

# Protect indigenous people to save forests

Speakers call at Bapa seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday called for protecting indigenous people to save forests of the country. They said the indigenous people are the part of the forests and they know how to protect them.

The seminar titled 'Environmental degradation in forest: Socio-economic crisis of indigenous people' was organised by the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) at WVA auditorium in the city.

Speaking as chair Bapa President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said there is a debate over the name of Adibashi but there is no debate about it that those who live in forests also protect them.

"Those who consider forests as the raw materials of industrialisation do not protect them," he said. The existence of Adibashi people is being threatened in the name of participatory forests, he added.

In a keynote paper, Prof Khandaker Mokaddem Hossain of Dhaka University said the ethnic communities constitute, according to a government statistics, about 1.2 percent of the total population, but the actual number of indigenous people is considerably

higher than this.

He said a huge number of Bangalee settlers have been rehabilitated at Matiranga and Ramgarh thanas in Khagrachhari district, Lama thana in Bandarban district, and Madhupur Tracts of Tangail and Mymensingh districts. As a consequence, the indige-

nous people have become marginalised and lost their traditional rights over land and trees, he said.

Prof Hossain said the government should implement ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 to protect their human and land rights.

He said the land and tree

resources of indigenous people should be protected from the activities that are not sound environmentally.

Apart from the rehabilitation of Bangalee settlers and commercial plantation of tea, pineapple, orange, lemon and rubber trees, infrastructural development including construction of roads, bridges and highways, industrialisation and urbanization process, and control of forest lands by military and para-military troops in Chittagong Hill Tracts are the main causes of deforestation.

Philip Gain, director of SHED, said the aggression of alien forest is not acceptable.

There were 100 species of indigenous trees in Madhupur forest but in the name of participatory afforestation these trees have been replaced by acacia and eucalyptus, he said.

If the government does not take adequate steps it will be very difficult for indigenous people to survive, said Rabinranath Soren, a leader of the Adibashi community.

AZM Shamsul Huda, a retired forest conservator, said indigenous people do not make any harm to forests, and during his service he did not find them in selling trees by cutting them illegally.



Rabinranath Soren speaks at a seminar on environmental degradation at WVA auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left are Prof Khandaker Mokaddem Hossain, Prof Muzaffer Ahmad and Sharif Jamil.

## Govt urged to realise dues from Chevron, Niko

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Committee to Protect Oil-Gas-Mineral Resources and Power-Port has again urged the government to take steps to realise outstanding dues from the US company Chevron and Canadian company Niko.

In a statement yesterday, the Committee also called for bringing Niko to book for its alleged corruption in gas exploration and demanded expulsion of Asia Energy from the country for its propaganda against Bangladesh.

The statement also criticised the role of the government in withdrawing the case filed by Petrobangla against Chevron.

The Committee said it is useless to take the issue of irregularities by Chevron to World Bank as it is eager to protect the interest of multinational companies.

The statement said although two former premiers have been charged with corruption in awarding deal to Niko, none of the company has been charged with irregularities till now.

Like the previous political governments, the present caretaker government has also failed to take any initiatives in these regards, it added.

The Committee also demanded that the Cairn Energy, which gave fabricated information about Sangu gas field, be thrown out of the country.



PHOTO: STAR

Eminent litterateurs praised Tahmima Anam for her Commonwealth award-winning novel 'A Golden Age' at a 'Meet the Author' programme in the city yesterday. Sahitya Prakash, the local publisher of the novel and its Bangla version titled 'Sonajhara Din', organised the function at Bengal Gallery where the author replied to questions from the readers about her book and her future novels. The function was attended by eminent litterateurs and cultural personalities and also by young writers. From left are Prof Hayat Mamud, Shaheen Anam, mother of Tahmima, Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, author Tahmima, Prof Anisuzzaman, poet and litterateur Syed Shamsul Haq and Mofidul Haque, proprietor of Sahitya Prakash.

## 953 killed in work-related accidents in 6 months: OSHF survey

UNB, Dhaka

Some 953 workers were killed and 1,637 others injured in work-related accidents across the country in the last six months, according to a survey report.

Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) prepared the

report on the basis of reports published in 16 newspapers from January 1 to June 30 this year.

It said that 166 workers were killed and 240 others injured in workplace accidents such as falling from height, electrocution, explosion and fire, while 191 were killed and 1016 others injured in work-related violence such as torture by employers, mugging and

baton-charge or firing by police.

Some 214 workers were killed and 199 others injured in accidents during travelling to and from workplaces while 310 transport workers were killed and 163 others injured in road accidents and 72 killed and 19 others injured in other incidents such as lightning, attack by animals at workplaces.

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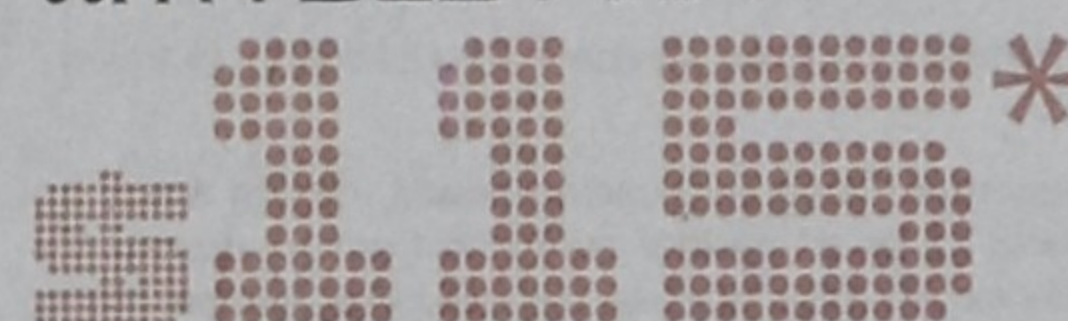
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