

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

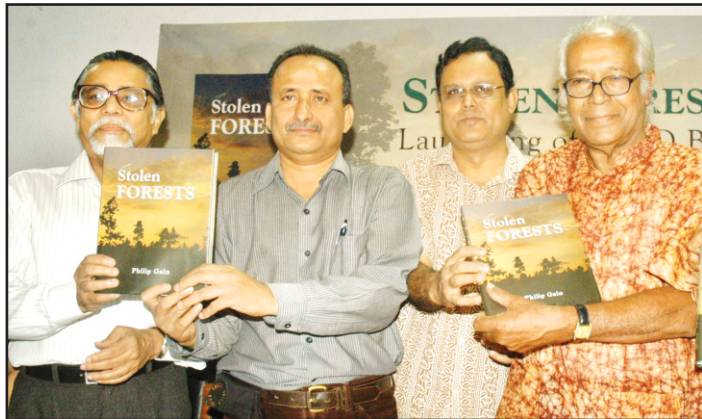


PHOTO: STAR

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 Ubining, 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 Sakawat Ali Khan, Kirti Nishan Chakma, an activist, and ambassador Syed Noor Hossain also spoke.



PHOTO: STAR

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

Change attitude towards people with disability

Speakers urge drivers, transport workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People with disability face immense difficulties in availing transport facilities, which is one of the main obstacles to their involvement in the country's mainstream development, said the speakers at a meeting yesterday.

They said both physically and mentally challenged people are not able to enter buildings, cross busy roads, get on or off the buses or trains, and enjoy other public facilities due to poor infrastructure and lack of awareness.

The view-exchanging meeting titled 'The role of transport sector in ensuring movement facilities for disabled people' was organised by Action on Disability and Development (ADD) at the National Press Club in the capital.

The speakers said awareness programme should be organised for drivers, bus helpers and transport workers regularly for changing

their attitudes towards the people with disability.

Major General (ret'd) AMSA Amin, senior vice-president of Dhaka Road Transport Association, said both physically and mentally challenged people have no freedom of movement as they are denied access to transports.

"If a person with disability cannot enter a health complex he or she is denied healthcare, if they cannot enter educational institutions, they are denied education, and if they cannot enter a workplace they are denied livelihood," he said while addressing as chief guest.

M Shafiqul Islam, deputy director of social service department, said both physically and mentally challenged people are being marginalised and excluded from the mainstream society as they cannot move easily and freely.

"Everyone has the right to equal access to public utility services in

his country. But the people with disability in our country are being deprived of their right," he lamented.

Mosharrar Hossain, country representative of ADD, said around 13 million people in Bangladesh representing about 10 per cent of the country's total population, have become disabled due to different causes including road accident.

He said the development of the country is not possible ignoring this vast number of population.

Dhaka Road Transport Association General Secretary Abul Hashem Dewan, Joint Secretary of establishment ministry Lokman Hakim, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority Deputy General Manager (Operation) Suvasish Saha, Daily Mymensingh Chief Editor Jasim Uddin, Journalist Mosharrar Hossain, Dr Suvas Chandra Saha and many people with disability took part in the discussion.

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 Bholar 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 the shanties to save their lives but lost most of their belongings in the fire.

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

Pushpa Rani, a vegetable vender, 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.



PHOTO: STAR

Mosharrar Hossain speaks at a discussion at the National Press Club in the city. On his right are Maj Gen (ret'd) AMSA Amin, Abul Hashem Dewan and Gazi Mozaffar.



PHOTO: AL

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've 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.



PHOTO: STAR

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 Coordination in Bangladesh yesterday.

"Bangladesh has developed an open impressive capacity to respond to disasters if and when they strike", UN Resident Coordinator Renata Dessallien 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.