

Political will a must to resolve regional water issues

Say environmental experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political will is needed to resolve bilateral and multilateral water resource management issues in the region, environmental experts said yesterday.

The issues must be addressed in order to avert any environmental catastrophe, they said at a seminar on 'Transboundary Water Resource Management: Issues and Concerns' organised by IUCN at Cirdap auditorium in the city.

Lack of political will is holding back South Asian water negotiations that seemed to have stalled, said Ainun Nishat, country representative of IUCN.

Speaking as the chief guest, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury said a 'positive trajectory' in Indo-Bangla relations will facilitate water resources negotiations between the two countries.

Bangladesh has 57 common

rivers in the region, 50 of which are shared exclusively by India and Bangladesh, and only two are shared by China, India and Bangladesh.

The adviser said, "We cannot afford to live in isolation; the costs are far too many."

Both Bangladesh and India could reach a win-win situation, if they cooperate in addressing the issues of bio-diversity, desertification and intrusion of salinity and in facing the challenge of 'atmospheric changes', he said.

In his main presentation, Ainun Nishat outlined a litany of environmental disasters ranging from floods, droughts and fisheries' migration to the fall in water quality and increasing salinity. He felt trans-boundary water negotiations are imperative to resolve these issues.

One of the major reasons for stagnancy in the water-sharing

negotiations is that the "Institutional setup is not working", he said referring to the Bangladesh-India Joint Rivers Commission (JRC).

The JRC is a statutory body comprised of technical experts who cannot make 'binding decisions' and as such, politicians still hold the key, he said. "Either make them more powerful or just give them all the power."

He also said Bangladesh should play an active role in ratifying the 'Convention on the law of the non-navigational uses of international water resources'.

Other speakers called for a greater participatory approach, cooperation with bordering Indian provinces and redefining the 'rights' to water.

Prof KB Sazzadur Rasheed of Buet and MH Siddiqi also spoke while Mahfuz Ullah, chairperson of IUCN Bangladesh National Committee, gave the welcome address.

First-ever contest to find out country's 7 greatest structures

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a view to upholding the country's historical and cultural heritage, Radio Foorti, a private FM radio station, has launched the first-ever contest titled 'The Magnificent 7' to find out seven greatest structures of Bangladesh.

"We have launched the contest being inspired by our listeners who sent several hundred short message services (sms) and emails to us after carrying out the news of seven new wonders of the world," said Sayyed Kabir, chief executive officer (CEO) of Radio Foorti, at a press conference at its office at Gulshan in the city on Friday.

"Awareness about the country's magnificent structures would be increased by the contest and people will feel an urge to protect these heritages which might be at the damaging state," he said.

Kabir said a panel of five judges has already made a short list of 21 important sites from which the people will select seven magnificent sites through sms or emails.

Prof Dr Enamul Haque, founder-director general of Bangladesh National Museum, Prof Dr Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, head of architecture department of University of Asia Pacific, Dr Syed Manzoorul Islam, professor of English department of Dhaka University, Murtaja Baseer, former professor of Fine Arts of Chittagong University and Shimul Yousuf, a noted theatre artiste, are the judges.

"Only human-built structures in an acceptable state of preservation with true artistic or archaeological value and situated within the territorial boundary of the country have been selected by the panel in making the list of 21," said Kabir, adding, the structures are from all ages and form all parts of the country.

"We are inviting all people to send sms votes that started from yesterday (July 14) and if anyone wants to vote through emails he or she needs to visit Radio Foorti's website," he added.

He said they will also give advertisement to newspapers and announce the news of the contest through their station.

Kabir said the voting will continue for a period of three weeks, ending on August 3 and anyone from the country and abroad can vote.

After the voting, they will tally the vote and announce the result in presence of the 5-member panel at a suitable event, he said.

When asked about the criteria while selecting the sites, Dr Enamul Haque said it is not a full proof thing as the number of sites could be increased to 25.

The panel has selected the sites considering their architectural, aesthetic and historical values, he added.

Aga Khan urges Muslims to solve their problems through consensus

The Aga Khan, spiritual leader of Shia Ismaili Muslims, yesterday committed himself to support democratic processes, find means to help ultra-poor and address political and theological tensions through consensus amongst all Muslims.

He was speaking at a ceremony that marked the 50th anniversary of his accession to Ismaili Imam in the city on Wednesday.

The Aga Khan succeeded his grandfather Sir Sultan Mohamed Shah Aga Khan as the 49th hereditary Imam on July 11, 1957, said a press release.

Speaking about the development of various institutions that constitute the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), one of the largest non-profit development networks, the Aga Khan said he is fortunate in having the support of wise men and women from the Ismaili communities throughout the world whose honorary service was a continuum of magnificence and timeless tradition of service.

He highlighted the importance of civil society and its effectiveness towards having a democratic government.

The Aga Khan said, "In many countries of Asia and Africa, democracy is young and still relatively ineffective in supporting modern development activities. A strong civil society can help counter-balance such ineffectiveness."

Turning to present global conflict situations, the Aga Khan emphasised that Muslims themselves are best suited to address some of the issues facing them.

He called for revitalisation of essential values of Islam, which he felt could only be done through greater collaboration among different interpretations of the faith.

Over 250 leaders of Ismaili community from some 25 countries attended the colourful ceremony.



PHOTO: STAR

Two girls, Rabu and Mousumi, who fell victim to human trafficking, reunite with their family members yesterday after an NGO rescued them from Sylhet. Officials of Directorate of Social Services handed over Rabu to her mother and Mousumi to her grandfather in the city.

Tale of two trafficked girls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nine-year-old Mousumi and six-year-old Rabeya alias Rabu could never realise that they were about to fall victim to trafficking when they left their home for an uncertain destination.

With the hope of a better living, the poverty-stricken two kids left their home at Masdar village near BSIC Industrial Area in Narayanganj on June 26 when some persons were engaged in bargaining for them.

Their family sources said over two weeks back Mousumi and Rabu went out for playing at noon. But they did not return home during lunch like other days.

Guardians of the two kids searched everywhere for them but in vain.

After 22 days, they got back their kids yesterday thanks to Protection of Children at Risk (PCAR) Project of social services directorate.

Mousumi said a person, introducing himself as their uncle at Kamalapur Railway Station, took

them to his house and handed them to a woman called Jesmin.

But Mousumi could not tell clearly how they came to Sylhet.

The grandfather of Mousumi said she was left to him by her parents when she was three years old.

"As I am unable to look after her due to old age and financial insolvency, I want her to stay at a Shishu Paribar," he added.

Rabu's mother also wants to keep her youngest daughter at Shishu Paribar as she has to lead a seven-member family alone by working at a garment factory. Rabu's father also left her mother.

When asked, Rabu said Mousumi had told her that they would have good food and money if they go to Dhaka.

University student found dead in Comilla

UNB, Comilla

A BBA student of the Northern University was killed here in the town yesterday.

The dead was identified as Imtiyazuddin Shuvo, son of former chairman of Daudkandi pourashava Nasiruddin Ahmed and a BBA first year student of the university.

Sources said Touhid, one of Shuvo's friends, called him out of his home at Segunbagicha in the capital on Friday afternoon. Touhid informed Shuvo's father over phone that Shuvo was killed in a road accident in Comilla yesterday morning.

Quoting local people police said the accident occurred when a motorcyclist hit Amer Ali while he was crossing the Sathkhira-Kaligonj road near Parulia bus stand in Debarha upazila, leaving him injured seriously. He succumbed to his injuries on the way to Sakhipur Hospital.

Munna was killed when a mechanized rickshaw ran skidded off the road at Gadaipur village. She died on the spot.

The accident occurred on Assasuni-Gadaipur road when she along with her mother was going to one of her relative's house at Gadaipur village in the same upazila by the rickshaw yesterday morning.

UNB from Comilla adds: A man was crushed under the wheels of a bus and his wife sustained injuries in Burichang upazila on Dhaka-Chittagong highway yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Habiburullah, 45, of Bilara village in Chanda upazila.

Police said a speeding bus ran over Habibur and his wife Sahida, 35, just after they got down from a bus at Nimsar about 2:30pm, leaving them critically injured.

They were rushed to Chanda Upazila Health Complex where Habibur succumbed to his injuries.

Ivory Coast to open mission in Dhaka

Bss, Daoukro, Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast will open a diplomatic mission in Bangladesh once the general elections, scheduled to be held in next January, is over.

"Now our mission in New Delhi works for Bangladesh affairs and the government will try to open an office in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, after the election, as good friendship has been established among us through deployment of Bangladeshi troops as UN peacekeepers," Henri Honan Bedei, former president of Ivory Coast told the Bangladesh delegation yesterday.

The delegation, comprising military officers and media persons and led by Brigadier General M Rafiqul Islam, called on Bedei at his luxurious palace in his village at Daoukro.

Bedei became the president and ruled the country from 1993 to 1999 without much disturbance. But in late 1999, he was overthrown in a bloodless military coup and fled to France. The general, who came to power, was killed in another coup.

Bedei returned home two years back and is now taking preparation to contest in the next election from his Democratic Party of Ivory Coast.

Appreciating the role of Bangladeshi forces, he said, "As part of impartial troops deployed by the United Nations, they (Bangladeshi forces) are doing better and we have good relations with them."

Road crashes kill 3

STAR REPORT

At least three people were killed in separate road accidents in Sathkhira and Comilla yesterday.

Our correspondent from Sathkhira reports: Two people were killed in two separate road accidents in the district yesterday.

The dead were identified as Amer Ali, 55, son of late Nur Baksa Sardar of village Zoya in Debarha upazila and Munna, 3, daughter of Asir Uddin Gazi of village Keygarhati-Assasuni upazila.

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At the concluding ceremony of the pilot project on June 30, CEC ATM Shamsul Huda said the pilot project has successfully put to rest all doubts regarding the feasibility of a voter list with photographs.

According to the EC's earlier announcement, it would finalise the voter list preparing process after evaluating the experiences gathered through the pilot project.

The EC is likely to announce a complete roadmap today for holding the next parliamentary election with a specific date for preparing the voter list with photographs and a tentative date for the polls.

Election Commissioner Sohul Hussain said the EC has evaluated the experiences of the pilot project and ".... we will recruit efficient enumerators to collect details of prospective voters on the prescribed forms."

Former adviser to a previous caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan told The Daily Star that the EC should revise its original plan for preparing the voter list on the basis of the lessons they have learnt from the pilot project.

The election commission should drop the plan of preparing the national identity cards along with the voter list. It should focus only on the voter list," Hafizuddin advised.

"It will be a disaster if mistakes are made on a large scale during the countrywide preparation of the voter list," he feared.

About the voter list prepared under the pilot project, EC Sohul said a draft voter list of the pilot project would be published with retrospective effect once the electoral rolls ordinance is amended.

"This list will be finalised after completing legal procedures," he said.

SingHealth-Galaxy office opens in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a view to sharing medical expertise between Singapore and Bangladesh, SingHealth, one of the largest healthcare groups in Singapore, and Galaxy Healthcare Services formally opened an office in the city yesterday.

"Through this collaboration we hope to be able to work in partnership with doctors in Bangladesh," said Prof Tan Ser Kiat, group chief executive of SingHealth, at a press conference at a city hotel in the afternoon.

Setting up the 'SingHealth-Galaxy' office in Dhaka is aimed at deepening and broadening the existing clinical collaborations between doctors in Bangladesh and those from SingHealth institutions, said the organisers.

Replies to a question whether SingHealth would set up any hospital in Bangladesh or join hands with any Bangladeshi hospital, Prof Tan Ser Kiat said that they would actively consider the issue if they get such a proposal.

He said that Bangladeshi patients are among top ten overseas patient groups visiting SingHealth hospitals.

He also said that they had selected Bangladesh as the first country where they would launch privilege cards for the patients.

A cardholder would be entitled to various benefits such as discounts for health screening packages and a complimentary sleeper bed for an accompanying relative, he added.

SingHealth-Galaxy office would also collaborate in the co-management of patients, who may be referred to its institutions for treatment that might not be available in Bangladesh, said the organisers.

Chief Executive Officer of Galaxy Healthcare Services Wahid Ahmed Yusuf, Chairman of Medical Board of SingHealth Prof Tay Boon Keng and Group Business Director Edward Oh were also present.

City road named after Shafiullah

Bss, Dhaka

The road from Sajal Square on Green Road to Farmgate has been named after Maj Gen (retd) KM Shafiullah Bir Uttam in recognition to his contribution to the War of Liberation in 1971.

"The street is being named as Bir Uttam KM Shafiullah Road in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the War of Liberation," said Dhaka city Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka while unveiling the plaque.

He said this kind of initiative would help the next generation learn about the bloodstained history of the liberation war.

Maj Gen (retd) KM Shafiullah Bir Uttam, freedom fighters and officials of Dhaka City Corporation were present on the occasion.

While talking to journalists, Bir Uttam KM Shafiullah, one of the sector commanders, said he felt honoured.

"All sector commanders should be honoured through such initiatives for their courageous role during the War of Liberation," he added.

WEATHER TODAY

Light to moderate rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light