

Nasa eyes in the sky to help global conservation

REUTERS, Bangkok

Space agency Nasa, which first put man on the moon, will now help to map the Earth in the name of conservation, the agency announced yesterday.

Nasa and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) signed an agreement to use the space agency's satellite system to monitor global environmental change in the hope of preserving the planet.

"The mission of Nasa is to understand and protect our home planet Earth and also to use its space-based observation to serve humanity," Dr. Ghassem Asrar, Nasa's deputy associate administrator for science, told reporters in the Thai capital.

"What better way to serve humanity than to help understand how our home is changing and what the consequences of that change are for us and for our children," he said.

The IUCN, which is the world's largest environmental umbrella group, said the remote-sensing technology would revolutionise the conservation struggle.

"The potential for the beneficial use of this information in the area of the environment and conservation is enormous," said Achim Steiner, IUCN's director-general.

"Yet until now, it has remained largely untapped, particularly in the developing world," he said.

Asrar said Nasa's 30 research satellites in orbit would be focused on monitoring natural and man-made changes around the world and assessing their impact.

The satellites, worth an estimated \$14 billion, promise to chart a new frontier in conservation by discovering unknown species of plants and animals, and pinpointing their habitats.

"There are about 30 million species on the planet. We have only managed to identify two million of them and out of that we know the habitats of just one out of every ten," said Asrar.

"Nasa can help close some of these gaps. We can now examine every habitat for every species around the world based on this satellite observation and do it seamlessly on a daily basis," he told Reuters.

Nasa said it is keen to share its space technology with communities around the world, a notion that would have been unthinkable just 30 years ago during the height of the Cold War.

"One of the benefits of these 21st Century technologies is that they have brought us all together," said Asrar.

"We no longer view ourselves as citizens of countries alone, we see ourselves as citizens of the globe," he said.

Opposition announces 9-point

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the common nine-point and the next course of joint agitation programme through a series of discussions after the August 21 grenade attacks on an AL public meeting on Bangabandhu Avenue.

Yesterday's declaration came as a sign of success of the opposition parties' efforts towards forging a common ground for movement and giving it a concrete shape.

Two components of the 11-Party Alliance -- Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Khalequzzaman) and Krishak Samik Samajbadi Dal -- however kept aloof from the combined anti-government movement.

Declaring the programmes at separate press conferences in Dhaka yesterday, top leaders of the opposition parties urged people to unite on the nine-point demand and topple the government through a mass uprising to establish rule of law.

The first-ever across the country human chain, about 1,000 kilometres long, will touch 57 points in 17 districts and capital Dhaka, they said.

On September 22 this year, the opposition parties formed a 50-kilometre human chain from Gazipur to Narayanganj. Earlier, the AL on March 30 formed a 22-kilometre human chain in the capital, from Pallabi to English Road.

The idea of human chain has widely been appreciated by the business community and commoners as an alternative to hartal and strikes.

The opposition parties through the December 11 human chain are determined to prove that people have no trust in the present government. They worked out the programme as the beginning of a vigorous movement to oust the government.

Key leaders of the parties concerned met tomorrow at the JSD office to finalise their strategy to make the programme a success and ensure maximum participation of common people along with their leaders and activists.

The central leaders of the parties will make preparatory visits in groups in the 17 districts to mobilise people to join the human chain, opposition camp sources said.

"This is a united move of all secular and democratic forces to free the countrymen from the clutches of BNP-Jamaat alliance government," said AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil declaring the programme at a press conference.

He said the opposition parties will announce tougher programmes after December 11 to oust the government through a mass uprising.

"We have tolerated enough. We don't want rajas (collaborators of 1971) to be more powerful in this country," said Mujahidul Islam Selim, secretary general of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), a component of the 11-Party.

"We don't want to see them in the administration anymore," he said.

JSD President Hasanul Haque Inu said the coalition is about to establish a one-party 'autocratic and permanent' government by destroying all the democratic, progressive and non-communal political parties and the pro-liberation culture and history.

The opposition leaders warned of tougher programmes if the government tries to foil the programme by launching crackdown on opposition leaders and activists.

NINE-POINT DEMAND
The combined opposition's key demand is the ouster of the coalition government and holding of a free and fair election under a non-party and neutral caretaker government after making reforms in the electoral

system.

Another major demand is the ouster of war criminals from the cabinet and administration to save the country from the religious militant groups, imposing ban on fundamentalist politics and trial of war criminals.

The opposition demands proper inquiry into the August 21 grenade attack, bomb blasts at rallies of CPB, Udichi, Chhayanaut and other places, arrest and punishment of the criminals involved in the Chittagong and Bogra arms hauls.

They also demand that the government identify the criminals and their godfathers and try them. They want expulsion of the criminals from political parties.

The opposition demands an independent anti-corruption commission to root out corruption and forfeiting resources of the corrupt people, and ensuring optimum utilisation of national resources including oil and gas.

They want the government to check the price spiral of essentials and keep the prices within the purchasing capacity of common people, reopen mills and factories and reduce prices of agricultural inputs.

The opposition also demands implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts peace treaty.

THE ROUTE OF HUMAN CHAIN
Starting from Teknaf, the planned route of the human chain is Ukhia-Ramu-Cox's Bazar-Chakoria-Lohagara-Satkania-Chandanaish-Patia-Chittagong City-Sitakunda-Mirsharhat-Feni-Chouddagram-Comilla-Burichang-Chandina-Daudkandi-Gazaria-Sonargaon-Araihazar-Rupganj-Siddhirganj towards Dhaka City.

It will touch Demra, Sutrapur, Sabujbagh, Khilgaon, Ramna, Badda, Gulshan, Airport and Uttara in the capital.

From Uttara, the human chain will run through Tongi-Joydepur-Kaliakoir-Mirzapur-Shakhipur-Kalihat-Sirajganj-Dhunan-Bogra-Gobindaganj-Palashbari-Pirganj-Mithapukur-Rangpur-Taraganj-Saidpur-Dinajpur-Dashmail-Khanhama-Birganj-Thakurgaon-Boda-Panchagarh towards Tentulia.

ALPRESS CONFERENCE
AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at the press conference criticised the government for law and order breakdown, corruption, politicisation in the administration and judiciary, skyrocketing prices of essentials and rise of religious militant groups.

"We have agreed to launch joint anti-government movement and time will say whether we will participate in the next election jointly or not," said Jalil.

"The government has turned the parliament into a party platform where the opposition members are not allowed to speak for people," he said.

Referring to the rigging in the by-election of Dhaka-10 constituency, Jalil said, "It proved that free and fair election is not possible unless reforms are brought in the electoral system and the formation of caretaker government."

Jalil however did not elaborate his party proposals regarding reforms of the caretaker government system. "We will place elaborate proposals later," he said.

Senior party leaders were present at the press conference at the party's Dhanmondi office.

11-PARTY
The leaders of the 11-Party alliance at a press conference urged all to make the human chain a success to gear up the oust-government movement.

They said people want the

3-year rolling

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room with Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman in the chair. State Minister for Finance and Planning Anwarul Kabir Talukder and senior officials from different ministries were present.

"The midterm plan will have a long-term vision, and our vision at this moment is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by the year 2015," Saifur told reporters after the meeting.

He further informed that the 3-year plan would be under the 15-year perspective plan besides being inclined to the PRSP.

"This will facilitate ministries in working out advance planning for their development programmes as an indication of budgetary allocation for three years will be given earlier," he said, explaining the advantage of the new programme.

Now, ministries know how much they will get next year for development programmes.

Saifur said the government will have to make three-year revenue projection to support the programme.

Meeting sources said the rolling investment programme would be in addition to the Annual Development Programme (ADP). The meeting recommended incorporating important and priority projects in the rolling programme and identified 429 of those.

Few of the projects have already been adopted in the ADPs of 2003-04 and 2004-05.

There are 726 investment projects out of 869 that got ADP allocation for 2004-05 under the ongoing development programme.

Hunger strike on cards

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what to do about them."

The government spends about Tk 10 crore a year for the stranded Pakistanis that includes some Tk 4 crore for their electricity and water supply bills. It pays nearly Tk 2 crore to Power Development Board and Dhaka Electric Supply Authority annually, sources said.

But the camp-dwellers said with the monthly rations they used to meet various camp expenses including maintenance of drainage system, salaries of imams and muazzins of mosques, medication and even burial. With the suspension of the rations all these activities have come to a halt leading to a serious decline in the standard of living in these camps, they added.

"Once I had my own land and home in this country. But now I am forced to live on government rations and that too has stopped," said Mohammad Mostafa, 65, of Chamragudam Camp, one of the 20 camps in Syedpur where 60,000 Pakistanis live.

According to camp sources, after suspension of monthly rations, illegal activities have also soared in the camps. Many dwellers are running businesses in the camps using illegal power connections. Some camps have even become dens of criminals and drug-peddlers.

The Urdu-speaking stranded Pakistanis were lodged in these camps as they sided with West Pakistan during the Liberation War. Some of them even took arms against the Bangladeshis.

Though Dhaka has repeatedly asked Islamabad to take them back, the latter has skirted the issue. International Red Cross took an initiative to repatriate the

Pakistanis after the Liberation War. At that time 540,000 of them wanted to go back to Pakistan, though only about 127,000 actually could. Later, in 1993, Pakistan accepted another 325 refugees.

The new generation of the stranded Pakistanis, however, does not want to return to Pakistan. About 10 of them born and brought up in Bangladesh received voting rights last year after the High Court declared them Bangladeshi citizens.

Cops look

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Asked about the counterfeit money, she only said her husband knows it, investigation officer (IO) of the case Sub-inspector Rezaul Karim said.

Earlier, Khairunnesa told the media Wahed was in Tangail.

On local and foreign currencies, she claimed they kept the money for jakat, sources said.

Police have asked her to give the numbers of their bank accounts. They will produce her before court today on expiry of her remand.

The couple has been living in Bangladesh since 1978 and Wahed got Bangladesh citizenship.

Tipped off, a team of Rab-2 arrested the Pakistani woman and recovered about Tk 2 lakh in counterfeit local currency and Indian, Pakistani, Thai and local currencies worth Tk 8.9 lakh from the couple's seventh-floor apartment in Karnaphuli Garden City in Ramna.

They also arrested eight girls including a daughter of a ruling coalition lawmaker and a security guard.

The Rab later released four girls including the lawmaker's daughter.

Postal operator

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that the fax message was sent from the E-Post Section of the GPO.

"Interrogating some officials and employees of the E-Post Section it was learnt that Mahubb sent a message to the US Embassy on November 9," read the first information report filed by CID Inspector Nazir Hossain Dewan on November 10.

Mahubb, son of Shawkat Ali Bhuiyan of Paradaia, Belabo, Narabingdi, lives at South Banasree in the city's Khilgaon area.

After his arrest on Wednesday, CID Inspector Nurul Absar Bhuiyan, investigation officer (IO) of the case, produced Mahubb before the CMM court, Dhaka, yesterday with a prayer for a seven-day remand.

The IO argued the postal operator 'needed to be interrogated to know his intention and the identities of others involved in sending the message'. The court granted a five-day remand.

Cox's Bazar

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arrested 45 of them for having no passports. They were released on bail the next day after airport police took them to a court.

"We've asked Cox's Bazar police to inform us about their names, addresses and other identities so we can find out the truth," said the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

A sub-inspector of airport police was sent to Cox's Bazar to find out whether four girls among the 53 people were being trafficked.

Hosne Ara was going to her parents in Saudi Arabia, the IO said, adding that the others were also not being trafficked.

India to remove

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problems of trade with Bangladesh and suggest remedies so that he can take measures before his visit," Altaf told the news agency.

The Indian minister shared the view with Altaf on the bilateral trade potential, which could grow as high as \$5 billion within a short span of time from the current both-way trade volume worth \$2 billion if they could remove the roadblocks.

Altaf said the Indian minister also directed the officials to develop infrastructures like roads, customs and banking facilities, security and transportation of 13 land-ports through which bilateral trade takes place to make the ports more effective.

"The meeting with Indian commerce minister was very fruitful," Altaf said.

Minister

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Elephants from India, foraging for food, are trapped in Sherpur in Bangladesh and are now stranded on edges of the two neighbouring countries because of the loss of biological corridors, he told the roundtable on "Ecosystem Services in the Asia-Pacific Region -- Planning for the Future".

Talking to The Daily Star after the session, Chowdhury emphasised that South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, can tap the co-operation network of Saarc and Asean countries sharing knowledge and expertise.

He pointed to the water-sharing treaty between India and Bangladesh and said common forums can be in place for shared ecosystems such as the Sundarbans.

Chowdhury blamed the over-extraction of natural resources and mindless development programmes that do not take ecosystems into account for environmental degradation.

"Natural resources are being harnessed indiscriminately for livelihood and lack of proper planning in use led to an overall decline and degradation in the quality of services," the state minister said.

He said development activities directly and indirectly impact air, soil and water.

The ecosystems of the Asia-Pacific region are among the richest and most diverse in the world, the roundtable was told.

About 60 per cent of the world's population, which translates into about 3.5 billion people, depends on them for sustenance. The roundtable revealed that the number of dependants will grow to 5 billion by 2030.

Prospective structures of human civilisation, ranging from agriculture to industrial enterprises, rely on ecosystems and their interactions.

Their value has not been recognised in development planning, although it has been estimated at trillions of dollars a year, said Dr Ashok Khosla, lead presenter from India.

His presentation explored how individual efforts can be coordinated at the regional level to contribute to meeting global targets for conservation and environmental protection.

MOUNTAINS UNDER ATTACK
Mountains are under threat from climate change, resource exploitation, air pollution and invasive species.

Seventy-five per cent of all freshwater is stored in glacial ice, much of which is in mountain areas, crucial to providing water for drinking, irrigation, industry and many other purposes.

"To conserve this globally important function of mountains, they have to be protected and managed effectively," said Dr David Sheppard, head of IUCN's Programme on Protected Areas at the launch of the new "Guidelines for Planning and Managing Mountain Protected Areas".

The new IUCN publication, released at the third IUCN World Conservation Congress, provides specific recommendations for setting up and managing new protected areas in mountainous regions that occupy over 25 per cent of the earth.

They house an exceptional amount of species, including half of the world's 24 biodiversity hotspots and provide home to a 10th of global population.

UN launches international

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Nonetheless, the United Nations is counting on microcredit in 2005 to help galvanize implementation of the 2000 Millennium Goals, which aim to halve the proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty by 2015.

It also hoped that the mobilization behind microcredit will prod governments to step up financial and political support for private enterprise, said Marie Nowak, founder of the Association for the Right to Economic Initiative (ADIE), launched in France in 1988.

From Asia to Africa, "banks of hope," as they are known, find credit -- which they sometimes guarantee themselves -- for small farmers or service providers who have been deemed ineligible for assistance from traditional banking institutions.

"Microcredit is first of all financed by local savings," Novak explained. "The second source of financing is the transfer of funds from immigrants, which the UN

estimates globally to be worth 93 billion dollars. Then comes public development aid."

The Grameen Bank founded by Yunus in Bangladesh -- "grameen" means "farmer" or "rural" in Bengali -- sought to do away with a vicious circle -- low earnings, weak savings, inadequate investment -- by sheltering poor farmers from money lenders.

With microcredit, there would be more credit available, leading to more savings and more investment and ultimately higher earnings.

Grameen Bank today has 3.7 million borrowers, of whom 96 per cent are women and who control 90 per cent of the bank's capital, the rest being in the hands of the state.

The bank's example has been copied around the world, and not only in poor countries. In France, the ADIE association has granted 25,000 loans in 15 years, mainly to unemployed entrepreneurs.

The survival rate for such "micro-enterprises" is 54 per cent after three years, according to Nowak.

31 Iraqis killed

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know their nature."

US troops are sweeping through Mosul in an operation against insurgents in the mainly Sunni Muslim city.

On Wednesday, 14 people were killed, most of them women and children, and 26 wounded in a bomb explosion and clashes Wednesday in the town of Baiji, north of Baghdad, police said.

Nine Iraqis were also killed in clashes between rebels and US troops in Ramadi, which has been wracked by unrest since last week's US-led assault on nearby Fallujah.

Earlier in the week 36 insurgents died when a day-long battle broke out in the city of Baquba, the military said.

AP adds: American forces pursued their search-and-destroy mission against the remaining holdouts in the former insurgent bastion of Fallujah, and to the north, American forces pressed an offensive to reclaim part of the city of Mosul from militants.

November became one of Iraq's bloodiest months as the US death toll in the war in Iraq reached 1,214, according to figures released by the

Defense Department.

On Wednesday, a suicide attacker drove his bomb-laden car into a US convoy during fierce fighting in the town of Baiji, 155 miles north of the Baghdad, killing 10 people and wounding 12, including three American soldiers. Another attack on a convoy of civilian contractors in Baiji caused no casualties.

Elsewhere, a three-hour gunbattle between militants and US forces after nightfall left seven people dead and 13 hurt in Ramadi, a city west of Fallujah.

Evidence

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of the other Degree (Pass), Subsidary, LLB and BEd results.

Chowdhury presented detailed documents on the 281st and 287th Syndicate meetings that dealt with rescinding or correcting the results.

In 2000, the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) had filed a case on tampering with LLB certificates according to the 111 lawyers, including a recently appointed Additional Judge of the High Court Faisal Mahmood Fayez.

Shun violence

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Singh was on the second and final day of his first visit to volatile Kashmir since becoming prime minister in May.

On Wednesday, he visited the more violent northern region of Srinagar and unveiled a 5.3 billion dollar economic package to help rebuild the insurgency-torn state.

He continued the message of economic development in Jammu and announced the lifting of a freeze on recruitment in government jobs that led to loud cheers from the crowd. The ban had been imposed two years ago due to severe financial constraints the state was facing.

Earlier Singh chaired a meeting of the Unified Command -- a security body comprising army and civil officials -- and reviewed the security situation.

He was briefed that the level of infiltration of militants from Pakistan had gone down sharply, an officer who was present at the meetings said.

India accuses Pakistan of sending armed militants into Indian Kashmir, charges Islamabad denies.

Next week, Singh is due to meet his Pakistani counterpart Shaukat Aziz in the Indian capital to continue peace talks started by the previous Indian government.

Singh, however, reiterated in Kashmir that redrawing the border, including the Line of Control -- a de facto border dividing Indian and Pakistani Kashmir -- was unacceptable.

Singh's visit was punctuated by a fierce gunbattle Wednesday just a few hundred metres (yards) from the venue of his public rally in Srinagar.

Two militants were killed in the encounter while four Indian soldiers were wounded.

On his arrival in the mainly Hindu city of Jammu flak-jacketed soldiers stood on every corner toting assault rifles.

Throughout his trip Singh has proclaimed the mantra of a "new" Kashmir.

He said he had a "dream and a firm belief" that a new Kashmir could be built.

"The time has come to put forward a new blueprint, a fresh vision for Kashmir... free from the fear of war, want and exploitation," he said.

Singh's visit came as India staged a high-profile pullout of some troops from the state, its first since the revolt broke out in 1989, and the prime minister renewed his pledge to pursue the peace process with Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Kashmir's main separatist alliance Hurriyat was due to meet to discuss a renewal of peace talks with New Delhi and give its reaction to the prime minister's visit.

Moderate separatists held two sets of talks with the previous Hindu nationalist government in 2004 before its election loss.

The scenic Himalayan region, held in part by India and Pakistan but claimed in full by both, has sparked two of the three wars between the nuclear-armed rivals since independence from Britain in 1947.

LOPART OF PROBLEM
Musharraf expressed Pakistan's readiness to show flexibility if it was reciprocated by India.

a dinner meeting did not make any reference to Singh's visit to Srinagar but quoted Musharraf as saying that LoC was "a part of the problem and could never be the solution."

"Flexibility and sincerity cannot be one-sided, but must be displayed bilaterally and mutually if we are to move forward," Musharraf said at the dinner meeting, according to the Associated Press of Pakistan.

"There is a need for demonstration of flexibility by all sides, Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir."

The dinner meeting was attended among others by Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, who is paying a two-day visit to India next week, PoK President Muhammad Anwar Khan and PoK Prime Minister Sikandar Hayat Khan.

The General's comment was apparently in response to Singh's assertions that any redrawing of international borders was not acceptable to India.

Musharraf said that there was a need for demonstration of flexibility by all sides, meaning Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir.

He said flexibility and sincerity cannot be one sided but has to be displayed "bilaterally and mutually if we are to move forward and Pakistan is prepared to do so if there is reciprocity from the Indian side."

Musharraf said Pakistan would continue to pursue a solution acceptable to the Kashmiri people.

He also informed the Kashmiri leaders of his meetings with the Indian leadership, which he termed as "positive" and said he felt that they were interested in arriving at a solution of Jammu and Kashmir issue, which was the "root cause of strained relations between India and Pakistan."

Reiterating that no solution of Kashmir was possible without taking into account the views and aspirations of the people of Kashmir, Musharraf said his remarks outlining options to resolve Kashmir issue made at an Ifar dinner on October 25, was aimed at stirring a debate in the media.