in remaking society.

And fascists? For starters, they have all been nationalists who promised national rebirth – that is, to make the country great again. But not all nationalists are fascists, and many politicians promise some form of regeneration. What has distinguished fascists historically has been their glorification of violent struggle and martial valour. They have also promoted strict gender, national and racial hierarchies, with races in particular assumed to be locked

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in permanent and deadly conflict. Today's far right is undoubtedly in the business of re-establishing traditional gender roles and hierarchies, and it derives much of its energy from a relentless politics of exclusion: those alien to the nation must be kept out, lest they eventually come to replace the dominant in-group. But there is also a perceived danger from within: namely, the "liberal elites" and minorities who don't count as members of what far-right populists consider the "real people." Yet, this politics of exclusion

does not necessarily go hand in hand with a glorification of violence and struggle as a means of providing men (it's usually men) with meaningful, disciplined, heroic lives. The latter feature, after all, emerged from the mass mobilisations of World War I, with Mussolini praising the "trenchocracy": an aristocracy of brave warriors – as opposed to today's weekend keyboard warriors – who had bonded in combat. After the war ended, Mussolini's followers continued the violence at home. Likewise, Hitler's rise is incomprehensible outside the context of the bloodthirsty right-wing militias that emerged in Germany in the early 1920s.

It is this all-pervasive atmosphere of violence that is missing today. Yes, veterans are over-represented within the more violent cohorts of the far right, and today's far-right leaders do

bring about what philosopher Kate Manne calls "trickle-down aggression." But even where the far right has come to power, it has sought to demobilise citizens and make its peace with consumer capitalism.

So, should we just move on from the debate about fascism? That would be too hasty. As the distinguished historian Robert Paxton has shown, fascism comes in different phases. The current conventional wisdom holds that whereas damaged democracies in the 20th century were usually killed off with violent coups, 21st-century

democracies are more likely to fall to aspiring authoritarians who subtly manipulate laws over time to make their removal from office virtually impossible. Such autocratisation is said to be more effective by dint of being harder to detect.

But this contrast overlooks the fact that fascism – notwithstanding its glorification of violence – often did not have to engage in violence to achieve its aims. Mussolini himself didn't march on Rome. He arrived by sleeper car from Milan after Italy's king and traditional elites had decided to hand him power, in the hope that he would sort out a political mess that nobody else appeared capable of managing.

Moreover, it is largely forgotten that Mussolini governed for years within the structures of Italy's democracy, even including plenty of self-declared liberals in his cabinet. He practised what today is often described as "autocratic legalism." He followed the letter of the law while violating its spirit, or he enacted legislation in ways that were procedurally correct but that put the rule of men over the rule of law. To be sure, there was plenty of horrific violence as well, most infamously the murder of the socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti. But not until 1925 did Mussolini clearly become a dictator (whereas Hitler left little doubt about the all-out racist totalitarian rule he would establish from the very day he was appointed chancellor).

It is a failure of political judgement to conflate today's far right and fascism. But it is imperative to watch closely how the far right develops over time. A shift to fascism could happen fast, but it might also happen quite slowly. In any case, the conduct of traditional elites is a key factor to watch. That is one of the least-understood lessons of the rise of Mussolini's Fascism in 20th-century Italy.

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যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতাঃ

- প্রার্থীকে অবশ্যই বাংলাদেশের নাগরিক হতে হবে।
- প্রার্থীকে আইনে সম্মানসহ স্নাতকোত্তর ডিগ্রি অথবা যে কোন বিষয়ে স্নাতকোত্তর ডিগ্রিসহ আইনে স্নাতক এবং পেশাগত যোগ্যতার স্বীকৃতিসহ আইন ব্যবসায় আইন উপদেষ্টার ক্ষেত্রে উচ্চাদালতসহ কমপক্ষে ১৫ (পনের) ও প্যানেল আইনজীবীর ক্ষেত্রে কমপক্ষে ১০(দশ) বছরের পেশাগত অভিজ্ঞতা অবশ্যই থাকতে হবে। অবসরপ্রাপ্ত জেলা ও দায়রা জজগণও আবেদন করতে পারবেন।
- আইন উপদেষ্টা/প্যানেলের আবেদনকারীকে অবশ্যই ভাল স্বাস্থ্যের অধিকারী হতে হবে।
- বিআইডব্লিউটিসিতে যারা আইন উপদেষ্টা/প্যানেল আইনজীবী হিসেবে কাজ করেছেন তারাও আবেদন করতে পারবেন।
- প্রার্থীর বয়স অবশ্যই ৬৫(পঁয়ষাট) বছরের কম হতে হবে। তবে আইন পেশায় বিশেষ অভিজ্ঞতাসম্পন্ন প্রার্থীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়স শিথিলযোগ্য।
- বিআইডব্লিউটিসিতে আইন উপদেষ্টা/প্যানেল আইনজীবী নিয়োগের জন্য যে সকল প্রার্থী ইতোমধ্যে দরখাস্ত করেছেন তাদেরও পুনরায় দরখাস্ত করতে হবে।

অন্যান্য শর্তাবলীঃ

- আইন উপদেষ্টা/প্যানেল আইনজীবীগণ মামলা পরিচালনার জন্য সংস্থা কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত ফি ও অন্যান্য খরচাদি প্রাপ্য হবেন। আইন উপদেষ্টা নির্ধারিত হারে মাসিক রিটেইনার ফি প্রাপ্য হবেন।
- আইন উপদেষ্টা/প্যানেল আইনজীবীদের নিয়োগকাল হবে ২(দুই) বছর। নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত বিষয়ে আইন, বিচার ও সংসদ বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়ের দিক নির্দেশনা ও সংস্থার বিদ্যমান নীতিমালা কার্যকর হবে।

শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও পেশাগত স্বীকৃতির বার কাউন্সিলের সনদপত্র পেশাগত অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি, জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্রের সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি ও সাম্প্রতিক তোলা পাসপোর্ট সাইজের ২(দুই) কপি ছবিসহ অগ্রাধী প্রার্থীকে স্বব্যায়িত দরখাস্ত আগামী ০৬/১২/২০২২খ্রিঃ তারিখের মধ্যে মহাব্যবস্থাপক (প্রশাসন), বাংলাদেশ অভ্যন্তরীণ নৌপরিবহন কর্পোরেশন (বিআইডব্লিউটিসি), ফেয়ারলি হাউজ, ২৪, কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম এভিনিউ, শাহবাগ, ঢাকা-১০০০ এর বরাবর পৌছানোর জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। অসম্পূর্ণ/অসম্পূর্ণ দরখাস্ত বাতিলসহ নিয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে বিআইডব্লিউটিসি কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত সিদ্ধান্তই চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।

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