

Ensure indigenous people's right to land to save environment

Speakers tell Bapa-Ben conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ensuring legal and traditional rights of indigenous people to land will save environment and protect the country from natural calamities, said the speakers at a conference yesterday.

They also criticised different government projects such as social afforestation and eco-park that evict the indigenous people by occupying their lands and habitats.

The conference on 'Indigenous People and Bangladesh Environment' has been organised jointly by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) and Bangladesh Environment Network (Ben) in association with eight departments of eight public universities including Dhaka University and Jahangirnagar University at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh auditorium in the city.

The two-day conference is the first of its kind where indigenous representatives from different parts of the country, social workers and researchers are taking part.

Speakers at the conference laid emphasis on participatory concept of development while planning projects, inter-country policy to prevent environmental pollution from neighboring countries and bringing indigenous people under the process of modernisation by upgrading their earnings.

"Legal rights of indigenous people must be ensured to save the environment where they live in, and they must be brought under the process of modernisation," said Prof

Nazrul Islam, coordinator of Ben.

"The indigenous people are born and brought up in the lap of nature. The way they earn, they cultivate and above all they survive have its own tradition and close connection with the nature that includes hills, rivers, forests and even the plain land. So ensuring their right means taking steps to save the environment," he added.

"Whether it is in plain land or up in the hill, what our policymakers always do while taking up or planning a development project is that they never take into consideration the views of the local people," said Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, president of Bapa.

"Our environment is threatened and to save it we need to kick off a

coordinated effort based on mutual understanding and ensuring fundamental rights of every human being," he added.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, chairman of the inaugural session, said, "The indigenous people were deprived of their rights to give dishonest people the opportunity to exploit and loot their life and livelihood."

The speakers made a 12-point demand at the session to ensure the rights of indigenous people including their constitutional approval, access to primary education in their own mother tongue besides the existing curriculum, right to land, separate ministries for the indigenous people and implementation of the peace treaty.



Bapa President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad speaks at a conference at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh auditorium in the city yesterday.

ALIM JUTE MILLS

Workers suspend blockade after assurance from law enforcers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Laid off workers of state-owned Alim Jute Mills suspended their dawn-to-dusk blockade programme on Khulna-Jessore highway from yesterday till 12.00 noon today following assurance of law enforcing agencies.

Officials of different law enforcing agencies assured the laid off workers to try their best to arrange payment of all arrears through a discussion with the high-ups of Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC).

Although the road blockade programme was postponed, workers demonstrated inside the mill from 9:00am to 2:30pm yesterday demanding early payment of their arrears and withdrawal of the decision to lay off the jute mill.

Later, in a rally at 3:00pm CBA leaders Abdul Hamid, Amirul Islam and Abdus Salam warned the management of severe consequence if they fail to meet their demands.

Workers who applied to the management to quit their jobs under the voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) also joined the movement.

Meanwhile, retired workers of the Crescent Jute Mills will observe a daylong hunger strike tomorrow and lay siege to its main office tomorrow to press home their demands.

Absconding convict held in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Fatulla police yesterday arrested Mohon Mia, an absconding convict who was sentenced to death in sensational Arju murder case, from Kodomtoli at Adamjee.

He killed Arju in broad daylight in 2002, police said.

He was accused in several cases.

CCC accords reception to freedom fighters

CU CORRESPONDENT

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) accorded a reception to around 300 freedom fighters under 12 police stations of the port city for the first time on Victory Day.

CCC Acting Mayor M Manjur Alam was the chief guest in the reception ceremony Afroza Kalam, Chairman of Social Welfare Standing Committee of CCC, presided over the ceremony at Lalidighi Maydan.

MA Mannan spoke on behalf of the freedom fighters on the occasion.

Acting Mayor in his speech said that Chittagong has a glorious history of Liberation War. He called upon all to be united to build a prosperous Bangladesh.

Later, the chief guest handed over crests among the freedom fighters.

CCC Commissioner Rehma Alam Chowdhury, Secretary AKM Khairul Alam, M Kafil Uddin, Dr ABM Faizur Rahman, Abu Saleh, Prof Mohammad Mamtaz Uddin Chowdhury, Shah Alam and Fahim Uddin were present at the ceremony.

Consolidate communal harmony

Archbishop says at social gathering

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Archbishop Paulinus Costa of Dhaka yesterday arranged a social gathering for journalists on the occasions of Eid-ul-Azha and Christmas with a call for consolidating communal harmony and fraternity to build a prosperous and peaceful Bangladesh.

He congratulated the journalists for sincerely reflecting the sufferings of people affected by the recent cyclone in the south-west part of the country in media, and their continuous efforts to spread the message of unity and fraternity among all.

Wishing happy Eid on December 21 and Christmas on December 25 respectively, the Archbishop said floods and cyclone ravaged many parts of the country, but failed to weaken unity and fraternity among people of various religions.

"It appeared to me that we came closer in regard to cooperation, respect and love with each other. We got more scopes to know and love each other while working together to help affected people," said Archbishop, head of the Christian community in Bangladesh, adding that contribution of media can never be denied in this regard.

He said people were informed of the damages and casualties as the media men risked their lives to go to the cyclone-affected areas to collect information and pictures, which is why "We all could be united to fight the disaster."

"You all have sacrificed a lot and I felt it is my moral duty to thank you. My conscience repeatedly says media men are very closed to us, our very closed friends," Archbishop added.

Reverend Kurian Matthew Vayalunkal, counsellor of Vatican Embassy in Dhaka, wished joy and happiness for all people on the

occasions of Eid-ul-Azha and Christmas.

Lauding the hospitality of the people of Bangladesh, he said, "Wherever I go, I am given warm welcome and it is wonderful. This is something very extraordinary."

Senior journalists at the gathering at Archbishop's House at Kakrail in the capital termed the celebration of both Eid-ul-Azha and Christmas together an unprecedented event, which will help boost religious harmony and co-existence of people of different cultures and religions in the country.

Appreciating the gathering, Managing Director of BSS Zagul Ahmed Chowdhury said all religions speak of equality and fraternity, but unfortunately discrimination is still dominant in the society. "We, therefore, should speak and work more to remove discrimination from the society," he said, adding that barriers should be removed allowing Muslim women to pray in the mosques.

Highlighting the tradition of religious harmony in Bangladesh, Prothom Alo Joint Editor Abdul Qaium said religion is a personal affair and it should not be mixed with politics.

"Bangladesh was created in the spirit that people of all religions will have equal opportunities, and we must hold it on," he added.

In his welcome speech Director of the Christian Communications Centre Father Kamal Corraya said the way people of all religions live together in Bangladesh is an example for others.

Moderating the programme, Radio Veritas Asia Bangladesh Correspondent Saifuddin Sabuj said, "Taking part in religious festivals by people of other faiths has become a tradition. We must keep it up."

Bangladesh should stay true to its founding principles

MJ Akbar tells BEI seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent Indian writer and journalist MJ Akbar yesterday said Bangladesh has to resolve the problems of Biharis and the punishment of war criminals to bury its past demons and stay true to the country's founding principles.

Speaking as keynote speaker at a seminar titled 'Meaning of Minority Politics' organised by Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) in the city, Akbar said he was saddened that Bangladesh's birth principle of 'language-centred nationhood' "was incapable of finding a polity."

"Out of all the countries in the Muslim world Bangladesh had the greatest opportunity to build a modern Muslim country," he said, adding that the question of Biharis and the gradual assimilation of Jamaat-e-Islami into national politics have to be addressed.

Otherwise the results will be felt long into the future, he added.

Akbar disagreed with the dominant view that a minority is a group of people who are demographically outnumbered in a particular area, stressing that the category is based on perceptions.

Outlining the history of Bengali Muslims to illustrate his point, he said they were affected the most as a 'minority' in the last century that have transformed their history, and ineffect their lives.

Akbar said the partition of Bengal in 1905, the Indo-Pak partition in 1947 and Bangladesh's independence in 1971 were the three key events that affected Bengali Muslims as minorities.

"In 1947, the Bengali Hindu Bhadrakol didn't accept Bengali Muslims because they said they were not Bengali enough, then in 1971, West Pakistanis thought Bengali Muslims were not Muslim enough," he added.

Application fee for US visas to increase from Jan

The application fee for US nonimmigrant visas will increase from \$100 to \$131 with effect from January 1, 2008, says a press release.

The hike will facilitate the authorities to ensure smooth processing of non-immigrant visa applications. All visa applications submitted before January 1 will be processed without any additional charge if the applicants are scheduled and appear for an interview before January 31.

Applicants who paid \$100 application fee before January 1, but do not appear for an interview before January 31, will be required to pay the additional \$31 before their interview.

Applicants have to pay \$131 after January 1, 2008 regardless of the interview date. The MRV fee receipt is only valid for 90 days.

There is no change in the fee collection procedures.

Fees for immigrant visas will also be increased to \$355 with effect from January 1, 2008 on the same ground.

Most Immigrant Visa applicants in Dhaka will not be affected, as their fees are paid at the National Visa Centre in Portsmouth, NH, prior to their interviews.

Some Immigrant Visa applicants (including all Diversity Visa applicants) will be required to pay the additional \$20.

Awami League Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury said problems of indigenous people with regard to language, forest, agriculture and environment must be addressed with a holistic approach.

She said Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord should be the basis of solving the problems of indigenous people.

Motia admitted that the then government should have implemented the peace treaty more speedily and effectively.

General Secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh Muzahidul Islam Selim said the problem of the indigenous people should be viewed from political and economic perspective.

He also laid emphasis on ensuring an environment in the country where each ethnic group can flourish with its distinct culture and tradition.

"An inter-country policy should be formulated to save our environment from its threatened condition. After 50 years indigenous people in Sylhet will have to evacuate their present habitat as huge sands from India are filling our rivers," said Shefalika Tripathi.

Chaired by Bapa Vice-president ASM Shahjahan, the plenary session was also addressed by Rocky Chakma and Trimati Tanchanga.

A total of 21 papers were presented at the session while 27 papers will be presented today.

The programme also incorporates children's art exhibition, film projection and cultural function.



Recipients of the UNFPA Media Award 2007 pose for photograph with the guests at National Press Club in the city yesterday.

Govt claim on free primary education not correct

Says Education Watch 2006 report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Education Watch 2006 report says that the government's claim of providing free primary education is not correct.

The report claims that the majority of cost for education in primary schools is actually borne by parents.

The Education Watch 2006 report published by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) Bangladesh was launched at the LGED auditorium yesterday.

The government's promotion slogan says, "Primary education is free in Bangladesh". The report refutes this claim especially in

government and registered school and madrasas.

It says that 59 per cent of the total spending per children in government primary schools and 71 per cent of spending per child in government assisted secondary schools come from the parents of the child.

The report points out that families of primary school students incur expenditure in respect of tuition fees, admission fees, bags, transport and others such related costs.

The Education Watch 2006 also reveals that public spending on primary and secondary education remains low in comparison to other developing countries and termed it insufficient to ensure an acceptable quality.

In terms of overall national spending (private and public) on education, Bangladesh with 2.2 per cent of GDP falls far short of the 6.0 per cent stipulated in the Dakar Framework for Action.

Compared to Bangladesh, the ratio is significantly higher in Nepal, with 3.4 per cent, and India, with 3.3 per cent, the report says.

Discrimination between boys and girls in both rural and urban areas is also small regardless of the types of institutions, the report says, revealing that guardians no longer discriminate against female children in regard to education.

The report shows public expenditure per student per annum in a government primary school (for 2005) to be Tk 1,728 followed by Tk 1,656 in the ebtedayee madrasas. The expenditure for the same is only Tk 664 in registered non-government schools.

At the secondary level, public expenditure per student per annum is Tk 2,461 in government assisted

schools and Tk 3,810 in secondary level (dakhil) madrasas, the report adds.

The report says that overall funding of primary and secondary education in Bangladesh is very low. At the primary level, the highest public spending per student per month is Tk 144 in government schools followed by Tk 138 in madrasas. The same varies from Tk 5.25 to Tk 55.33 for other types of institutions.

The report is based on 2005 statistics and costs.

The report stresses the need for increasing public funds for primary and secondary level institutions.

The Education Watch report has also found wide variations in public funding between urban and rural institutions of the same type at both primary and secondary levels.

"We are not at present on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for 2015 or to fulfill the constitutional pledge to 'extend free and compulsory education to all children,' the report says.

The objective of the report is to gain an understanding on educational expenditure at primary and secondary levels in the country.

The report is based on a study that covered 313 institutions at primary level with 18,625 students. At secondary level a total of 283 institutes with 16,529 were covered.

Quazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad was the adviser and coordinating lead author of the Education Watch 2006 report. Kazi Saleh Ahmed was principal investigator.

CAMPE director Rasheda K Chowdhury and education advisor Ayub Quadri among others were present at the launching ceremony of the report.

CA performs Umrah

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed performed Umrah prior to Hajj at Makkah Al Mukarram on Sunday evening and offered special munajat for overall welfare of the nation.

Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed and other members of the CA's entourage also performed Umrah with the head of caretaker government and joined the munajat, according to a message received here last night.

Fakhruddin went to Mina at noon yesterday and would stay over there until Tuesday for prayers.

The CA and his entourage will leave Mina this morning for Arafat Maidan to perform the main rituals of Hajj.

DU 'Gha' unit admission test deferred

DU CORRESPONDENT

The admission test of 'Gha' unit at Dhaka University (DU) for the academic session 2007-08 will be held on January 18, instead of January 4, 2008.

The authorities took the decision to shift the date, as the university will remain closed then due to scheduled winter vacation, sources said.

The admission test of 'Kha' unit will be held on January 11.

'Withdraw cases against RUJ secy'

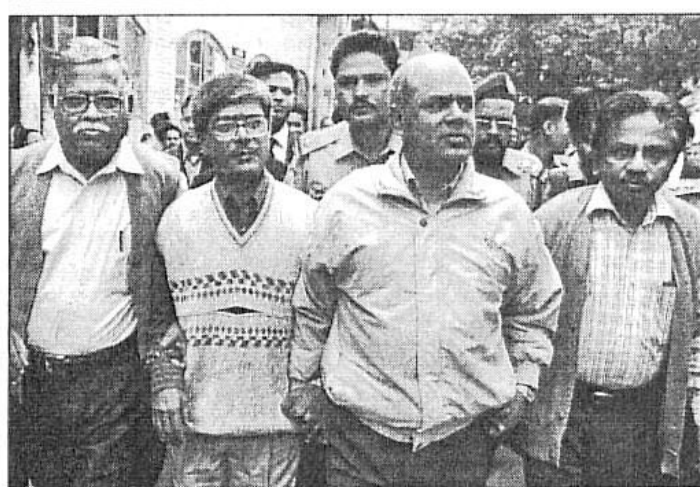
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and its front organisations in a statement yesterday demanded withdrawal of the false cases against Jahangir Alam Akash, general secretary of Rajshahi Union of Journalists (RUJ), and an end to the harassments on him.

Condemning the filing of the false cases against Akash, journalists leaders also demanded removing all obstacles to free journalism.

In the statement journalist leaders alleged that some vested quarters have been filing false cases against Akash one after another as their interest was threatened by his reports for Deutsche Welle, a German radio channel, now defunct CSB News and the daily Sangbad.

Signatories to the statement are Acting President of BFUJ Kartik Chatterjee, Secretary General Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan, President of Dhaka Union of Journalists Altaf Mahmud, General Secretary Omar Faruk, President of Chittagong Union of Journalists Shaheed ul Alam, General Secretary Reaz Haider, Acting President of Khulna Union of Journalists Mamun Reza and General Secretary Anwarul Islam Kajol, Rajshahi Union of Journalists President Akbarul Hassan Millat and Treasurer Shibby Noman, Jessore Union of Journalists President Sazed Rahman and its General Secretary SM Tauhidur Rahman, Bogra Union of Journalists President AHM Akhtaruzzaman and General Secretary Mahmudur Rahman, Dinajpur Union of Journalists President Swarup Kumar Bokshi Bachchu and General Secretary Ekram Hossain Talukder, Mymensingh Union of Journalist President Kazi Yasin and General Secretary Ataul Karim Khokon.



Four teachers of Dhaka University were produced before the court of chief metropolitan magistrate in the city yesterday. From left are Science Faculty Dean Prof Harun-or-Rashid, Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) General Secretary Prof Anwar Hossain and President Prof Sadru Amin and Prof Neem Chandra Bhowmik.

1.5m euro for relocation of Rohingya refugees

UNB, Dhaka

The European Commission has approved 1.5 million euro in humanitarian aid package for the unregistered Rohingya refugees of Teknaf and Cox's Bazar.

The assistance will focus on the relocation of refugees to a sustainable place and the provision of humanitarian aid, including shelter, water, health and nutrition, said an EC press release yesterday.

Funds are being allocated via European Commission Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) under the responsibility of EC Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel.

"The situation of Rohingya refugees is continuing to deteriorate. These vulnerable people rely on international solidarity. There is an urgent need to create adequate living conditions for them. The Commission wants to express its solidarity by helping the victims of this forgotten crisis," said Louis Michel.

Since 1978, around 2,00,000 Rohingya people have fled from Myanmar. More than 28,000 have found refuge in camps managed by the

United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Most of others are hosted by local communities. In the region of Teknaf, around 10,000 undocumented Rohingya refugees need to be relocated in order to empty overcrowded camps where living conditions are appalling.

The Commission funding will help this population resettle in a suitable place where their immediate needs will be met. Funds will provide multi-sectoral humanitarian support such as shelter, water and sanitation, access to healthcare, nutrition, protection activities and livelihood projects.

As this area is prone to natural catastrophes, disaster preparedness activities will be also implemented. International non-governmental organisations will operate this funding.

Besides, victims of natural disasters in Bangladesh have already benefited from ECHO humanitarian assistance in 2007 - euro 2.5 million after the flooding in August and euro 6.5 million following the recent cyclone Sidr. This fresh allocation will bring the Commission's support to the victims of crises in Bangladesh up to euro 10.5 million this year.

13 journo get UNFPA Media Award 2007

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prize giving ceremony of the UNFPA Media Award 2007 was held at the National Press Club in the city yesterday.

This year 13 journalists from both print and electronic media received the award under different categories. The award carries prize money, crest and certificate.

The Daily Star received a special award for its continuous support to reproductive health (RH)/family planning (FP) and gender related programmes.

UNFPA Representative, Bangladesh Arthur Erken gave away the awards among the winners as the chief guest.

On behalf of The Daily Star, Rezaul Karim Lotus, chief reporter, received the award.

Alpha Arzu of the daily New Age won the first prize in print media (English) while Nicholas Biswas, a contributor to The Daily Star, and Nurul Islam Hasib of The Daily Independent became second and third respectively.

In print media (Bangla), Razu Ahmed of the daily Aiker Kagoj became first while Ismat Morjida Khan, a contributor to the daily Samakal, became second.

Angur Nahar Monty, Naznin Akhter and Mansura Hossain jointly won the third prize in this section.

Meanwhile, Tanjil Mahmood, Rezauddin Sheikh Badsha and Munni Saha won the award in electronic media (TV) while Abul Matin and Salahuddin Ahmed won in electronic media (Radio).

Condition of KCC mayor has deteriorated

Says wife

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A five-member medical board was formed yesterday for the treatment of detained Mayor of Khulna City Corporation (KCC) Sheikh Tayebur Rahman.

Headed by Dr Kazi Hamid Asgar, an associate professor of Orthopaedics department of Khulna Medical College and Hospital (KMCH), the board has already checked up health condition of the mayor.

But the findings of the health check-up could not be known as of filing this report.

Laila Rahman who met the mayor at noon said the condition of her husband had deteriorated due to lack of proper treatment in Jessore Central Jail.

The mayor is yet to be provided with better facilities in the KMCH prison cell where four policemen and three security guards of Khulna District Jail are guarding him, she added.

Tayebur was admitted to the prison cell of KMCH on Saturday.

Obituary

CU CORRESPONDENT

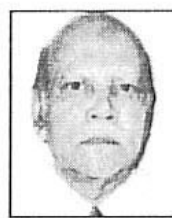
Chittagong University (CU) Islamic History and Culture Department Chairman Prof Mohammad Rezaul Karim passed away due to a brain haemorrhage at Chittagong Medical College Hospital on Sunday night at the age of 55.

He left behind his wife, a daughter and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

He was buried in Feni after namaz-e-janaza in the afternoon.

Vice-chancellor Prof Dr M Badul Alam in a statement condoned the death and conveyed sympathy to members of the bereaved family.

Death anniversary



Today is the first death anniversary of Md Shamsuddin, former officer of Muslim Insurance, Shadharan Bima Corporation and Co-operative Insurance, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad and Quarnkhani will be held at his residences at Uttar Badda in Dhaka and Station Road in Gaibandha and on his village Madrasa premises in Gaibandha for salvation of his departed soul.

Relatives and admirers are requested to attend the doa.

Qulkhwan



Qulkhwan of Alhaj Abul Kashem, chairman of Baly Group of Industries and director of Premier Bank Ltd, will be held at his residence at Uttara in the city after Asr prayers today, says a press release.

Relatives, friends and admirers are requested to attend the qulkhwan.

He passed away due to a cardiac arrest at Square Hospital in the city at the age of 65 on December 16.

He left behind his wife, one daughter and three sons to mourn his death.

He was buried at the family graveyard at his native village in Narayndi after namaz-e-janaza at a mosque at Uttara Sector-1.



Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

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

Mild cold wave is sweeping over Rajshahi division and the regions of Tangail, Mymensingh and Jessore