

Increasing damage to forests a threat to ethnic people

Speakers tell book launching ceremony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Increasing damage to natural forests poses a threat to the survival of indigenous people in the country, speakers at a book launching ceremony said yesterday.

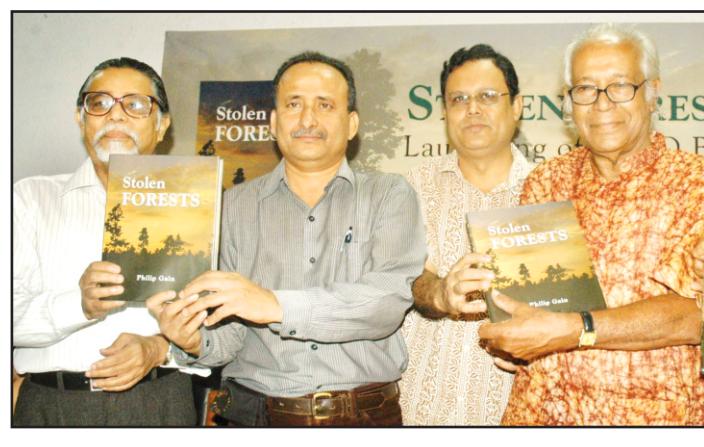
They also discussed the issues leading to the extinction of forest, wildlife and the rich ethnic culture.

Botanist Dwijen Sharma launched the book 'Stolen Forest' by Philip Gain at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) published the book.

The book is a glowing example of 'investigative reporting' with 250 photographs and over one dozen maps, said Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, executive editor of the Sangbad.

Philip Gain's presentation of images of forests at the programme revealed that the public forestland has shrunk to six percent from 18 percent.

"Through this book, I want to



Botanist Dwijen Sharma, right, launches a book titled 'Stolen Forest' by Philip Gain at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday.

challenge the plantation projects which are implemented by the government, and financed by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB)," said the author.

In the name of social forestry,

the forests have been turned into monoculture haven of teak, rubber, eucalyptus and acacia. These trees have dreadful impacts on the Sal forests, including Modhupur, he said.

He said the plantation econ-

omy is in the core of destruction in Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The forests have now become green desert because of these projects, he added.

Supporting his view, Farida Akhter, executive director of Ubinig, discussed how the plantation economy caused waterlogging and added to the misery of the ethnic communities living in the forest areas.

Gautam Dewan, former chairman of Rangamati Zila Parishad, described how they are being deprived of their rights. "We had to suffer a lot due to Kaptai Lake, but only five thanas in Rangamati, out of 10, have got electricity."

He strongly criticised the grabbing of lands of indigenous people and threatened to launch movement to protect their rights.

SEHD Chairman Prof Sakhawat Ali Khan, Kirti Nishan Chakma, an activist, and ambassador Syed Noor Hossain also spoke.



About 200 shanties were gutted in a fire at a slum in Jurain Balur Math area in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Awami League leaders present a bouquet to the party chief Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence in the city yesterday on the occasion of her homecoming day.

Reforms in OIC stressed

Iftekhar meets Ekmeleddin

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury had a meeting with OIC secretary general Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu in Islamabad yesterday.

Ekmeleddin thanked the adviser for the support OIC has been receiving from Bangladesh.

During the meeting, they spoke about the need to "reform and modernise the organisation and give it the necessary economic and development bias."

Speaking to the media after-

wards, Iftekhar said these changes are "essential if the OIC is to remain relevant to our times."

The adviser also asked for OIC assistance in rendering the Islamic University of Technology (IUT) as a centre for excellence in scientific learning to meet the present-day needs of the Ummah.

He invited the OIC secretary general to visit Bangladesh, which the latter accepted with thanks.

The foreign affairs adviser also held bilateral talks with Qatari State Minister for Foreign Affairs Ahmad Bin Abdullah Al-

Mahmoud in Islamabad yesterday morning.

During the meeting, Abdullah Al-Mahmoud expressed keenness for possible Qatari investment in Bangladesh.

Iftekhar said Bangladesh would be very pleased to host a delegation representing Qatar Investment Council, headed by Minister Al-Mahmoud, to identify projects for joint collaborations.

It was agreed that such a visit might take place either in July or October.

Initially, possible projects in which Qatar is interested would be in energy, real estate and infrastructure development of special economic zones.

"We have many potentials for cooperation for mutual benefit, given our excellent relationship," said Iftekhar, who served as Ambassador to Qatar between 1994 and 1996, and according to Minister Mahmoud, he is regarded as a "great friend to Qatar."

RMG factory pays salary after protest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Amid stern agitations by the workers, owners of Jamuna Denim in Gazipur yesterday paid their last month's salary.

Discontent grew among the workers of the factory, as the employers did not pay their salaries until yesterday morning. Fired workers of the factory, whose arrears were not paid off, also joined the workers.

At about noon, the workers started demonstrating in front of the factory demanding their salaries and overtime bills. On information, law enforcers rushed to the scene and brought the situation under control.

And the factory authorities started paying off the workers' salaries after 5:00pm.



National Heart Foundation of Bangladesh takes out a procession in the city yesterday to mark the World Hypertension Day.

'Bangladesh still faces challenges in disaster preparedness'

Bangladesh is still facing some challenges in disaster management although the country has been impressive recently in this sector, says a press release of the office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh yesterday.

"Bangladesh has developed an open impressive capacity to respond to disasters if and when they strike", UN Resident Coordinator Renata Dessaillien said, adding, Bangladesh still faces challenges in disaster management.

She was speaking at a two-day tabletop exercise organised by the United Nations Country Team that ended yesterday.

However, she assured the government of Bangladesh that the UN is ready to support the country in its effort to strengthen preparedness and response capacity.

The two-day tabletop exercise was held to review and discuss the actions that the UN and its partners in Bangladesh would take in response to a large-scale flood disaster.

National and international experts, staff from the UN OCHA Bangkok and senior officials of the government, bilateral donor agencies, NGOs and UN agencies participated at the tabletop exercise who recommended improved contingency planning.

200 shanties gutted in city fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 200 shanties, including 15 shops, were gutted in a fire that engulfed the whole Jurain Balurmath slum in Shyampur in the city yesterday afternoon.

Local and police sources said the fire originated from the shanty of Jahanara Begum at around 3:00pm while she was cooking.

Soon the fire engulfed the whole slum and the shanties were reduced to ashes.

The slum dwellers could only manage to come out of their shanties to save their lives but lost most of their belongings in the fire.

A youth named Mohammad Kokhoni sustained burn injuries who was rushed to a local hospital.

Pushpa Rani, a vegetable vendor, said she was selling vegetables when she saw her house in flames and rushed to rescue her 10-year-old child, Babu, who was sleeping inside the shanty.

Although she was able to save her child, she could not save her belongings worth Tk 8000 that were all destroyed in the fire.

Fire brigade sources said six fire fighting units rushed to the spot immediately and was able to douse the flame at around 3:45pm.

President to visit BIRDEM hospital for eye treatment

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed will visit BIRDEM hospital today for treatment of his eyes, says a press release issued from the Bangabhaban.

The release, however, did not say about the nature of the problem the president is suffering from.