

'40pc forests dwindles in three decades'

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE from Srimangal

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia A Butenis has said conservation of biodiversity has become a great challenge for the country as 30 to 40 percent of its forests had dwindled due to unabated deforestation during the last three decades.

Addressing a gathering at Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI) in Srimangal yesterday she said destruction of biodiversity had also threatened the environment and ecology of the country.

However, some recent steps taken up by the government in association with the USAID and other bodies would help bring a big change in the country's forest resources in near future, she hoped.

The ambassador said a joint and collaborative approach can ensure the recovery of declining natural resources in the country.

In this context, she praised the self-regulated fishing on the wetlands at Hail haor in Srimangal where the Management of Aquatic ecosystem through Community Husbandry (MACH) project has already been working satisfactorily.

Patricia also praised the developments achieved at Lawachhera National Park where the Nishorgo project has achieved a lot with the active participation of the local stakeholders who had been entrusted with the job of guarding the forest.

The ambassador also visited some stalls set up to display the works and achievements of the MACH and Nishorgo projects being implemented by different government agencies with the assistance of the USAID.

State Minister for Environment and Forests Jafrul Islam Chowdhury was present as chief guest at the gathering which was also addressed by Uday R Sharma, vice-chairman of South Asia for World Commission for Protected Area (WCPA), Deputy Secretary of fisheries ministry Fokhrul Islam, Moulvibazar Deputy Commissioner Yunusur Rahman and Chief Conservator of Forests Osman Gani.

Earlier, a roundtable was held at BTRI auditorium to mark the second day of the weeklong programme styled 'Co-management Week'.

World Bank Country Director Christine Walich, ADB Country Representative Hua Du, government officials and NGO representatives from home and abroad including India, Nepal and Sri Lanka took part in the roundtable.

The speakers highlighted the impact of degradation of forests and wetlands which provide a lifeline to 80 percent people who live on a poor income in rural areas.

They also discussed efforts to improve the management of forest resources and the lessons learnt from

two pilot projects to bring local stakeholders together with the government in a collaborative management process.

The projects are Management of Aquatic ecosystem through Community Husbandry (MACH) supervised by fisheries and livestock department and Nishorgo Support Project supervised by the forest department.

The events of the week included field trips to the project areas including Lawachhera National Park and Hail haor and a roundtable.

On this occasion, about 300 stakeholders involved directly on the management of pilot projects around the country came together to share their experiences.

The pilot projects have community elements.

The Nishorgo project is aimed to protect the country's forest and biodiversity for future generation while the MACH project focuses on conservation and rehabilitation of degraded or lost aquatic habitats.

The organisers said by holding stake holders' convention, seminars and roundtable they wanted to create awareness about conservation of resources, collective responsibilities of the stakeholders, providing motivation to those unsung heroes who are already working locally for protecting the environment and finally to engage policy makers in co-management to address the problems of forest and fisheries sectors.



US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia A Butenis speaks at a gathering in connection with 'Co-management Week' at Bangladesh Tea Research Institute in Srimangal yesterday.

Crossfire

FROM PAGE 16 case in Nalchhity Police Station under Jhalakathi district and several cases in Barisal Kotwali Police Station.

On Sunday night, Rab went to recover arms at Rupatali Battala Gurgobari Pole area of Barisal city following Panir's statement, Rab said, adding that Panir tried to flee away after his associates engaged in a gunfight with the Rab team.

When local people recovered Panir's brush-fired body in the presence of Rab from a water-filled ditch in the area on Monday morning, there were injury marks on different parts of the body and a hand was broken.

A revolver, a pipe-gun, and nine live and used bullets were found on the spot, sources said.

Kotwali police sent the body to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Locals said they did not witness any incident of crossfire.

Officer-in-Charge of Barisal Kotwali Police Station Zillur Rahman also failed to substantiate the Rab allegations against the victim.

Journalists were not allowed to visit Panir in Rab camp during the press briefing before his death on Sunday night and Rab personnel were seen busy in medical treatment of an unknown prisoner at that camp.

Panir was tortured to death in Barisal Rab camp and to cover the marks on the body, it was brush-fired and thrown into a ditch, the victim's family said.

Panir had extramarital affairs with Anima, wife of Rafiqul Islam, sources said.

The victim's brother Manirul Islam said Panir was never accused in any criminal case and he would go to court for justice for the killing of his brother.

A cadre of outlawed Biplobi Communist Party (BCP) was killed in 'crossfire' with Rab at village Bangshitala in Sadar upazila in the district early yesterday, our Kushtia correspondent reports.

The dead was identified as Mahidul Islam alias Milon, 36, of Dhahnagar in Kumarkhali upazila in the district.

After Milon's arrest at Bangshitala on Saturday night, he was brought to Kushtia Rab office and interrogated, Rab said, adding that Milon gave information about his accomplices and hidden firearms.

When a Rab team took Milon to Bangshitala village to nab his accomplices and seize his hidden firearms at about 4:30am yesterday, the BCP operatives opened fire on the Rab men who retaliated.

During the gunfight that followed, Milon tried to escape and died in crossfire, police said, adding that Milon was accused in seven cases including four for murder.

Police seized a shutter gun and 10 bullets from the scene.

Joint efforts of all needed to achieve MDGs

Speakers at a roundtable emphasised joint efforts by the public representatives and political leaders alongside the government for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the country.

The roundtable titled "The Role of the Elected Public Representatives and the Political Leaders of Bangladesh in Achieving MDGs" was held at Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) conference hall.

People's Empowerment Trust (PET) and Campaign for Popular Education organised the roundtable in cooperation with People's Forum on MDGs-PFM Bangladesh.

When using public money, the political leaders should weigh up the long-term benefits and costs and the possible repercussions of the reallocation of resources, speakers said.

They urged the political leaders to ensure people's preference while selecting any development project and maintain transparency during its implementation.

The participants called upon the political leaders to think of updating the minimum wages to achieve the target of poverty reduction.

The discussions at the roundtable also put forward several suggestions for achieving the MGDs through involving the public representatives and political leaders.

The suggestions included mobilising as much internal resources as possible and carrying out an in-depth analysis about the sustainability of a project; making education a rewarding option; prioritising education, healthcare and physical infrastructure and creating employment opportunities.

Former commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury MP was the chief guest at the roundtable where Abdul Wadood Bhuiyan MP, also the chairman of CFT Development Board, Noori Ara Saha MP, Rozi Kabir MP, former minister and Chittagong city Awami League President MA Mannan were the special guests.

Professor Mohammad A Hossain of Economics Department of

Chittagong University presented the keynote paper.

CPB Presidium Member and Chittagong District unit General Secretary Md Shah Alam, former president of Chittagong Union of Journalists and Chittagong Press Club Muhammad Idris, Chittagong City Corporation Ward Commissioners Advocate MA Naser and Sabiha Musa, Musa, Professor Dr Hasan Mahmud and Professor Hossain Kabir of Chittagong University took part in the open discussion among others.

Campaign for Empowerment Trust Director Rasheda K Chowdhury chaired the roundtable while Mushfiqur Rahman, assistant director of PET and honorary staff member of All party Parliamentary Group on PRSP, MDGS, WTO and BDF conducted it.

Police seized a large number of fake SSC, HSC and degree certificates from a computer centre in Jessore on Sunday night and arrested three people in this connection.

Police source said, ASP (KA) Zillur Rahman along with his team raided Dipon Computer Centre at New Satellite Town, Jessore at about 9:30pm on Sunday night.

The police arrested owner of the computer centre Nitu, Madrasa teacher Abdus Salam and Mizanur Rahman.

During the raid, police also seized large number of fake certificates of Madrasa Board, Dhaka Board, National University (Honours and Masters) provisional certificates, certificates and marks sheets of SSC and HSC of Jessore Education Board and testimonials of Jessore Polytechnic Institute.

They also found specimen copies of Doctorate Degree of Dhaka University and other education institutions preserved in hard disks of the computers.

Police said, during the raid Nitu offered the police team to pay a sum of Tk 2 lakh as bribe but the police refused to take the amount.

The police seized a PC, a monitor, scanner machine, 6 printers and other equipments as 'evidence'.

The police seized huge quantities of fake certificates from Dipon Computer Centre on April last year, the police added.



Intekhab Mahmud, centre, chief commercial officer of CityCell, speaks at a press conference in the city yesterday. On his left is Taslim Ahmed, assistant vice president of CityCell, and on his right is Faridur Reza Sagor, managing director of Channel i.

President recuperates further

AGENCIES, Dhaka

Condition of President Iajuddin Ahmed, who underwent bypass surgery at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore on Friday, has improved further.

President's Press Secretary Mokhesur Rahman Chowdhury said yesterday the physicians removed two of the three life support machines.

"President feels comfort after removal of the machines supporting balloon pump and dialysis," he said, adding: "It will be possible to remove the respiratory machine within the next two days."

The press secretary said infection in the lungs of the president has been cured, but even then antibiotic has been given to him so that the lungs do not get infected again.

"It will be early to say that the president is out of danger until he is being shifted to cabin," the press secretary quoting the doctors said. However, the doctors are satisfied with the rapid improvement of his condition, he said.

Dr Maurice Choo and Dr Ming Chuan Tong are constantly monitoring the president's condition.

JUDGES' KILLING CASE Govt will take step for speedy execution of verdict: Moudud

UNB, Dhaka

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said steps would be taken for speedy execution of Monday's court verdict awarding death penalty to seven top JMB leaders in Jhalakati judges' killing case.

"The judgement has reflected the aspiration of the people," he told reporters at a regular press briefing on the activities of his ministry yesterday.

In reply to a question, he said, "It is also the success of the prosecution."

Huge fake certificates seized in Jessore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Police seized a large number of fake SSC, HSC and degree certificates from a computer centre in Jessore on Sunday night and arrested three people in this connection.

Police source said, ASP (KA) Zillur Rahman along with his team raided Dipon Computer Centre at New Satellite Town, Jessore at about 9:30pm on Sunday night.

The police arrested owner of the computer centre Nitu, Madrasa teacher Abdus Salam and Mizanur Rahman.

During the raid, police also seized large number of fake certificates of Madrasa Board, Dhaka Board, National University (Honours and Masters) provisional certificates, certificates and marks sheets of SSC and HSC of Jessore Education Board and testimonials of Jessore Polytechnic Institute.

They also found specimen copies of Doctorate Degree of Dhaka University and other education institutions preserved in hard disks of the computers.

Police said, during the raid Nitu offered the police team to pay a sum of Tk 2 lakh as bribe but the police refused to take the amount.

The police seized a PC, a monitor, scanner machine, 6 printers and other equipments as 'evidence'.

The police seized huge quantities of fake certificates from Dipon Computer Centre on April last year, the police added.

MoU signed between DAB, Virginia University

Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB) and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, USA (VPISU) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) yesterday for greater collaboration in conducting research on preventive measures and economic aspects on Obesity and Diabetes, says a press release.

Secretary General of DAB Prof A K Azad Khan and Prof Kevin J Joyel of Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics of VPISU, USA signed the MOU at the conference room of the Association in the city.

Joint Secretary of DAB Md Sayef Uddin, Members of DAB National Council Prof Jajera Mahtab, Prof M K Sultanul Aziz and Sonia Aziz of VPISU were also present on the occasion.



Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists sets fire to the effigy of ruling party MP Shahid, who allegedly launched attack on journalists in Kushtia, in front of the National Press Club in the city yesterday protesting attack on the journalists.

AL wants to disrupt electoral process: Bhuiyan

BSS, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the opposition Awami League does not want to sit for dialogue rather it wants to disrupt electoral process by wasting time.

He said this while taking part in a discussion as the chief guest organised by the ruling BNP and its front organisations marking the 25th death anniversary of President Ziaur Rahman at Mohanagar Natya Manch in the city yesterday.

BNP Chairperson and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was present at the discussion arranged as part of the 10-day programme chalked out earlier in observance of the death anniversary of President Zia.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, Law Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Forest and Environment Minister Tariqul Islam, Agriculture Minister MK Anwar, Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, Mayor of Dhaka Sadek Hossain Khoka, Vice-chancellor of National University Prof Dr Wakil Ahmed, General Secretary of Jatiya Press Club Shawkat Mahmud, President of Buddha Federation Dr Sukamal Barua, Jubo Dal President

Barkat Ullah Bulu, Sramik Dal President Abul Kashem Chowdhury and JASAS General Secretary Babul Ahmed, among others, took part in the discussion.

The BNP secretary general criticised the Awami League's threat of resisting the next general elections and asked is it the language of democratic politics?

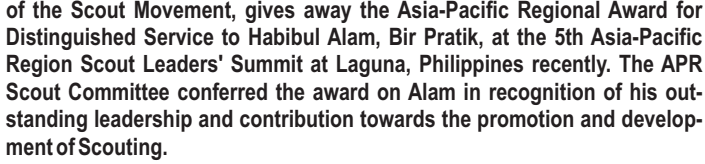
"Awami League wants to take lease of Bangladesh when the BNP gets two-thirds majority in the Jatiya Sangsad," he said.

Bhuiyan reiterated his call to opposition Awami League to extend all out cooperation to the government for holding a free, fair and impartial election for giving democracy an institutional shape.

He said the party, which would get support from the people of the country in the next general elections scheduled to be held under a neutral caretaker government, would form the government.

If there is sincerity and willingness you may serve the nation staying in the opposition, he said.

Referring to the 14-party demands on electoral reforms, Bhuiyan said the Awami League is reluctant to respond to our call to sit for dialogue for bringing reforms to some issues accepted by all.



Eric Khoo Heng-Peng, chairman of Asia-Pacific Region, World Organisation of the Scout Movement, gives away the Asia-Pacific Regional Award for Distinguished Service to Habubul Alam, Bir Pratik, at the 5th Asia-Pacific Region Scout Leaders' Summit at Laguna, Philippines recently. The APR Scout Committee conferred the award on Alam in recognition of his outstanding leadership and contribution towards the promotion and development of Scouting.

Govt cautioned over low gas price

FROM PAGE 16

University said any proposal of foreign investment should be strongly prevented if it does not protect the interest of the country, and the investment proposal of Tata would not bring any good for the economy and the people.

The government would have to face penalty if it failed to provide Tata with uninterrupted gas supply, he said. "When local industries are not getting uninterrupted gas supply, how the government could give it to Tata. Bangladesh is not in a position to do so considering its energy reserve."

Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal, former chairman of Power Development Board, said the investment proposal of Tata has created a panic among the people. Tata's proposal should be outrightly rejected, as it is a threat to Bangladesh economy as well as to its energy security, he added.

In his keynote presentation, Dr Hossain Monsur, who is also a former chairman of Petrobangla, said there is no qualitative change in the revised proposal of Tata.

Tata in its revised proposal presented the issues of gas price and uninterrupted supply 'very cunningly', which had been more direct in its previous proposal, he said.

Professor Badrul Imam of Dhaka

Attack on journals

condemned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of different socio-political organisations and professional groups yesterday condemned the attack on journalists in Kushtia allegedly by the ruling party cadres.

Some BNP cadres loyal to MP Shahidul equipped with arms and hockey sticks swooped on the journalists on Kushtia Public Library premises at about 11:50am yesterday in presence of police leaving BFUJ President Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and other 50 newsmen seriously injured.

In a joint statement National Press Club President Reazuddin Ahmed and General Secretary Shaukat Mahmud expressed resentment for the attack on journalists at Kushtia and demanded exemplary punishment of the miscreants involved in this connection.

In another statement, President and Secretary of Bangladesh Awami Jubo League said MP Shahidul and his men has turned Kushtia a free-land of hooliganism, corruption and looting. They demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of Shahidul and his men for the attack on journalists.

President of Bangladesh Sangbadpatra Trust Prof Deen Mohammad Bhuiyan in a statement said such attack aims to destroy the newspaper industry.

Leaders of Sangbadik-Sramik-Karmachari Oikya Parishad said this is an assault on our constitutional right for freedom of expression.

Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon and General Secretary Bimol Biswas also expressed condemnation for the heinous attack on the journalists in Kushtia.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Huq Inu and General Secretary Syed Jafar Sazzad in a statement said this is not only an attack on the newsmen and newspapers but a well planned aggression on the democratic spirit of people. They also called upon all to be united against such oppression on journalists.

Besides, Chittagong Samity-Dhaka, National Front of Teachers and Employees, a platform of eleven organisations of teachers and staffs, and Advocate M Amir Ul Islam of The Law Associates condemned the brutal attack on journalists in Kushtia.

Tata proposed the gas price in British Thermal Unit (BTU). In the revised proposal it proposed \$1.47 per BTU of gas, which is even three cent lower than the previously proposed rate of \$ 1.5 per unit, Monsur explained.

Professor MM Akash of Dhaka University said Tata's proposal is not acceptable because it is not economically profitable for Bangladesh.

The subsidy the government would have to give to Tata is much higher than what would be the company's contribution. So, it is not economically profitable for Bangladesh, he argued adding that the country's energy security is also a very important issue that has to be taken into consideration.

Citing the example of Tata's investment proposal to the West Bengal government in India, Professor Samsul Alam of Chittagong University said the government there did not accept the proposal because Tata's proposal required a good amount of agricultural land.

Rafidul Islam urged the government to maintain transparency in the negotiation process so that the people can get a clear picture.