

Scout Camp opens
UNB, Dhaka

The 4th National Srijani Scout Camp was inaugurated at National Scout Training Centre at Mouchak in Gazipur yesterday.
President of Bangladesh Scout Shah Mohammad Farid formally inaugurated the camp that actually began on Monday to celebrate 100 years of the scout movement.

Enact right to info law to ensure accountability

Speakers tell book launching ceremony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a book launching ceremony yesterday called on the government to push through the right to information act in order to ensure accountability and transparency in the administration.

If the freedom of information does not exist, accountability and

transparency become non-existent, thereby preventing the country from moving forward, said Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, chairman of Biswa Sahitya Kendra, as the chief guest.

Three books -- 'Landmark Judgements on Violence Against Women', 'Toththo Odhikar' and Training Manual on Rights and Governance -- were launched at the

ceremony organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation at a city hotel.

"Thieves and robbers want darkness to commit their misdeeds. Sometimes they even create the darkness, if necessary. Information and knowledge act as the light to remove the darkness and that is what the right to information act would achieve," said Prof Abdullah

Abu Sayeed.

"We can create a workable nation by 2020, but it won't happen by itself," he said, adding that what is required is a committed and alert civil society to continuously press the government to ensure accountability.

Maja Dhun Daruwala, director of Commonwealth Human Rights Initiatives (CHRI), was present as the special guest and spoke on Toththo Odhikar (right to information), a Bangla version of CHRI publication 'Open Sesame'.

She cited the Indian example of how the civil society, prominent individuals and the media itself pushed the government into enacting the right to information law.

Prof Mizanur Rahman of law department, Dhaka University, gave a presentation on the Human Rights Training Manual, while Advocate Fawzia Karim Firoze presented a summary of the 'Landmark Judgements on Violence Against Women'.

The book on landmark judgements traces the history of Bangladesh's judiciary on the issue of violence against women, which reveals that an entrenched patriarchy has caused life-long struggle for women, including violence, harassment and obstacles to justice.

The 'Toththo Odhikar' outlines the various ways the right to information serves to strengthen democracy through ensuring accountability and also suggests ways for the civil society to ensure access to information for the people.

The training manual on human rights and governance defines and outlines the current human rights standards and mechanisms and also points out evolving legal and governance processes that may help the practice of human rights and good governance.

Human rights activist Hameeda Hossain, Justice Gholam Mohammad Rabbani and Unnayan Shamunnay Executive Director Atiur Rahman took part in the discussion.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, delivered the welcome and concluding speech.



PHOTO: STAR

(From left) Maja Dhun Daruwala, Justice Gholam Mohammad Rabbani, Shaheen Anam, Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, Hameeda Hossain and Dr Atiur Rahman hold copies of three publications -- 'Landmark Judgements on Violence Against Women', 'Toththo Odhikar' and Training Manual on Rights and Governance -- at the launching ceremony at a city hotel yesterday. Manusher Jonno Foundation organised the event.

'Reduce maternal mortality rate to achieve MDG'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is still high in the country and this will have to be reduced to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG), said Health and Family Welfare Adviser Major General (Retd) Dr ASM Matiur Rahman yesterday.

He said the present MMR in the country is 320 per one hundred thousand which should be reduced to 220 by 2015.

The adviser was speaking as chief guest at the inaugural session of a workshop on "Safe Motherhood Promotion Project (SMPP)", a joint collaborative programme of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Ministry of Health, at Biam auditorium in the city.

Matiur said every mother must have the facility to deliver the baby safely and every newborn baby must get all the health advantages.

Speaking as special guest

Ambassador of Japan Masayuki Inoue said many health indicators have improved significantly in Bangladesh over the recent years.

But the MMR is still high in comparison to other countries that needs to be addressed, he added.

"The \$3.3 million SMPP along with government's Health Nutrition Population Sector Programme (HNPPSP) will continue till 2010 to enhance the primary healthcare services, especially the delivery system at community level," the envoy added.

He said the diseases and deaths related to pregnancy and delivery are sometimes reflecting the fragile position of women in local families and communities.

He hoped that the programme of improving safe motherhood will directly strengthen women's security and improve gender situation in Bangladesh.

Health and Family Welfare Secretary Ehsan Ul Fattah, Joint Chief

of the Planning Khodeza Begum, Director General of Family Planning Abdul Mannan, Director General of Health Services Dr M Shahjahan Biswas and JICA Resident Representative Akio Arai also spoke on the occasion.

The SMPP started in six upazilas in Narsingdi in 2006

to improve health status of women of reproductive ages and newborn infants.

This is a pilot project and will continue till 2010 covering around 22 lakh people.

The strategies of the SMPP will be public-private partnership, capacity development and community empowerment, the speakers said.

'50 killed by law enforcers during emergency'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 50 people were killed during operation by law enforcement agencies while 95,825 were arrested during the first 60 days of the state of emergency from January 12 to March 12, 2007, says a press release of Odhikar yesterday.

Of the 50 people, 26 were killed as a result of actions taken by Rab, 12 by police, six by army, five by joint forces and one by navy, it added.

Odhikar, a human rights body, demanded independent inquiries into all the extra judicial killings and to reveal the report publicly.



PHOTO: STAR

Workers demolish part of the ground floor of Gazi Bhaban at Naya Paltan in the city during a drive by Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) yesterday as shops were set up in the space for car parking.