

*BEYOND THE SECURITY IMPASSE:  
STATE, DEVELOPMENT AND PEOPLE*

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*Beyond the Security Impasse:  
State, Development and People*

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## CHAPTER 1

### *Introduction*

Developing countries worldwide invoke eminent domain to pursue objectives they deem economically beneficial but development has remained elusive for them till now. With help from international development agencies, they implement development projects that in most cases displace people from their homes, communities or means of subsistence. The land acquisition required to implement development projects with foreign funding generally requires relocation of an entire community and can wreak widespread economic devastation which in turn can produce insecurity, denying the right of individuals to reside peacefully, without being subject to political or other stresses in their original habitats. It would be wrong to view the developing countries as a homogeneous mass and to consider development a simple equation, where, with the right inputs, the correct outcomes are possible. In this backdrop, the plantation projects and eco-parks established as part of the so-called development are adding to the sufferings of the people of the developing country of Bangladesh.

Ensuring the security of the citizens is one of the major responsibilities of any government, and the logic behind the implementation of all the development projects is to improve the living conditions of the citizens. It is ironic that the strategy has boomeranged because of the very nature of the development projects. These are not improving the conditions of the common people as they are divorced from the local settings, conditions and realities. In the long run, the country is creating problems that can become threats to territorial security. The grievances of the common people and the sense of deprivation can lead the victims of the development projects to become a serious threat to the country.

The vanishing old forests and plantations cause people living in

the forests to be deprived in every way and they wonder whether they are really the citizens of the country. This situation cannot prevail and the country cannot enjoy the loyalty of this deprived group of citizens for long. The government cannot act irresponsibly because the Adivasi people living in the forests and jungles where the government is implementing various development projects without their consent are citizens of this country and the government cannot ignore its responsibility to ensure the security of its citizens.

From time immemorial more than 45 indigenous communities have been living in this country, known as *Adivasis*, meaning 'original inhabitants'. The indigenous peoples of Bangladesh are descendants of the original inhabitants of these lands and are strikingly diverse in their culture, religion and patterns of social and economic organization from the mainstream Bengali community. It is very sad that the Bangladesh government does not recognize their social and cultural institutions at all. One of the common features suffered by all Adivasis of Bangladesh is the grabbing of their ancestral lands—sometimes with brute force of local influential or powerful people, and sometimes in the name of development. If their existence is threatened, they will revolt and that situation will not bode well for the government. Security in both its traditional and contemporary forms will be threatened.

A race for markets and technological-industrial ascendancy has brought economic issues to the centre stage of global politics in this transformed world. Therefore, contemporary security studies have become more comprehensive, now including social, economic and political factors alongside military. In this situation, the developing countries are trying their best to reach the highest stage of development they can to ensure security, traditional and human. The dynamics of the relationship between development efforts and allocation of scarce resources to the proper sectors and eventually its impact on the overall security scenario of the developing countries need further in-depth study. The State is supposed to ensure the security and well-being of the citizens, but in the name of internal order and stability, the State apparatus itself resorts to violence and repression. The law-enforcing agencies on the one hand and gangs

and criminals on the other often develop a coalition of interests because of rent-seeking and extortion. Consequently, the common people are subjected to torture, repression and physical threats. This is an attempt to show the patterns in deprivation, lack of insights in implementing the development projects, the incomplete nature of development, unwillingness of the political leadership, exclusion of local expertise, the access situation, livelihood status, liberty, and security in the context of a developing country like Bangladesh.



## CHAPTER 2

# *New Challenges to Security: The Context of the Developing Countries*

In the past, security was identified with military-oriented definitions in terms of ‘absence of threats and conflicts’<sup>1</sup> and accumulation of instruments of power to ensure it. The centrality of the West and excessive emphasis on the military had been the hallmarks of all post-War security doctrine. As time went by, it is being realized that the traditional statecentric, militaristic security paradigm can hardly address the security threats currently being faced by states, societies and individuals. It is observed that threats to the survival and well-being of states, societies and individuals often come from non-State sources, mostly from within states. Certainly, traditional security concerns like border and territoriality, power rivalry and the arms race are extant in the developing world.<sup>2</sup>

But the traditional approach to understanding of security or insecurity without a socio-political and economic content is simply inapplicable to the developing countries where security ‘is complex and the links between its various dimensions are a further complicating factor’.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the whole notion of security in terms of political and military threats to national sovereignty was expanded to include the impacts of poverty, environmental stress, and other problems occurring due to underdevelopment because the security implications of all these will be tremendous. Even when security means the protection of the core values of a nation, these values in case of developing countries in their particular material circumstances differ widely from those of advanced countries. For the developing countries, these values need to be defined in more tangible terms, like ensuring the survival of their population.

Ethnicity and ethno-nationalistic insurgencies are traditional

challenges to State authority and territoriality that cropped up mainly in the post-World War II decolonization period. Along with these, there are concerns such as food and energy security, large-scale movement of populations, threats originating from malnutrition, hunger, epidemics, etc. The traditional concept of security threats laying emphasis on external sources does not mesh with the realities of the developing countries. Still, many regimes in these countries view security problems in the traditional way only, to serve their narrow, parochial and short-lived interests. Looked at objectively, the terms 'security' and 'threats' should now be given broad-based meanings and flexible interpretation to include economic, political and all other development aspects in the context of the developing countries. By focusing on human development, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) made a comprehensive approach to cover food security, energy security, environmental security, sustainable development, and human rights, called Human Security. It is, therefore, inevitable that whenever the developing countries implement any development projects, they should consider the consequences in this new security paradigm. The important thing is that if human security is threatened, ultimately the territorial integrity of the country will be threatened as the domestic law-and-order situation deteriorates.

#### RELATION BETWEEN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Security and development, in whatever way they are understood, are two fundamental goals of any society irrespective of its stage of development, social system, and value orientation. As developing countries in general suffer from severe scarcity of resources, intense conflict over proper allocation of scarce resources among different groups of people varying in race, religion, etc. is a common feature in these transitional societies. Euphoria of the triumph of democracy is also associated with new dangers in the form of a renewed stampede for self-determination and nationalistic assertions that are unleashing the horrors of long-simmering ethno-religious and national conflicts. The crisis of underdevelopment and poverty coupled with

the failure to deliver economic growth, social progress and political stability are causing frustration in the developing countries. Good domestic management can best counter and manage these internal conflicts. McNamara aptly observes, 'Security is development and without development there can be no security.'<sup>4</sup> Even when we talk of achieving security through development, compounding the problem is the fact that the developing countries must cope with a highly competitive world market in which they start from an in-built disadvantage of underdevelopment and technological backwardness.

If we analyse the basic concept of security, we will find that security is the protection and preservation of the minimum core values, which are not necessarily political independence and territorial integrity alone, but also mean preserving national integration, maintaining the legitimacy of the State apparatus and regimes, eradication of poverty, and ensuring political development. There is a close relationship between the present pattern of global dependency, nature of bilateral aid flows and threat perceptions of the developing countries. At the end, State perspectives still take precedence over individual and citizens' perspectives, providing a perfect pretext for State repression and human rights violations.

The linkage between security and development is integral. In case of Bangladesh, chronic political instability and socio-economic underdevelopment coupled with its external vulnerabilities are critical to the country's security debate. Security, in the ultimate analysis, is freedom from threat to one's survival, and, therefore, it is the ability to maintain an independent existence and to preserve the core national values. In Bangladesh, security has always been viewed in more than strictly military terms. In the post-Cold War era, there is renewed emphasis on the interconnection of military security with various aspects of national life: political, societal, economic, and environmental. The stronger the society, polity and economy, the lesser is the vulnerability of the country to any security threats.

Like any other South Asian country, Bangladesh requires foreign aid and assistance for its survival—at least we made it seem like this. It is against this backdrop that we have to analyse

the interesting relationship between the donor-sponsored, State-backed development strategies, security and people. Here, the key word is 'people', the fundamental component of a State, and it is essential for a State to provide security to its people for its own survival, but the reality is that the State is largely responsible for the failure to meet individual security needs in the developing countries. Bangladesh is no exception. However, it is also true that the role of the international system and globalization impinging on the autonomy of the State cannot be ignored. By cooperating with foreign donor agencies with a tendency to homogenize the developing countries and apply generalized development policies to all, the country is heading nowhere in the long run.

#### DONOR-FUNDED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Literally millions of people face disease and premature death because national and global inequalities deny them access to the basic needs of life. Political unrest resulting from unrequited demands for democratic government, regional autonomy, or equitable economic opportunities has soared. As a result, the developing countries suffer from endemic political and socio-economic instability. Basic threats to the security of these countries originate from internal sources, broadly divided into poverty and social conflicts, or power struggles between groups with differing interests. This is because continued economic stagnation weakens the predominant conflict-resolving mechanism of social engineering, viz., the ability of the State to buy off sectional demands by giving everyone bigger slices of a growing economic pie. It is, thus, evident that unlike developed countries, the internal or domestic dimensions as well as regional factors of insecurity assume much greater importance in case of these countries. Internal threats of destabilization loom larger than ever particularly in the countries that are at best nation states only in the making, due—among other things—to lack of national cohesion, problems of identity, and crises of political and historical legitimacy.

During the last five decades the developing countries have

experimented with a number of development models advocated by the developed countries and international lending and development assistance agencies. But development has remained a myth for the developing countries till now.

Financial aid from the developed countries through institutions like the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an effective instrument in the contemporary global geo-strategic and geo-economic systems to control the decision-making of the developing countries. The aid allows the developed countries to exert influence over the development strategy and value orientation pursued by the aid-recipient governments. Therefore, the development challenges of Bangladesh as a least developed country that is highly dependent on external financial help are enormous and all-pervasive. It is important to highlight the socio-economic and political issues not only for development alone, but also for security reasons.

Bangladesh had a history of substantial external economic dependence that continued to grow in the face of a shrinking domestic production base. In the context of low income, massive poverty and chronic underdevelopment, the level of internal resource mobilization is obviously low. On the other hand, it is also a society of sharp social inequalities. Abject poverty pervading the society is contrasted by conspicuous inequity in the distribution of income and wealth. To catch up with the global trend, Bangladesh has introduced radical economic reforms including complete trade liberalization. But the country is yet to reap the benefits of free trade to a great extent because of discriminatory trade practices followed by some of its trade partners that continue to impose non-tariff barriers often based on perceived notions of labour laws. To make the situation worse, the growing dependence on external aid has been, in the ultimate analysis, suppressing the prospect of self-reliance. Though ironic, the main beneficiary of this dependence is the expanding and strengthening network of the aid-sustained elite while the vast majority of the poor continue to remain disadvantaged. All this contributes to pervasive social and economic frustration and alienation that add to the weakening of the socio-

political fabric, and, thus, undermine the prospect of intrinsic vibrancy of the State.

The plantation projects established in different parts of the country with the help of foreign money are no exception. The species selected for commercial or industrial plantations in Bangladesh are mostly exotic and alien to Bangladesh. These have replaced significant parts of natural forests. Although the plantations are not large, particularly for fuelwood production, there are plans for larger-scale plantations in places once covered by natural forests. It is a well-founded observation that in many places the natural forests have dramatically vanished to accommodate the commercial and industrial plantations. Those responsible for this situation are to a great extent the WB and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and donor countries that benefit in different ways from plantations that many consider to be unsuited for Bangladesh. The eco-parks established as part of development are also considered to be mistakes if we consider the consequences from the human security perspective. In both cases, the sufferings of the Adivasis living there are beyond description. If this situation continues, the threats that would arise will be beyond the capability of the government to handle and it would become a serious security concern for the entire country. Proper development is supposed to ensure security, not become a threat to security. Thus, the problem lies within the very structure of the developing countries and their decision-making bodies.

## CHAPTER 3

# *Policies and Practices of the Government and Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh*

In Bangladesh, plantation of exotic or invasive species dates back to 1873 but has expanded rapidly in recent times due to the rapid expansion of simple and complex plantations around the world. The stated objective of the Forestry Master Plan completed in 1993 that is considered central for any kind of plantation projects established is to 'optimize the contribution of forest resources for environmental stability and economic and social development'.<sup>5</sup> The Forestry Master Plan backed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) has linked Bangladesh with the controversial Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) sponsored by the WB. The Forestry Master Plan and the new forestry policy based on it are designed to promote commercial- and production-oriented forestry, which is an obvious threat to the natural forests and environment that it sustains. Under the Forestry Master Plan, the Bangladesh government has set a high target to attain tree cover on 20 per cent of the total land area of the country, which has reportedly shrunk to a mere 6 per cent. The reforestation is actually planned for all the lands recorded as forest land at the time of the revision of the Forest Act in 1927. Officially, about 18 per cent of Bangladesh is public forest land. But approximately 6 per cent is said to be covered with forests. This 6 per cent of the forest cover includes plantations. The Forest Department (FD) under the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) is the custodian of the forests.<sup>6</sup>

The largest category of the forests of Bangladesh is 'reserved forests' that include the Sundarbans (mangroves) in the south-west, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region in the south-east, and the Modhupur tracts in the north-central region. A smaller category

is of 'protected forests'. The basic difference between reserved and protected forests is that the inhabitants in the reserved forest areas have no rights over the forest produce, but in protected forests they have far more rights. In many cases, a protected forest is an intermediate category that eventually turns into a reserved forest. Privately-owned forests are another category that ranges from plantations to those that are wholly owned by private individuals or companies. The ownership and benefits of plantations are shared by farmers, government agencies and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). The last category of forest is of Unclassified State Forests (USF).

To define forests, one can argue that trees are forests. Are plantations forests too because they produce trees and timber? This notion is contested not only by environmental critics but also by forest professionals. It is the government, IFIs and companies which profit from plantations, and which try to establish that plantations are forests. Environmentalists and critics have raised serious concerns over plantations on public forest land having exotic species. While tree plantation in rural Bangladesh has yielded much of the desired results, plantations, especially with invasive or exotic species on public forest land have caused environmental disasters and human misery. Plantations (monoculture in most cases) of teak, rubber, eucalyptus, acacia, pine and other exotics that we see on public forest land in Bangladesh are 'simple plantation forestry' which requires clear felling of the native forests.

Governments, companies, pulp and paper industries, IFIs, etc. strongly support and finance these plantations. At the global and local levels 'simple plantation forestry' for a range of wood products is said to return wood yields many times greater than most natural forest systems. In many countries including Bangladesh, degraded, denuded, encroached and less productive forest lands are targeted for plantations. However, what is often branded as less productive or degraded is actually native forest that has immense social, cultural, traditional and environmental values.

The government inaugurated an eco-park in Moulvibazar district on 1,500 acres of Adivasi ancestral land as part of tourism

development. In July 2000 the government initiated this plan without the consent of the Adivasis who have been living in the area for centuries. The government did not even consult them, and did not mention the villages of the Khasi and Garo peoples in their project proposal, instead considered them to be illegal inhabitants of the forest.

Again, the government has taken necessary administrative and legal measures for reorientation of its future forest management with the clear objective of promoting plantation. For example, one of the many objectives of forest management as seen in the Revised Working Plan for the Forests of Chittagong Division (for the years 1978–79 to 1987–88) is, ‘To replace the existing irregular, depleted and less productive forests by a man-made plantation forest with more valuable and productive species suited to the soil and country’s requirements.’<sup>7</sup> This objective has had devastating effects for forests and indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. Most of the natural forests outside the mangroves (the Sundarbans) in the south-west have disappeared as the so-called planted forests have replaced local forests. The plantation practices have also provided ample grounds to the opportunists—generally rich and influential people—to take illegal possession of the public forest land and convert the natural heritage into pineapple, banana and plantations of other crops. Plantations of different kinds have strong research, policy and legal backing. The government agencies, government research institutes and international interest groups such as UNDP, FAO, ADB and WB have circulated their argument widely that the invasive conifers and eucalyptus are much more productive than the native species and harmless to the local environment. These are lies hidden under rhetoric. They have also put a legal framework in place. So if a particular type of plantation turns out to be mistaken in the long run, the authorities responsible and their supranational allies are immune to any legal action. This setting has given the Forest Department necessary leverage for clear felling of the natural forests and establishing plantations in their place resulting in ecocide and human misery. There is recognition of the ill effects of plantations in the Forest Department (the executing agency of the government

plans of plantations) as expressed in the words of Manoj Kanti Roy, Conservator of Forests (CF) of the Central Circle (Dhaka, Mymensingh, Tangail and Sylhet): ‘What was wisdom about plantations at one time has proven wrong now. Now is the time of conservation.’<sup>8</sup> So from the security perspective, such development projects should be stopped immediately.

If we analyse this in an international scenario, monoculture plantations are clear violation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and contrary to the spirit and commitment of the SAARC Social Charter that stresses cooperation in the cataloguing of genetic resources in different SAARC countries. Plantations cause wholesale destruction of genetic resources. Plantations, as their characteristics suggest, have eroded the rights of forest-dwelling communities to land and local resources massively and caused ecological disaster. This is contrary to the SAARC Social Charter, Bangladesh Constitution, ILO Convention 169 and many other instruments.

Plantations with exotic species have been carried out mostly with external finance especially from IFIs. Such plantations have caused drastic changes in the landscapes of the sal forest areas and other public forest sites. Rubber and woodlot plantations are examples of such disastrous plantation projects undertaken in Modhupur.

The Constitution of Bangladesh contains the fundamental principles of State policy that address the need for the State to ensure the availability of shelter, employment, and education to all citizens. But in reality, denial of the constitutional safeguards to the poor, minorities, ethnic communities and different disadvantaged communities makes it difficult to translate the spirit and commitments expressed in the SAARC Social Charter and other international instruments into reality. It seems that the promoters of the plantations do not adequately acknowledge the adverse economic, social, and environmental consequences of plantation forestry programmes.

## RUBBER AND WOODLOT PLANTATION PROJECTS

Primarily, ADB and WB have funded most of the recent commercial and industrial plantations that have become a matter of concern. Rubber plantation is a concern in the CHT, Modhupur Forest, Sylhet, and some other locations. It began in the CHT on an experimental basis in 1959. In 1969, it began on a commercial basis. The government initially wanted to take over 40,000 acres of land for rubber plantation. But by 1988, the land brought under rubber plantation was 25,000 acres. The Second Development Project for Rubber Plantation began in the Modhupur forest area in 1987. The project was inaugurated in 1986. The plan to bring 15,000 acres under rubber plantation could not materialize. A little over 7,000 acres of forest land were made available for rubber plantation.<sup>9</sup> There is no doubt that the project has abjectly failed to yield the desired results.

The stated goal of the introduction of commercial fuelwood or woodlot plantation on public forest land was to meet the fuelwood requirement of the local communities. It is also branded as 'social forestry'. It was a component of the ADB-funded five-year Thana Afforestation and Nursery Development Project that started in 1989 and ended in 1995. The total project cost was US\$46.8 million of which borrower finance was US\$3.4 million and UNDP contributed US\$2.5 million. Now, exotic species planted in the woodlot component have become controversial. Fuelwood plantation or 'woodlot' was the largest component of the project and US\$12.3 million was spent for it.<sup>10</sup> Other major components of the project were agroforestry plantations, strip plantations, seedling distribution, nursery development, research and training.

According to an ADB source, the project established 19,415 hectares (1 hectare equals 2,471 acres) of woodlot plantations to produce fuelwood and timber on degraded and unencroached State forest land in the districts of Gazipur, Tangail, Sherpur, Comilla, and Mymensingh and the greater districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Rajshahi. According to the project documents, any encroached land used for production of rice and subsidiary food crops was to be

excluded from the woodlot plantation component. These lands were supposed to be planted under the project's agroforestry plantation component. Planting would be a departmental (Forest Department) activity for which members of the surrounding communities were to be employed. As a special incentive, the project participants were to be temporarily allowed to grow food on the unutilized parts of the woodlot blocks for two to three years until the area was fully planted. The maintenance of the woodlot blocks was to be done by the project participants against wages. Each participant was to get a maximum of three acres of land.

The benefit that the participants were to get included intermediate products, viz., leaves, twigs, branches, fruits and seeds, by-products of thinning and final harvest, and about 40 per cent of the wood harvested at the end of the rotation period. These benefits were specified by a formula in a contract between the Forest Department and the project participants. According to the contract, the participants were not to be granted any land tenure. In less than 10 years after the establishment of woodlot plantation, the physical appearance of many sal forest sites and their environment has changed dramatically. In many places the sal and other local species have disappeared altogether. In some areas the forests have been replaced by tall, white eucalyptus and other flashy exotic species. Modhupur is one such sal forest location and the participants of the so-called 'social forestry' have complained of not receiving the benefits promised to them by the government.

The traditional sal forest used to extend over the Modhupur Tract as well as the districts of Dhaka, Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Rajshahi. However, today the remnants of the sal forest are not representative of the traditional sal forest. Most of the sal forest land has been denuded, degraded and encroached upon or taken over for commercial or industrial plantation of rubber or fuelwood with exotic species. The Modhupur sal forest, the largest in the country, depicts the critical conditions that the sal forests face today. Sal forests are the moist or dry deciduous forests (122,000 hectares) located mainly in the central plains and the fresh-water areas in the north-east region.<sup>11</sup> In the sal forest, 70–75 per cent of the trees

used to be sal. But today the sal forest patches have been exhausted to such a great extent that in most places they no more represent the traditional sal forests.

A traditional sal forest has some unique features. The soil all over a sal forest looks yellowish or reddish. In addition to its commercially valuable sal tree, this forest has other valuable trees such as *koroi*, *chambal*, *jogini chakra*, *kaikha*, *sidah*, *bazna*, *amlaki*, *pales*, *sonalu*, *ajuli* and *gadila*. The undergrowth in the sal forest also provides economically and environmentally valuable commodities such as sungrass, which is commonly used for making roofs of village houses. The sal and other produce of the sal forests is in great demand not only by the people in and around the forest but also people of other districts such as Dhaka, Mymensingh and other neighbouring districts. Sal firewood including the stumps is seen piled in the brick kilns and the industrial areas though the supply has become very limited.

Rubber plantation on the public forest land in Modhupur is under process for handing over to private owners or companies as government management proved to be less beneficial than desired. The Adivasi communities of the plains have been progressively losing their rights and possession over land. The case of the Garos (who like to call themselves Mandis), living in the traditional sal forests of Modhupur is well-known in this regard. Spread over some 62,000 acres, Modhupur forest has historically been the habitat of the Garo and the Koch. They have lived there in peace for centuries. But then with reservation of the forest land, introduction of national parks, plantation economy and intrusion of the land-hungry Bengalis for commercial banana, pineapple and papaya plantation, the original inhabitants of the forests are alienated today from their land and forests. They feel deprived and alienated because if they were equally citizens as the Bengalis, then why is it always they who become the ultimate target group to suffer?

The irresponsible plantation projects have severe consequences over the landscapes and lifestyles of residents of the Modhupur forest area. It is mainly due to commercial plantation (funded by the ADB with technical assistance from UNDP) that there has been

drastic loss of the remaining natural vegetation. This has provided incentive for rapid expansion of banana, pineapple and papaya plantation controlled by outsiders. Use of pesticides, including DDT and imported hormones to make the fruit bigger and ripen more quickly pose a serious threat. Acacia that has replaced sal in Modhupur and elsewhere is not strong enough and can break in a strong wind. Most of the land that once was commons for the Adivasis is out of their reach now. This is true of many other sites throughout the public forest land and the commons.

In Bangladesh, plantation on public forest land means dealing with big cash with loans coming from IFIs. The practice of 'simple plantation' forestry has been passed for 'social', 'community' or 'participatory' forestry. The land belongs to the Forest Department, loans come from the ADB, and the Forest Department establishes the plantations on public forest land, cutting native forests and bushes with the argument that the local species are less productive and grow slowly. The locals and often outsiders are drawn into it as the so-called participants or beneficiaries who have no say about the selection of species, while the production and trade are controlled. According to some appalling statistics about the state of the Modhupur forest given by the Tangail Forest Office, out of 46,000 acres in the Tangail part of the Modhupur forest, 7,800 acres have been given out for rubber cultivation, 1,000 acres to the Air Force, 25,000 acres have gone into illegal possession, and the Forest Department controls only 9,000 acres. In Modhupur, one can hardly find native species such as *gandhi gazari*, *koroi*, *ajuli*, *dud kuruj*, *sonalu*, *sesra*, *jiga*, *jogini chakra*, *kaikha*, *sidah*, *sajna*, *amloki*, *gadila*, etc. Currently, the Forest Department is implementing the second rotation of fuelwood plantation throughout the country with loans for the Forestry Sector Project from ADB. Funded primarily by ADB and the WB woodlot (for the production of fuelwood), agroforestry and industrial plantations look alike, with similar species, exotic and invasive in most cases. Major species selected for woodlot and agroforestry are acacia and eucalyptus. There is severe criticism of these invasive species that are normally selected for plantation. The controversy, debate and protests that the first

rotation of plantation (beginning in 1989–90) generated are still alive. The Forest Department continues to ignore all these protests and controversies on plantations. For the Garos and the Koch the forest used to be their source of livelihood, food, and medicine. But with most of the forests despoiled, forest resources have become scanty for them. Therefore, the Adivasis living in the natural forests become the worst victims of these plantation projects in the name of development. Development is important for the people of a country; what is the logic of such development that denies the people their basic right to live? This has become an unanswerable question.

#### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CONSEQUENCES OF PLANTATIONS IN BANGLADESH

In general, Bangladesh has been following 'simple plantation forestry' practices. Complex plantation forestry offers the prospect of more effective conservation of forest genetic resources. Plantation does not mean a *planted forest*. It is generally monoculture of exotic species. It is plainly impossible to plant the enormous diversity of plants that are found in native forests. As plantation requires elimination of native forests, it causes severe deforestation and loss in habitat of local flora and fauna. Invasive or exotic species produce enemy pests and impact the surrounding land.

Plantations displace human communities (the Adivasis) who have lived in the forests from time immemorial and work against their customary rights, tradition, culture and knowledge. Plantations do not have historical, cultural, educational and traditional values.

Plantations cause major ecological disturbances: increased soil erosion, disruption of original vegetation type (usually grasslands), and local evolution.

The promoters of the plantations do not fully acknowledge the adverse economic, environmental and social consequences of plantation forestry programmes. Many participants reported that their efforts to protect the last bits of the planted forest went in vain because they did not get support from the Forest Department. Now they accuse the Forest Department officials not only of engaging in

plundering but also of harassing them. The local people complain of false cases filed against them and physical abuse, including rape and murder were also reported. The participants ultimately find that they have been deceived. They realize that they were made to sign a fake agreement. So they cannot legally challenge the Forest Department. The ADB that provided loans couldn't be challenged either. True, the forest land is encroached and converted into agricultural land due to plantations. But who are the encroachers? The rich, or the poor, forest-dwelling Adivasi communities? In most cases it is the rich, the influential or outsiders who encroach upon the forest lands in collusion with the government agencies and political forces. Plantations in many instances create avenues for such encroachment. Banana plantations, illegally established on a massive scale on the forest lands in Modhupur are an example of how plantations have brought outsiders into the forests.

Plantations are monoculture and the lack of biodiversity is of concern. They typically have sparse canopies so do not protect the land; they cause air temperatures to rise; and they deplete rather than increase the water level. They are generally exotic to the region. While the initial planting may be free of natural pests and diseases, that situation will not last and plantation regions may not be in a position to combat scourges yet to arrive.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the net result of the so-called 'social forestry' on the public forest land in Modhupur is that it has hastened the deforestation process, provided greater scope for government officials to become corrupt, led to wholesale destruction of the local environment, and further indebtedness of the country.

#### THE ECO-PARK PROJECT

In the north-east, the Khasi and Monipuri communities are not better off. Alienation and dispossession of land and common properties are commonplace. In its latest bid to set up the so-called eco-parks in a number of places in the country the government has added to the tension of the Adivasis. The Khasis and Garos from Moulvibazar District travelled to Dhaka to stage a demonstration

against establishing two eco-parks near Madhabkundo and Muraichara waterfalls in Moulvibazar District. They alleged at a rally that the proposed eco-parks have endangered the livelihood means, principally of the Adivasi Khasi community living in the area for ages. They alleged that if the government had gone ahead with plans of establishing eco-parks, around 1,500 people, most of them Khasis and some Garos, would have been directly affected. They would lose their land that they have used for betel leaf cultivation and it would be difficult for them to retain even their homesteads. Despite all this opposition against setting up of the eco-park in Moulvibazar, the minister for forests and environment inaugurated them on 16 April 2001. The minister declared that the eco-park would not disturb the habitat of the Khasis and Garos living in the areas.

The committee that was formed as a result of the Adivasi demand to exclude their land from the eco-park consisted of six members, none of whom were Adivasis. The Adivasis protested without any result, but finally the government was compelled to stop further activities with regard to the eco-park, as it seemed that finally the policy makers understood the disastrous consequences of their prestigious eco-park project. The argument of the Adivasis was that the government has thousands of acres of reserve forest land in the hills of Patharia and Longla next to where the eco-park was planned. Then instead of building it in Patharia and Longla hills, why target the Khasi and Garo lands? The eco-park has threatened to evict 1,000 Khasi and Garo families from their ancestral homelands. The Adivasi people have tried their best to stop this eco-park on Khasi–Garo ancestral land. It was ultimately stopped, but much mistrust had been created between the government and representatives of the Adivasi communities by then. The Adivasi communities consider this an issue of their very existence. Such development strategies will not bring any kind of development for our country: instead, the overall security scenario would be worsened.

CRITIQUE OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES REGARDING  
THE ADIVASI PEOPLE

Access to justice, education, health, and housing that are guaranteed by the Bangladesh Constitution and international human rights law are basic rights to live with dignity. Despite progress made on different fronts, serious limiting factors persist that stand in the way for the true transition of the country to democracy and political empowerment of the citizens. Some key limiting factors are the weak public policy regime and non-implementation of existing policies, laws and international instruments to which Bangladesh has made commitments. This situation contributes to social and economic deprivation and weak political participation of a large percentage of the people of Bangladesh. The government and the opposition parties have failed to rise above narrow partisan interests and cooperate with each other for attaining greater national interests. The failure of the political leadership—both in the government and outside—to demonstrate the commitment and capability to sustain the democratic process at the expense of immediate parochial gains appears to have alienated them from the masses, thereby accentuating societal frustration and instability.

The government lacks transparency and accountability, repressive laws remain in place, law-enforcement authorities and State agencies are influenced by partisan interests, and there is weak political participation of the masses, especially women, minorities and disadvantaged communities. This freaky political face of Bangladesh is aggravated by unending corruption and factionalism.

The Bangladesh government is a signatory to the International Labour Organization (ILO) 107, but not to Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (as of January 2004).

Article 14 of ILO Convention 169 says, ‘the rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands they traditionally occupy shall be recognized’.

Article 16, Section 1 of the convention states, ‘the people concerned shall not be removed from the lands, which they occupy’.

If relocation becomes unavoidable, they shall be provided in all possible cases with 'lands of quality and legal status at least equal to that of lands previously occupied by them, suitable to provide for their present needs and future development'.<sup>13</sup>

As Bangladesh has not signed ILO Convention 169, this convention has no practical significance for the Adivasis in Bangladesh.

Along with the plantation projects, many factors have contributed to the loss of the natural sal forest. The historical changes in the ownership of the forests, especially the enactment of the East Pakistan State Acquisition and Tenancy Act in 1950 worked as incentives for indiscriminate felling of trees. The partition of the subcontinent and the transfer of the forests to the Forest Department have also been contributing factors for serious deforestation. However, environmentalists and professional foresters believe that in most places the sal forest could have been regenerated with proper care. But in recent times, instead of regeneration of the sal forest, commercial and exotic species have been introduced. This has drastically changed the features of the sal forest.

According to experts, natural rubber does not have much economic basis in Bangladesh. At the time of resuming rubber plantations the authorities said it would be economically profitable and the production would match that of Malaysia. But when Bangladesh went into rubber production in the CHT and Sylhet in the first phase, the production was much lower than what was projected. Rubber plantation has been reported to be a 'colossal failure'. Corruption is said to be one of the main reasons.

It is astonishing that the Bangladesh government amended the Forest Act of 1927 under pressure of the ADB to access loans for the forestry projects and initiatives. While the people of the Modhupur forest areas are shocked by the first wave of commercial plantation passed for 'social forestry', they find that almost the same kind of plantation is being planned under the Forestry Sector Project also funded by ADB. There are also indications that the government has a plan to replicate the commercial plantation (woodlot) in other areas of the country. If that is indeed the case, the consequences will

be severe for the forest ecology and local communities.

The new forestry policy of reforestation sugarcoated as ‘social forestry’ (but actually plantation) is bound to have horrendous consequences. If the plan is implemented, an enormous amount of land—degraded and encroached that has turned into agricultural land for a long time—would be taken away from the public with no guarantee that these lands will actually be forested in real public interest. On the one hand, such plantations would reduce the food production and on the other, will militate against the forest communities, especially those indigenous to the forest land. This means the new forestry policy may contribute negatively to social development. The members of the Adivasi communities and environmentalists have already termed the Forest Act of 2000 (that has followed the Forestry Master Plan for its implementation and as a conditionality of the ADB for Bangladesh to access loans) anti-people, anti-environment, and anti-national interest.

External forces such as IFIs, donors, bilateral agencies and investors have great influence in shaping the local actors and actions including the political systems and NGOs. There are allegations that the consultants drafted the amendments without proper consultation with different citizens’ groups, especially the forest-dwelling communities which are to be impacted by the amendments. There are also allegations that the amendments that the consultants wrote for the ADB were actually intended for the promotion of commercial or industrial plantation, which, if incorporated in the Forest Act, would have severe impacts on the Adivasi communities. If the Forestry Master Plan and the resulting forestry projects are to bring all the officially-recorded public forest land under tree cover without considering customary rights, the Adivasi communities living in the forests will certainly be severely affected.

The marginal and the poor with little or no political influence become subject to torture, ill-treatment, arrest and detention; this is not a new situation in Bangladesh. These are rooted deep in inequality, economic injustice, and exploitation by the local elite and developed countries. Demand for just wages, food, habitat and rightful share of sources is met with force and violence. It is true

that there are more deaths from hunger, malnutrition and diseases, but fear and violence are more overpowering, conspicuous, and debilitating.<sup>14</sup>

Many contest the arguments of the authorities and the international interest groups and believe the destruction of the public forests has nothing to do with the Adivasi people who are the real sons of the soil. How can it be possible that the Adivasi people are destroying their own homes? The Adivasis have a strong bond with the forest, as it is their world. Bangladesh is one of the first countries to sign the Convention on Biological Diversity, thus committing itself to conserve the natural and biological resources. Some of the fitting clauses of the convention have relevance to the Bangladesh government's afforestation programmes and the endangered biodiversity.

Practices and innovations developed by indigenous peoples, which contribute to the sustainable use of biological resources and conservation of bio-diversity should be recognized, rewarded; states should control or eradicate 'alien' species which threaten ecosystems, habitation or species and states should adopt measures for the recovery and rehabilitation of the endangered species and for their reintroduction into their natural habitats.<sup>15</sup>

Bangladesh and other parties concerned have obviously violated the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In all the Adivasi-inhabited areas there are common issues and concerns that are also national concerns. The Constitution, international instruments and the SAARC Social Charter talk of their protection, but in reality these instruments are being not implemented. The Bangladesh government has yet no policy for the development of the Adivasi people; neither does it recognize the 'Adivasis' as indigenous peoples. Today, their special relationship to the land and forest—an elemental symbiosis crucial to their survival—has been threatened by communal State and politicians and the so-called development projects. The provisions of the SAARC Social Charter that urges the South Asian states to engage the citizens and communities in governance are severely violated, particularly in the forest areas inhabited by the Adivasi communities.

The claims and opinions of the Adivasi communities are being ignored. The creation of reserved forests and their further expansion also violate the provisions of the SAARC Social Charter that urges equitable distribution of income and greater access to resources. Expansion of reserved forests limits access of the forest-dwelling peoples to local resources.

The outcome of actions to improve the dismal conditions of the Adivasi people and the forest of Bangladesh has been minimal. The Bangladesh government and IFIs have responded to some specific critiques, but there has not been any significant change for the better in policies and situations that erode the customary rights and lead to massive dispossession of means of livelihood.

The critique of the policies is not conclusive; there must be further investigation and critical analysis in these areas.

#### DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS POSING THREAT TO THE ADIVASI PEOPLE

Severe deforestation has occurred in the sal forest areas that extend over the Modhupur Tracts as well as the districts of Dhaka, Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Rajshahi. Apart from economic and environmental problems that the rubber and woodlot plantation and the eco-parks have created, it has also become a source of conflict over land on which the ethnic communities held customary rights. In these areas, the local communities have got engaged in protracted conflicts with the Forest Department and the rubber plantation authorities because the monocultures have been carried out or attempted mostly on the land that the Adivasi communities claim. Human habitat, the life and culture of the forest communities are severely affected because of the shrinking of natural forests. A product of great demand of the natural sal forest used to be hardwood sal. Other species found in the natural sal forest are also in great demand. These are used for house construction, manufacture of furniture, bullock-cart wheels, axles and planking.

The forest is also a major source of twigs, chips of bark, branches, brush and decayed branches used as firewood. Root foods, wild fruits,

and berries found in the natural forest also provided sustenance to the local communities and indigenous forest communities which are the primary beneficiaries of such foods. Sungrass and thatch grasses are also important products of the sal forests, valuable for construction of roofs and walls of thatched houses. Grasses other than thatch and sungrass provide fodder for livestock. Medicinal plants such as *basak*, *swarnalata* and *sarpagandha* are very important as medicine among the local communities, depleted to such an extent that the forest communities have been hard-hit. Their livelihood has been affected, their lifestyle has changed, and their cultural heritage threatened. Moneyed people and outsiders now control pineapple, started by the Garos and the missionaries in the Modhupur region. It raises great ecological concerns. In addition to the adverse conditions that are created by large-scale pineapple plantation on land that used to be sal forest a year or a decade ago, spray of hormone on almost each pineapple twice a year is of great concern. The use of hormone makes the pineapple bigger, but it puts the consumers' health at risk. It also has an impact on the soil and on insect life.

Women in Garo societies, who are more open than Bengali women and in many areas heavily dependent on forests, are the worse hit due to implementation of the development projects. Women in a matrilineal society, such as Garo, who live in the Modhupur Garh forest as well as other parts such as Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Netrokona, etc. play a great role in the economic activities of the family. They are the ones who collect fuelwood, fodder, roots foods and are the routine head-loaders. Women, who collect fuelwood and other necessities from forests for domestic consumption and sale, have found that their sources of livelihood have shrunk drastically. Adivasi women would generally be the ones to collect fuelwood and fodder from the nearby forest and the men would generally sell them in the market. In the first place, because of deforestation, Adivasi women have to walk longer and work harder to collect their minimum requirements of fuelwood and other forest resources crucial for their survival; and second, due to creation of commercial fuelwood plantations, women and men have all largely

been restricted from entering the forests. This is a situation Adivasi women are not familiar with. Many women have totally lost their relationship with the land and some of them have allegedly gone into degrading professions because of displacement.

Due to the inroad of cash economy such as pineapple cultivation in the beginning and then commercial plantation established with ADB loans, the relationship between men and women has been particularly affected. Men are usually more engaged with cash economy than women. This creates a dichotomy in their respective relationships with nature. Men do not hesitate to destroy nature to earn cash. This pushes women, who are left to continue to collect fuelwood and fodder from the forests, into hardship. As a result, many of them have migrated to the cities where they become cheap labourers in the garments industry, in beauty parlours and in houses of well-to-do families. The working environment in these places does not suit them. They are often exposed to economic, mental, and physical abuse.

The Garos of the Modhupur sal forest and the Khasis of Moulvibazar became worried about their means of livelihood on their traditional homeland because of attempts to take 'prescribed' lands for rubber plantation and the establishment of eco-parks. Allegations abound that the authorities attempted to take homesteads, croplands, and registered lands for rubber plantation and in some instances such attempts were successful. The scenario of deprivation is not different in Moulvibazar.

The local communities consider the expansion of the reserved forests an immoral act. Plantation of exotics—rubber, acacia and eucalyptus in particular—is one major factor that has changed the Modhupur sal forest forever. Sal forest coppices from thousands of acres cleared in the 1980s for rubber plantation worked as a two-edged sword: first, rubber has not proved to be economically beneficial; and second, part of the former sal forest land dispensed for rubber plantation now lies completely useless or abandoned. Forestry experts warned against rubber monoculture and recommended regeneration of the natural sal forest or mixed forest that could have been done with minimal expense.

Commercial fuelwood plantation funded by the ADB (which followed rubber plantation on over 7,000 acres) instigated a continued process of cutting the sal coppices. Although the stated goal of fuelwood plantation or 'woodlot' was production of fuelwood, in reality such plantations, mostly with exotic species qualifying best as pulpwood have contributed to the extreme damage to the sal forest. Most of the plantation sites in the Modhupur forest, formerly luxuriant with sal coppices, lie completely denuded today. With minimum cost and caution, the sal coppices could have been regenerated into full forests. Commercial plantation with exotic species has destroyed the last chance of protecting the biodiversity in many sal patches. This has led the people to believe that 'social forestry' is a camouflage for some hidden interests.

The logic behind the eco-parks is that through the implementation of the projects, animal and plant life would be protected. But the project requires new roads to be built, hills to be levelled and trees to be cut. All these will lead to vendors, traffic, pollution, waste and noise. The serenity of the place will be lost. Hordes of tourists will drive out all the remaining small forest animals from their present secure abodes and trample native plants. The eco-park is also questionable in terms of its impact on the socio-economic and cultural identity of the Adivasis. The government's plan to resettle the Adivasis infringes upon their traditional lifestyle and their self-determination. With hordes of visitors invading their privacy, examining them as if they are exhibits in a zoo, the Adivasis will no longer be free to live their lives on their own terms.

The ADB's assessment about the sal forest that most of these low-lying state forest lands are made up of poorly-managed sal of extremely low productivity or are barren altogether serving as low-quality pasture has been regarded as ill-intentioned by critics.<sup>16</sup> The ADB's evaluation inadvertently proposes that the exotic species planted under woodlot can replace trees of the natural forest because these exotic varieties grow faster and the returns are much quicker than from natural trees. The Adivasi people understand that the long-term benefits of the natural sal or other trees are much higher than from exotic varieties. As the natural forests are very diverse,

they not only supply timber and fuelwood but are also sources of medicinal plants and habitats for rare wildlife. The coppices of the natural forests, if nurtured, can generate natural forests over a period of time, and protect the biological diversity and natural habitats of the Adivasi people.

If we look at the eco-park projects, we find the same thing. The stated objectives of the eco-parks are the preservation of biodiversity, the creation of an eco-friendly environment, and the promotion of eco-tourism. However, one doubts the intentions behind the eco-parks. In Bangladesh, most of the natural forests have been ruined not because of poverty or the presence of the Adivasi communities in the forests; rather, the areas inhabited by the Adivasi communities still have bits of forest. Given the experience of the approach of the project to save biodiversity, the setting up of eco-parks in areas inhabited by the Adivasi communities is likely to cause the rapid destruction of biodiversity. Donors are not yet visible behind the eco-parks, but it is apparent that the government is making an effort to build a good image of them perhaps to hide the misdeeds and ill-conceived plantations using donor money on public forest land.

Cases of 'complex displaced persons' occur when both political factors and environmental change play a part. 'Ecocide' is a situation where human lives of a community in great number are threatened by destruction of the environment. The affected country should find solutions through its own strategies and domestic policies. Political calculations may come into play when deciding upon a location to carry out development programmes that will result in massive population movements. Under such circumstances, international assistance programmes implemented through the government should be carried out with great caution to achieve the developmental goals. The governments of the developing countries should be aware of the intentions of the donor agencies. Otherwise, one would simplistically blame the structural flaws, and, ultimately, human security is threatened.

## CHAPTER 4

# *Dead Forests, Dying People: Security Threatened*

**I**t seems we are no longer sensitive to the Adivasi communities and have forgotten their identities as citizens of the country. We have taken it as natural that it is *they* who have to suffer for the sake of development of an impoverished, dependent country. We need to dig deeper into the issues to find a sensitive approach to address the security needs of the Adivasi people. We have to incorporate and include them in order to achieve any long-term development objective.

In our hills and sal forests one will find only some tiny fragments of natural forests and the number of the Adivasi people is few. This is a miserable situation if the importance of forests is considered. What factors have led to this situation? The typical response of the Forest Department is that those who live in and around the forests are encroachers and despoilers of the public forests. Different international interest groups, especially institutions like the ADB engaged in the forestry subsector argue that growing population, poverty, migration of landless people into the forest areas, shifting cultivation, illegal felling, fuelwood collection, etc. cause degradation of forests. The question remains: Do the people, materially and spiritually intertwined with the forests, really destroy what are so important for their lives? Are the Adivasis who have lived in the forests for centuries, encroachers? The answer is simple, but the process of finding it a complex one.

The ultimate role of the State is to protect its territory in order to protect the safety and dignity of its citizens, secure their political, economic and cultural rights, and to eliminate external threats to their human rights. Thus, State security is directly related to the

security of its citizens. However, many citizens have their safety and even their lives threatened by their own State or government. One of the great paradoxes of human civilization is that the machine of progress has put enormous pressures on nature's life support systems. This is the reality in most developing countries and the situation becomes worse when donor agencies interfere with inadequate development strategies.

In Bangladesh, with the disappearance of the natural forests, most of the wild animals in the sal forest have also vanished. Leopard, bear, deer and many other animals that were abundant in the sal forest areas have totally disappeared. Flocks of monkeys are rarely seen. Commonly seen in the past, pheasants, peacocks, pythons and a variety of birds now have no place in the rubber and woodlot fields. With the sal trees and other local species gone, wholesale destruction of the undergrowth vegetation, medicinal plants and soil condition have also suffered. During the monsoons, many poor forest-dwelling households gather roots (a kind of food for them) from the sal forest. With most of the sal forest gone, this food has become scanty.

Rubber plantation, if practiced as a monoculture, is ecologically sensitive. On the one hand, rubber has been planted as monoculture in the traditional sal forest in the Modhupur tract, on the other; the rubber trees have not been much cared for. Cutting of coppices still continues for plantation, expansion of pineapple cultivation and other uses. Not only were the coppices cut, even the stumps were uprooted. It, thus, completely destroyed the possibility of regeneration of the sal forest. Experts suggest that creation of mixed forest with local varieties instead of rubber plantation as a monoculture would be more economical and helpful for preserving the environment.

The alienation of the forest and local people from the rubber plantation and the destruction of natural patches have jeopardized the intimate relations of the forest people with the forests. The local people have been extremely antagonized by rubber plantation in the Modhupur forest because outsiders, who received bank loans, did not plant trees in most cases. They have allegedly used the bank

loans for other purposes. The environmentalists had been able to draw attention of the ADB to the social and environmental hazards already created through the ongoing rubber plantation activities. Consequently, ADB abandoned the project after initial survey and analysis. There were no policy changes about the woodlot plantation projects. From this, we can understand how sensitive and sincere the donor agencies are in development of the developing countries.

Ultimately the extant setting has severe consequences for the Adivasi communities of Bangladesh, most of which have traditionally lived in the forest regions of the country. The government should remember that the displaced not only affect the society, its economy and polity in all its ramifications, but also strikes at the physical structure.

Protection of forests, biodiversity and privacy of the Adivasi people is significant for the protection of these people. Their traditions, knowledge, history, educational values are all attached with the forests. Therefore, protection of forests and biodiversity is very significant for the protection of the Adivasis. The extent has to be determined to which factors such as growing population, poverty, migration of landless people into the forest areas, shifting cultivation, illegal felling and fuelwood collection, etc. contribute to deforestation and how much is due to investment strategies of the IFIs, wrong policies and practices with plantation economy, etc.

If we look deeper into the matter, we find there is a harmony of interests among the elite in the developing countries and the international donor agencies, which do not want to generate autonomous growth or development in these countries. Thus, there is a managerial bourgeoisie consisting of a corporate wing and a local wing. By their very art and practice, modern development projects are generating an all-encompassing affect where the notion of individual security is always neglected. Donor agencies devoid of local or regional settings and social realities and structure pursue these projects through the State apparatus that ultimately lead to the collapse of environmental security and pose a threat to the country's economic and social stability. Whether we are talking about State security or individual security, this situation will threaten both.

OVERALL IMPLICATIONS OF THE  
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS  
ON THE ADIVASI PEOPLE

Commercial and industrial plantations are part of a cruel process primarily responsible for deforestation and the deteriorating soil conditions in the plantations, also severely affecting the unique culture and lifestyle of the Adivasi people who have lost the most from such transition. They are generally not opposed to others living and benefiting from the jungle, nor are they opposed to its development. On the contrary, what they want from development is benefit for themselves and not just for the companies and outsiders. They also want conservation of the forest resources so that they can serve future generations of both the profit-makers and the Adivasi people.

The commercial forests created with alien species in Modhupur have drastically changed the ecology and economy of the forests and also the concept of ownership of land. The main complaint during the establishment of woodlot in the Modhupur sal forest was that it threatened the habitat of the Garos and the environment that the sal forest sustained. Although no forest land under cultivation of rice, sugarcane and pineapple was to be taken for woodlot, there were many reports that this ruling was ignored and cultivated and encroached lands were taken. Severe ecological problems caused by woodlot were also reported at the initial stage. In many places throughout the sal forest the coppices of sal trees and other indigenous species were clear-cut for the preparation of woodlot blocks. The authorities ignored the experts' suggestion for mixed forest instead of commercial monoculture under woodlot.

No woodlot plot in Modhupur that had matured in the seven-year rotation period was officially cut by the end of the seventh year. First, a seven-year period was not enough for a forest to mature; and second, very few plots actually had a good number of trees for cutting. Most of the trees had been plundered by forest thieves allegedly in collusion with dishonest Forest Department officials, employees and guards. It was only in April–May 2001 that some

plots of 1990 in Charaljani, Gachabari and Kamarchala had been officially auctioned. In Charaljani beat, seven plots of 20 acres that were established in 1990 were auctioned for some Taka 850,000. In Gachabari beat, 34 woodlot plots of 100 acres were auctioned only for Taka 105,000 and 10 agroforestry plots for Taka 487,000. In Kamarchala beat, 65 woodlot and agroforestry plots were auctioned for Taka 3,500,000.

These statistics were gathered from discussion with the participants and Forest Department officials. What might be striking for cost and benefit analysis is that in all these three beats some 116 woodlot and agroforestry plots were auctioned for Taka 4,942,000: that means the average income from a plot has been a little over Taka 40,000. This is a ridiculous amount compared to what was expected. When the Forest Department dragged the participants into plantations they were told that each of them would earn at least Taka 200,000 from each plot by the end of the seven-year rotation. If that is 40 per cent of the total income expected, each plot should have been auctioned for Taka 500,000 and the 116 plots should have earned an income of some Taka 58 million. But what has been earned is only 8.5 per cent of what was talked about. With only a fraction of the loans used for creating plantation, the sal forest could have been regenerated that could earn many times more income in a slightly longer term.

The Adivasis living in the eco-park area live in groups. They have their own social and administrative system. Law and order are maintained through the headman of each village, called 'Punji'. The Adivasis are proud of their disciplined social system. The women will be worst hit if the eco-park project is implemented. They enjoy more freedom than the women in the Bengali community. They move freely in the forests and cross hill after hill to collect fuelwood. Their traditional social system will break down totally. Their moral values will also be degraded. Ninety-five per cent of the Adivasis will get involved with political matters when they exercise their voting rights. Other than this, they are peaceful, silent observers whose major economic activity is growing betel leaves. They are a self-sufficient society and do not like intruders. But if they are

evicted from their ancestral land, the situation might be different. As our research findings reveal, 90 per cent of the Khasis became very aggressive when the eco-park issue was raised. The young generation is more violent. The old generation is calmer and only worried about their future generation.

Our research findings reveal the hidden grievances of the Adivasis who are the victims of the plantation projects and the eco-park project. In Modhupur, 80 per cent of the Adivasis believe that their life was easier and happier before the plantation projects. Intrusion of outsiders in their social system destroyed the peace and harmony prevalent in their society and their social fabric got destroyed. This ultimately led to the degraded morality and dishonesty of the youth. Binod Chiran and Lodit Slan's sons quit college and became drug addicts from frustration. The direct impact is visible in their culture. In most cases, the Adivasis were cheated by the outside Bengali settlers and their experience of the people involved in the plantation projects is very bad. They think they were exploited and the outsiders took advantage of their ignorance, sincerity and innocence. None of them believed that these projects were implemented to develop the Adivasi people; none of them believed that the government cared for their financial development; everybody believed that these projects were an instrument to further marginalize their situation and corner them.

The young generation very aggressively opposed government policies. But the old generation thinks that there are differences between the actual proposed projects and the implemented projects. They at least understood that corruption might be the factor due to which the fruits of these projects did not reach them. When they were asked how they felt about the people who are there as representatives of the government, 41 per cent answered without hesitation that they are very bad people; 58.7 per cent had no comments. When they were asked about the diminishing natural sal forest, the pain could be seen in their eyes. They said they had lost everything with the forest. They used to worship the trees, as the forest is the major source of food, medicine, cloth and housing materials. But with the forest they think they have lost their identity.

In Moulvibazar, the scenario is almost the same. The difference is that they are a step behind in the process of exploitation and marginalization. Village headman Anil Yang Yung and Jatish Ranga think the eco-park project is severely flawed.

The first target of the eco-park will be their tradition and culture; free movement of the women would be hindered; moral values would be degraded; means of subsistence would be diminished. In this situation, a sense of insecurity is haunting each and every Khasi today. From this sense of insecurity, they have decided that they will revolt against the establishment of the eco-park, and take up arms if anyone tries to evict them from their ancestral land. It is of great concern for the entire country. How is any kind of development possible if the people are marginalized and given the impression that they are second-class citizens? The grievances that cropped up in the Adivasis will lead to armed violence and ultimately it will become a major security threat. How can the policy makers forget that behind our independence struggle, the major reason was the sense of deprivation and exploitation?

Landlessness is a serious problem of the Adivasi communities in the plains. They have been progressively losing their land because of State policies and also for socio-political factors. Communal rights over land are almost non-existent in the plains. What is *khas* land or government land, in many instances, was land that belonged to the Adivasi communities. There is a government policy for the distribution of *khas* land among the landless people, but that does not help the Adivasi communities much because of lack of political protection in general. So there is no easy way for the members of the Adivasi communities to establish their legitimate land rights. Deprivation does not stop there: grabbing of their land by force, false records and tricks by the members of the majority community are common.

The loss of *debottor* property (property gifted to God) has been another cause of anguish for the Adivasis. *Debottor* property such as temples, cremation grounds and ponds are found in almost all Adivasi regions that are progressively getting lost to the land-hungry Bengali land-grabbers. While retaining the possession of

the properly recorded land and commons is becoming increasingly difficult for the Adivasis, recovering the Adivasi land illegally occupied or grabbed is far more difficult even with court verdicts in their favour. The State organs including the police which are meant to provide protection to the Adivasis turn them away in many instances. Arbitrary application of the land acquisition right of the government is another problem. There are complaints that the government often acquires land belonging to the Adivasis without taking their consent.

Monoculture plantations have been a poor ecological strategy. Insect attack and diseases in the monoculture are also reported. According to experts, plantations with a short rotation are agricultural crops, entirely for commercial purposes. Therefore, these plantations seem to be a major threat not only to the Adivasi people but also to the environment. The impact of clearing of the forest for woodlot and rubber plantations is enormously negative for the wildlife and biodiversity. Rare subspecies of golden langur monkey reside in a limited area of the Modhupur Forest. Its habitation is threatened both by rubber cultivation and firewood production through woodlot.

Woodlot has also been reported to change the local environment. In the changed and hostile environment the local people's rights over forest produce have been drastically reduced and their freedom to move around has been limited. Commercial plantation has also seriously disturbed their cultural life centring around trees. The Adivasi communities say that they grow rice, pineapple and other crops in the fertile areas for their subsistence, but they never destroy natural forests. They have seen that in places where woodlot plantations have been established, the natural coppices have fast disappeared and exotic species have taken over.

Problems such as poverty, landlessness and powerlessness are common among the Adivasi communities in Bangladesh. Progressive alienation of the Adivasi communities from land and commons only makes their economic condition worse. Nothing can help them effectively unless the government provides political protection to the Adivasi communities through constitutional recognition, signing

ILO Convention 169, and framing new laws in their interest. Participation of the Adivasi communities in governance of resources and commitment in the SAARC Social Charter are a far cry without any implementation mechanism in place. Dispossession of land is a serious social injustice contributing to inequitable distribution of income and access to resources, disempowerment, impoverishment, inadequate standard of living, shelter, food, etc. We must remember that these are all contrary to the principles in the SAARC Social Charter.



## CHAPTER 5

### *Preserving the Identity of the Adivasi People*

**P**rotracted poverty, a high ratio of hard-core poor, shrinking commons, lack of control over livelihood means, corruption, etc. are manifestations of structural human rights abuses that need to be dealt with in the struggle for attaining human dignity and rights. Livelihood is a key dimension of the broader concern for human rights. For attaining right to livelihood it is very important that access to land, forests and other commons are ensured. Denying the Adivasis their livelihood means is, thus, denying them their human rights. It is, therefore, important to preserve the identity of the Adivasi communities and show some tolerance towards these communities by members of the majority Bengalis.

Efforts at resistance against abuse seem to be futile in view of our contemporary politics and ill-effects of the aid industry. Political resistance against what is deemed absolutely unjust and unethical concerning forestry issues is important. The Modhupur sal forest today has turned into a big pineapple plantation and the future is at stake largely due to the wrong strategies and approaches supported by the supranationals. The plantations established with foreign funds are controversial because of their nature and the local and international politics at play behind them. The Adivasis living in the forests are children of the forest. The graves of their ancestors lie in the forest lands. Thus, the forest is sacred to them and they cannot leave it. They preserve trees because the trees protect them. If they lose the forest, they will lose their lives and their ancestors. They love the forest and taking away their forests and lands means plucking out their lives.

The latest amendment to the Forest Act of 1927 passed by the National Parliament in April 2000 has given more power to the Forest Department, which the critics say will further curtail the rights

of the Adivasi people on the forest land. The Forest Department is the chief implementing agency of the policies and programme initiatives in the forestry sector. The chief objective of the National Forest Policy, other environmental policies and initiatives is to protect the remains of the natural forests and bring forest lands that are degraded and encroached upon under afforestation programmes. But the main obstacle for achieving this objective is the conflict between the Forest Department (a colonial set-up), and the Adivasi communities. The conflicting parties put the blame on each other for destroying forests.

The Forest Department's treatment of the Adivasi communities as encroachers drives the latter to take an antagonistic stance against the former. On the other hand, the Adivasi communities believe that corruption in the Forest Department is one of the main causes of plundering of forest resources. Given this conflict from colonial times, the Adivasi communities are hesitant to participate in the afforestation programme on public forest land. The ADB's two key assessments relating to environment and dissipation strained the relationship between the Adivasi communities and the project-implementing agency (the Forest Department) which have been challenged in Modhupur. In its project completion report, the ADB had asserted that the project had had a positive impact on the environment, since the forest cover was supposed to have been established on previously degraded public forest land.

However, the reality in the Modhupur sal forest does not match ADB's assessment. The environmental conditions have not improved but deteriorated in the Modhupur sal forest. It should be noted that ADB does not have the right kind of mechanism for monitoring the project site after completion of the project report. The ban on the plantation of eucalyptus under the project in 1993 by the MoEF is also a reflection of environmental problems that the ADB project has caused. Due to strong opposition to commercial fuelwood plantation and the serious disturbance caused to the land tenure situation, both the ADB and UNDP stopped funding planting activities in the Modhupur forest in the final years of implementation of the project. The government has successfully set

up a legal mechanism to serve the post-colonial economic interest groups (supranational and local) with assistance from ADB and dominated by the developed countries.

The key lessons learnt from the plantation and eco-park projects are that for successful developmental projects the sponsors need to understand the local needs and aspirations and let the Adivasi people build confidence in them. The Garos of Modhupur call themselves 'Mandi', meaning 'human being' in their own terminology. There are examples that if the Adivasi communities' rights to the forest and its produce are secure, they can and will make the forest sustainable. What we need is a strictly-organized, well-knit plan spread down to grass-roots levels having definite policies and programmes of action.

The Constitution of Bangladesh is supposed to guarantee fundamental rights, equality, and protection. A constitutional amendment has made Islam the State religion which is seen by the Adivasi people as severe discrimination. A popular political demand of the Adivasi communities is constitutional recognition. The demand raised in 1972 (at the time of the formulation of the Constitution) was ignored by the rulers. Since then, the members of the Adivasi communities have been appealing to the government and legislators to recognize them constitutionally. Since the Bangladesh Constitution is mono-linguistic and mono-nationalist, the Adivasi communities of the country with different languages and religions naturally find themselves in the position of second-class citizens. If the Constitution were secular with no mention of the religion of its citizens, there would have been no problem. But since Islam is constitutionally recognized as the State religion, the Constitution should also mention the other religions of the country.

On the other hand, when the Constitution is examined, it is found that wherever it refers to the national culture and its preservation, it implies Bengali culture. But if at all any culture needs special consideration of the State, it is the cultures of the Adivasi communities and the marginal peoples. The overwhelming Bengali majority, which is virtually the power structure, do not need their culture to be protected as do the religious and cultural minorities.

The demand for constitutional recognition for the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh has two aspects: it provides the legal basis of rights of a community; and the basis of rights over land, natural resources, and cultures.

Then, of course, we need to see that the wrongs done to the forests and forest-dwelling communities are corrected in the true sense. It is the State and its agencies that need to act rightly and drastically. But for that to happen, one obvious means is political resistance from the side of the environmentalists, Adivasis and activists. Political resistance is a difficult choice indeed in a country that fails to provide political protection to the weaker and disadvantaged sections of its people. Still, steadfastness and unity are imperative to resist the misdeeds done to the forest and forest people.

There are a few environmental groups and Adivasi organizations that have played a significant role by drawing attention to the factors behind deforestation, commercial and industrial plantations, expansion of reserved forests, etc. They have also been demonstrating against the process that contributes to shrinking of the customary rights on the forest lands, use of forest lands for commercial or industrial plantations at the cost of environment and livelihoods of the forest-dwelling communities. There are also initiatives and actions taken at different times to draw attention or to seek remedies to local problems. The Khasis and the Garos organized demonstrations and hunger strikes to show their rejection of the government plan for setting up eco-parks that would severely curtail their customary rights over forest commons. The Modhupur Garh Land Protection Council formed in early 2001 assembled hundreds of Garos and Bengalis to tell the stories of deprivation from participation in the ADB-funded 'woodlot' plantation under the guise of social forestry.

The trust-building process cannot be one-sided. The government needs to show some actions to become trustworthy in the eyes of the Adivasi communities. For that, the government needs sensitive policies to help the Adivasi communities to preserve and nurture their true identity.

GOING BEYOND THE MODERN IDEA  
OF SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The development strategies followed did not bring any significant increase in economic progress for the developing countries. We cannot hope to formulate appropriate development theory and policy for the majority of the world's population which suffers from underdevelopment without first learning how its economic and social histories led to their present underdevelopment. It is generally held that economic development occurs in a succession of capitalist stages, and that today's underdeveloped countries are still in a stage (sometimes depicted as an original stage of history) through which the now-developed countries passed long ago. Yet even cursory knowledge of history shows that underdevelopment is not original or traditional, and that neither the past nor the present of the underdeveloped countries resemble in any important respect the past of the now-developed countries. The now-developed countries were never underdeveloped, though they may have been undeveloped.

It is also widely believed that the contemporary underdevelopment of a country can be understood as the product or reflection solely of its own economic, political, social, and cultural characteristics or structures. A related and also largely erroneous view is that the development of these underdeveloped countries, and, within them, of their most underdeveloped domestic areas, must and will be generated or stimulated by diffusing capital, institutions, values, etc. to them from the international and national capitalist centres. Historical perspective based on the underdeveloped countries' experience suggests that, on the contrary, in the underdeveloped countries economic development can now occur only independently of most of these relations of diffusion. A dependent country is one whose development is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy. Disarticulation between technology and social structure reinforces the economy's lack of integration. The ruling groups in the more advanced peripheral societies have discovered that the kind of economic development they need to

sustain their own lifestyles requires the increasing political exclusion of the mass of the population.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are the organizational embodiment of international capital. Their decisions reflect the dictates of imperialism. At the same time, these decisions are more than just the reflections of external exigencies; the organizational form itself has consequences. Just as imperialism is not simply capitalism, MNCs are not simply profit-making capitalist firms. MNCs extend the alienation across political boundaries. For those who live on the periphery, the realization that the plans are made in the developed countries is frustrating, perhaps even more for the elite than for the mass of the population. MNCs will maximize their profits in terms of a global strategy, not a local one.

New technology will continue to be generated by the developed countries and later assimilated by the developing countries. An MNC also has every reason to try to persuade consumers of the developing countries to imitate customers in the centre. The further it can spread the products and ideas over which it has control, the more profits it can make. Reluctant to invest in innovative activities that might produce a more locally appropriate technology, the MNC is anxious to market existing ideas regardless of appropriateness. MNCs are more than the representatives of the international economic order: they are organizations whose internal structures both reflect and shape the international economy. The contradictions between the interests of the MNCs and development of the peripheral countries were not just figments of imagination or transitional aberrations by scholars of the developing world.

The new dependency in the form of foreign assistance has brought a new kind of pressure on local governments. Dependent development left the national bourgeoisie with no opening for either political domination or economic hegemony. Its position and privileges were always contingent on its ability to make alliances with other elite groups. The local bourgeoisie that suffers intensely from imperialist domination serve the interests of the imperialist countries. Since the political power of local capital cannot flow from its dominant role in the process of accumulation, it must depend on

the nature of its ties to the technobureaucracy that staffs the State apparatus. The national bourgeoisie must be seen as a class fraction or segment whose ability to control the state becomes ambiguous when the interests of MNCs are at stake. The centrality of the State in dependent development is special and it should be taken seriously as a macrostructure in this complex relationship. The State apparatus must be willing to oppose the MNCs when questions of local accumulation are at stake. Still, it should also be kept in mind that a developing country and a peripheral society that lacks valuable natural resources, an extensive local market or an exploitable labour force is hardly in a position to bargain.

If the security paradigm is analysed, we will see that in the past the problems of security pertained exclusively to those of the developed world where these countries lie. Perhaps such security orientation was an appropriate response to the needs and concerns of the advanced developed countries. These countries reached a stage of socio-economic, political, and, in fact, civilizational development through a prolonged period of trials where their sources of insecurity, if any, could emanate only from an external source, and the military, among other things, was indeed important to combat it. But in the post-Cold War era, the epicentre of crises and conflicts shifted to what has so far been known as the 'Third World'. The conflicts in the Third World are fundamentally rooted in the socio-political and historical developments of the countries in the region. The forces and factors that influence the conflict situations in these countries are generated within the boundary of the country or the region concerned. Most of them are still grappling with the uphill task of national integration in highly pluralistic social settings. It is hard for these developing countries to extend the security concept beyond the active and passive concepts of traditional and human security and encourage active efforts by the people against human rights violator agencies.

It is taken as axiomatic that contact between the developing and developed societies will lead to the development of the former. The capitalist system has effectively and entirely penetrated even the apparently most isolated sectors of the developing world. This

penetration has made the economies of the developing countries dependent upon those of the developed countries. The consequence has been a partial development that is neither self-generating nor self-perpetuating. The relationship between the developed and developing countries is inherently exploitative. That means it leads to the continued enrichment of some countries and the perpetual stagnation and poverty of others.

The foundations of the existing economic order were laid during and immediately after World War II by the now-developed countries when most of the present developing countries were still under colonial rule. Naturally, the views and aspirations of these countries were not kept in view. In the 1960s, after independent nation states proliferated, a struggle was launched against the biased economic order that didn't serve the cause of the developing countries. Attempts by Third World governments to improve their economic bargaining position had been going on for some time. Thus ensued the North-South dialogue (the North consisting of the developed countries and the South consisting of the developing countries), for establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The demand for an NIEO, among others, included transfer of resources (capital and technology), trade reforms, and restructuring of the international monetary order. But no significant progress was achieved in this regard due to unwillingness on the part of the developed countries to part with their well-entrenched dominance over the present order.

The first among the development strategies advocated by the developed North was the 'growth-oriented' strategy. This strategy relied upon the 'modernizing' elite on the assumption that they could make the best use of available resources, both domestic and foreign. Other measures included a policy of import substitution by local manufacturing and price regulation and other fiscal measures. By the end of the 1960s, it became evident that the 'trickle down' development strategy did bring some rapid growth in some parts of the developing world but mainly ended up by enriching only the elite, both urban and rural, at the expense of mass deprivation.

The latest in the series of development strategies is the Basic

Needs Approach (BNA), advocated by proponents from both the developed and developing countries. In this strategy, it was rightly assumed that the major objective of the development strategies should be reducing mass poverty through satisfaction of basic human needs, viz., food, shelter, health, education, etc. It was assumed that a minimum standard of living would bring the masses within the fold of greater national endeavours. Conceptually, it seems that if the basic needs of life are met, frustrations that crop up from need do not end up in internal conflicts. Therefore, before implementing any kind of development project, the developing countries should consider the outcomes in their own settings. No one else could do that for them.

The factors for the dismal condition of our development projects, especially the plantation projects, are deep-rooted in our colonial past. The concept of reserved forests to exploit what used to be common property, plantation of teak, and extraction of raw materials from the natural forests for pulp and paper mills were introduced during British rule. These have continued since then and have contributed massively to deforestation and degradation of soil of forest floors. In recent times, industrial and fuelwood plantation, rubber plantation, the so-called 'social forestry' and further expansion of the reserved forests have greatly contributed to the rapid destruction of forests. These have dramatically changed our forest landscapes.

In the Indian subcontinent, forests were once considered to be the property of the gods and permission from the local priest was required before one could fell a tree. Such a tradition made the British colonizers, who badly needed hardwood, impatient during the eighteenth century when they consolidated their power in India. Britain's demand for hardwood, including teak, was very high. The British colonizers eventually converted the property of the gods into a commercial product. In defiance of community ownership of forests, the British expropriated millions of hectares of communally owned forests. The villagers and the indigenous forest communities began to lose control over trees and medicinal plants and their knowledge system became endangered. Now, after

the end of the direct colonial era, the developed countries want to ensure supplies of wood from the Asian countries with the aid of various institutions and mechanisms such as the ADB, the WB, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), and Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP). Development projects funded by the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) have taken away much of Asia's forest resources. An effort to make up the forest loss through commercial forestry practices has not only failed but contributed to further clearing of natural stands. This has also increased the burden of debt of the Asian countries. The MDB-financed mega-projects in many countries have contributed to the snowballing effects on the forest resources and the forest communities, including the indigenous peoples. Two examples of how big projects funded by external sources—MDBs or aid agencies—can devastate an area and have multiple effects on the ecology, economy and life of local communities are the Karnaphuli Paper Mill in Chandraghona and the Kaptai Hydroelectricity Dam in the CHT.

The policy makers should realize that we will not be able to accomplish our goal by importing sterile stereotypes from the developed countries that do not correspond to our economic reality and do not respond to our political needs. To change our reality, we must implement our own development strategies.

#### PRESERVATION OF SECURITY IN THE REAL SENSE

It is alarming that all countries and people have a tendency to try to mould others according to their own image or likeness and to impose on them their particular way of living. This applies equally to the national and international fields. There would be more peace in the world if people were to desist from imposing their way of living on other people and countries.

In security studies, it is conventionally and conveniently assumed that the security of the whole system would ensure the security of all its components. Evident inequalities of income and differences in culture have led many observers to see dual societies and economies in the developing countries. Each of the two parts is supposed to

have a history of its own, a structure and a contemporary dynamic largely independent of the other. Supposedly, only one part of the economy and society has been importantly affected by intimate economic relations with the outside capitalist world, and that part, it is held, became modern and relatively developed precisely because of this contact. The other part is widely regarded as variously isolated, subsistence-based, and, therefore, more underdeveloped. Each national and local group of exploiters serves to impose and maintain the monopolistic structure and exploitative relationship of the system as long as it serves the interests of the profit makers who take advantage of this global, national, and local structure to promote their own development. Uneven development throughout its history, and the resulting persistence of commercial rather than industrial capitalism in the underdeveloped world deserve much more attention in the study of economic development and cultural change than they have so far received. Though science and truth know no national boundaries, it is probably new generations of scientists from the developing countries themselves who most need to, and best can, devote the necessary attention to these problems and clarify the process of underdevelopment and development.

The transitional societies in South Asia are experiencing instabilities and violence of different sorts. Personality cults, bureaucratic dominance and rent-seeking character of social forces feature the functioning of the political process. Good governance remains the avowed goal, yet undemocratic governance, State repression and lack of accountability rule. Security issues and sources of conflicts in most of the developing countries with colonial backgrounds may be said to have three broad roots: legacies of the colonial era; lack of adequate conflict resolution mechanisms; and issues related to the nation-building process, especially identity assertion and strengthening national security. Bangladesh is not an exception.

Human security means improving human standards of living by actively eliminating the underlying threats. This extends beyond the passive protection of individuals from war, persecution, disease, famine and poverty. Then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's

statement at the General Assembly in 2000 that ‘individual sovereignty takes precedence over State sovereignty’ and that all human beings have the right to ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’ sends a warning that national sovereignty must not be used as a shield for the violation of individual rights. To bring to reality the government policies in the forestry sector, many projects and initiatives funded mainly by the ADB and the WB and bilateral agencies have been designed before any survey and research, and the projects are implemented accordingly. While the instruments and processes such as environment policies, National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP), which led to the UNDP-funded Sustainable Environment Management Plan (SEMP) and Forestry Master Plan set policy guidelines, the projects design actual activities. External influence, especially that of the ADB and the WB is acute in formulating policies and designing projects. The government agencies involved in the forestry sector initiatives are the MoEF; the Forest Department; local government division; local government organizations; Ministry of Agriculture; Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation; Forest Research Institute; Bangladesh Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; Planning Commission; Ministry of Commerce; Science and Technology Division, etc. To understand what has happened to the forests and the forest-dependent communities in recent times, one needs to look into the plantation projects, use and abuse of ideas, and important actors, both local and international.

The ADB’s loan programmes and conditions in the forestry sector are guided by its policy on forestry. Bangladesh, a stakeholder of the ADB, has obligations to the ADB’s Policy on Forestry. It is no wonder the government is opting for the so-called ‘social forestry’ on public forest land that causes further degradation of the forest and complicates the land rights issues of the forest-dwelling communities. The government is under tremendous pressure to submit to the conditions set by the ADB and the WB. Their common agenda is to set new rules and mechanisms for the forestry subsector in Bangladesh. Critics say the kinds of exotic species that have been planted with their soft loans are good for serving their purpose.

The investment strategy of the ADB raises concerns. Although there is no proper mechanism to present accurate information on the success or failure of plantations, quick disappearance of natural forests and replacement of the natural forests with plantations lead us to believe that plantations have caused enormous damage to forests and the ecology that it sustains. Loans from these two banks have produced numerous plans and policies and tons of documents but they have not been helpful for the forests, which is evident in the warning of the Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation that we have only fragments of natural forest left. There are people in the Forest Department who believe that what has happened in the forestry subsector with foreign funds is fundamentally flawed. But the government is made to submit to the conditions that come with the soft loans of the ADB and the WB.

The plantations have contributed to severe human rights abuses and social unrest in the areas of the plantation projects. Everybody would appreciate real afforestation efforts on degraded and encroached forest lands, but the rubber and 'woodlot' plantation projects implemented so far are not what the people wanted. They have gone through a cycle of plantations and have suffered the social and ecological consequences of such plantations.

To ensure security in its real sense, Bangladesh must be able to build a stable, prosperous, and resilient political and economic system and implement development projects designed considering the local realities.



## CHAPTER 6

### *Conclusion*

As a result of the low level of human and technological development, the overwhelming majority of the huge potential manpower remains a burden rather than a contributing factor to the development process. The failure of the country to develop human resources accounts significantly for Bangladesh's continued underdevelopment. Moreover, penetration of the IFIs into the decision-making of the developing countries and their success in manoeuvring the local elite to serve their commercial interests has eroded the ability of national governments to exercise power to fulfil the aspiration for development on their own terms.

The forests of Bangladesh have for centuries been the traditional lands of the Adivasi communities living here, but it appears now that the politically constructed modern state of Bangladesh has lost its will to support and nurture the material aspirations of its Adivasi communities. It is time for the majority of the people and the policy makers alike to rethink the concepts of development and security, to find ways to ensure living conditions for its citizens from man-made disasters and ruthless exploitation of nature. Enlightened and innovative intervention is what we need immediately to stop implementation of such disastrous development projects in Bangladesh. It is time to look behind the mask of altruism of the influential international donor agencies and seriously investigate the entire development and conservation system. Given the indisputably devastating impacts on the Adivasi people and the natural environment all over, it may be misleading and outright dangerous to further promote these projects as harmless tools for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Bangladesh is blessed with a rich cultural heritage. The vibrancy of Bengali culture is felt everywhere in the country. But the

cultural heritage of Bangladesh has been enriched by the languages, traditions, literature and arts and crafts of various indigenous communities whose mother tongues are not Bengali. Yet what we normally see in the more visible aspects of our mainstream cultural practices is scarcely reflective of this pluri-cultural heritage. This has severe consequences in their social, political, economic, and cultural lives. They have become defenceless, excluded, and are compelled to assimilate in many instances. Language, knowledge, thought, belief, tradition, technology, behaviour, morality, rights, festivals, all these are parts of the cultural life of a human community. We can recall with justified pride that the people of this country have set a unique example in the world by successfully protecting their language and culture from foreign aggression. One would expect that no people would better understand the pains of cultural aggression than us. It is, therefore, to be hoped that enlightened leaders from the mainstream Bengali community will show their magnanimity by supporting the Adivasi people in their struggle for cultural rights.

Today most of the natural forests—except for mangroves—have disappeared and the last stands are quickly diminishing with their gene pools. It is insane that multilateral, supranational and bilateral institutions; agencies and companies engaged by them; State agencies and local agents dependent on them identify the poverty and the practices of the Adivasi communities as the main threats to the forest. It is actually these institutions and agencies that are the main threats. But they have developed legal, political, and financial systems and pressure to remain immune to justice.

In recent times, because of constant monitoring of atrocities in the Modhupur forests by human rights groups and journalists, the government and the ADB cancelled plans for further expansion of rubber and woodlot monoculture that obviously causes damage to the forest and erodes the customary rights of the Adivasi communities. But there has not been any significant change in policies that cause immense threat to the resource bases, which is so important for protection of livelihood. Changed perception, and, accordingly, sincere efforts from proper realization can ensure lasting peace, harmony, and real development in our country.

It is hoped that this paper will refresh many minds about the marginalized situation of the Adivasi communities that in the long run can become a threat to the existence of the nation state. It is, of course, a big challenge for both the government and the Bengali community of Bangladesh because the official protectors of the natural forests in Bangladesh have become so deeply accustomed to a loan culture imposed by the developed world and the donor agencies that initiatives taken so far might not have any significant impact. The common people and the politicians right now do not care for a sal, a Garo or a Khasi, but in future they will.



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