



FILE PHOTO: OUR GOLDEN HOUR

A child writes in her mother tongue at a school in Bandarban. The school, run by a non-profit voluntary organisation, is trying to teach indigenous children their alphabets to keep their languages alive.

Keeping their language alive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On September 21, 2016, at the regional grand finale of Telenor Youth Forum in Dhaka, Myat Moe Khaing – originally from Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and currently studying at IBA, Dhaka University – pitched an idea titled “Project Ree Fu Zang”. The idea deals with the problem of children in CHT not being able to learn in their mother languages.

Ree Fu Zang is a mythical dragon in the folklore of the CHT. Myat Moe was telling stories of this creature to her little niece – how it rose from beneath a lake to save the world – and she yearned to hear more. Unfortunately, Myat Moe could not, and

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the fear of not being able to read out stories or write in her own alphabets left her at a loss for words, literally.

Our brain decodes and comprehends texts as we read along. Children living in CHT can understand Bangla text while reading, but fail to fully interpret its meaning. Over time the alphabets cease to exist, and many languages die. There have even been cases of early dropouts in schools – and now dark clouds of illiteracy loom over their heads. “Project Ree Fu Zang” was born out of an intense desire to address this issue.

The concept of “Project Ree Fu

Zang” is to use stories to sustain fading languages. Through this idea, stories that have been passed down generations will be collected, recorded and shared by students themselves. The stories, in their own languages, will provide a sense of belonging.

These age-old stories and their shared values will revive the beautiful relationship between children and their elders.

Moreover, it will present an opportunity for children to acknowledge and accept other stories from different communities and cultures. Such an



Myat Moe Khaing

attribute is vital, Myat Moe believes, for a world that harbours no prejudice and wants to create global citizens.

Using the stories her family and she had heard from their elders, Myat Moe intends to contribute to the shaping of a just world for

the ethnic communities and give them the confidence to believe in their individualities. She wants to implement this idea in future and would wholeheartedly welcome any assistance.

A more detailed feature on “Project Ree Fu Zang” will come out in the November 24, 2016 issue of SHOUT.