

FIFTH SAARC PEOPLES' FORUM BEGINS Ensure security, protect food sovereignty

Speakers tell S Asian leaders

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN, from Tangail

The Fifth Saarc Peoples' Forum began at Delduar in Tangail yesterday, calling on South Asian leaders to work together to ensure security of the region and protect food sovereignty.

The forum, organised ahead of the 14th Saarc Summit to be held in New Delhi next month, also stressed the need to combat trafficking in women and children and strengthen cooperation between the big and small countries in the region.

Some 100 delegates from the Saarc countries attended the forum organised by South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture (SANFEC), PANAP, SANTI, Resistance Network, Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) and FTF Asia. UBINIG and Odhikar are the hosts of the programme.

Speakers at different sessions said food sovereignty is important for long-term benefits and sustain-

able development.

They also stressed the need to promote local seeds and indigenous knowledge and skills in order to ensure improved livelihood of the people.

The forum is likely to adopt a declaration to draw the attention of the Saarc leaders so that they take steps to ensure security of the people as well as food sovereignty of the South Asian countries, said Farhad Mazhar of Nayakrishi Andolon of UBINIG.

It will also adopt recommendations regarding the fight against human trafficking, he added.

"We are also concerned about the security of small countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. We think that the security of such countries should figure in the agenda of Saarc summit," he said.

Earlier, the three-day forum was inaugurated with Lalon song and by lighting candles.

Shree Ram Shrestha of SANFEC, Benu Gurung of Resistance Network, Gurinder Kaur of FIN Asia, Shalini Bhutani of Grain,

Sheikh Altafur Rahman of Santi, ASM Nasiruddin Elan of Odhikar and Farhad Mazhar addressed the inaugural function moderated by Farida Akhter of UBINIG.

After the inaugural session, Farida Akhter and Bhaskar Goswami briefed the participants on Saarc Peoples' Forum and highlighted the outcomes of the last forum.

Later, Shalini Bhutani and Farhad Mazhar spoke on 'Saarc and concerns of the Peoples of South Asia: Setting the Theme of Fifth Saarc Peoples' Forum'. Ranjit de Silva of Sri Lanka moderated the session.

Gurinder Kaur, Shree Ram Shrestha, Ranjit de Silva, Dr Qamar Mahiuddin and Dr MA Sobhan presented papers on agriculture and food sovereignty.

In another session, Shalini Bhutani, Bhaskar Goswami and Md Iqbal presented papers on 'Privatisation and corporate control of natural resources'.

A book titled 'Food Sovereignty and Uncultivated Biodiversity in South Asia' will be launched today.

FFs exempted from N'ganj municipal taxes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Narayanganj Pourashava in a unique move yesterday decided to exempt municipal taxes on the houses of all the freedom fighters of the district forever in a bid to show respect to them.

They have also exempted municipal tax on the houses of the wives or family members of martyred freedom fighters.

Dr Selina Hayat Ivy, chairperson of Narayanganj Pourashava, disclosed this decision of Pourashava to the reporters yesterday.

She said following the government gazette and list provided by the Zila Mukti Joddha Sangsab about 200 names of the freedom fighters have been listed to exempt municipal taxes forever.

She also said those who fought outside the district during the Liberation War period and now live in the district also get the same facility if they contact with the Pourashava.

The Pourashava has also organised a reception to the freedom fighters on March 31 where the certificates of municipal tax exemption will be handed over to the freedom fighters formally.

Ivy said the Pourashava has taken the decision in a bid to show respect to the golden sons of the soil on the occasion of Independence Day.

Seven joint secretaries transferred

UNB, Dhaka

The caretaker government yesterday transferred and gave new postings to seven joint secretaries to various ministries and government bodies as part of its ongoing reshuffle in the interim administration.

OSD (joint secretary) of Establishment Ministry Aslam Iqbal has been appointed joint secretary of Economic Relations Division while OSD (joint secretary) Mohammad Abdul Wahab joint secretary of Commerce Ministry and OSD Amlendu Mukherjee joint secretary of Finance Division.

Finance Division Joint Secretary Molla Munsur Ahmed has been made OSD at the Establishment Ministry while Health and Family Welfare Ministry Joint Secretary Syed Mustafizur Rahman transferred to Home Ministry. Bangladesh Land Port Authority member (joint secretary) Abdus Sobhan Sikdar has been transferred to Bangladesh Rural

Development Board (BRDB) as Director General and OSD (joint secretary) Md Ashraf Hossain to Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC), Savar, as Member, Directing Staff (MDS).

In the shake-up, Ansar and VDP Director General (deputed) Major General M Akbar Aktar has been taken back to the Armed Forces Division.

JU first yr classes begin today

BSS, Savar

Classes for the students of first year honours courses under the academic session of 2006-07 of Jahangirnagar University (JU) began today.

Freshers have been asked to report to the chairman of the respective departments of the university on the opening day. The newly-admitted students have to be present at the initial ten classes. Otherwise, their admission will be cancelled, said the university authorities.

No student will get seat at the halls initially this year, they said.

Drug dealers arrested in city hotel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of Rab 3 captured a group of drug dealers from Hasan International Hotel at Motijheel in the city yesterday.

Tipped-off, Rab 3 team raided the hotel in disguise at around 3:20pm and arrested three drug dealers with 20 yaba tablets.

The arrestees were identified as Md Sharif Hossain Robin, 37, Md Alamgir Hossain Bip, 32, and Md Humayun Kabir, 45, according to a press release.

Upon their confession, the Rab team also recovered a private car that the criminals used to use to conduct their business in the city.

Reading materials donated

The Book Group, a welfare organisation, recently donated reading materials to the Save the Children (Sweden-Denmark) for using at the non-formal education centres and child clubs conducted by the partner organisations of Save the Children, says a press release.

Syed Nazmul Abdal, executive director of The Book Group, handed over the materials styled 'Many men from many countries' to Kristine Zeuthen Jeppesen, acting country representative of Save the Children, at the country office of Save the Children on March 27.

The reading materials, financed by cellphone operator Airtel, have been being used in the educational programmes of several NGOs for the last three years.

'Cancel 27th BCS exam'

DU CORRESPONDENT

Fair BCS Movement, a platform of students and civil society members, yesterday demanded immediate cancellation of 27th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination for the sake of upholding justice, transparency and accountability in administration.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), news media and civil society members have long been urging the government for reconstitution of the Public Service Commission (PSC), but no step has been taken yet, leaders of the organisation lamented.

A number of students from Dhaka University (DU), Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and other college and university level students placed their demands at a press conference at DU Journalists' Association (Daja) office yesterday.

Former member of PSC Prof Mohammad Mohabbat Khan and Hamidul Islam Bir Bikram were also present at the press conference.

They said there are sets of corruption allegations against the current Chairperson of PSC Prof ZN Tahmid Begum and its members. They urged the government to form a supreme judicial council to investigate the corruptions.

Meanwhile, Fair BCS Movement also declared Fair Award 2007.

Transparency International Bangladesh, the Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Moen U Ahmed and the Dainik Samakal Reporter Sabir Newaz were nominated for the awards for their recent outstanding contribution to build a corruption-free Bangladesh.

The prize giving ceremony was followed by a cultural programme where the students recited poems, rendered songs and performed dance numbers. They also staged a play titled 'Cinderella'.

Four teachers were also honoured for their contribution.

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Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in celsius	Humidity in percentage
Max	Min	Morning Evening
Dhaka	34.9	20.0
Chittagong	36.0	21.5
Rajshahi	34.7	17.0
Khulna	35.0	18.0
Barisal	35.2	18.5
Sylhet	35.7	19.4
Cox's Bazar	35.2	22.8
		67 64

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 36.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Chittagong and Jessor and lowest 15.5 degree Celsius at Srimongal and Chuadanga.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:13pm today and rises at 5:53am tomorrow.

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