



PHOTO: STAR

Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique speaks at a discussion on International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right are Kanai Lal and Prof Mesbah Kamal and on his left are Shaheen Anam, Dr Hameeda Hossain and Abed Khan.

DISCUSSION ON INT'L DAY FOR ELIMINATION OF RACISM Call to formulate law to end discrimination against Dalits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Soud Sarder, a leader of the Bede community in Manikganj, lives in a tent measuring 14 by 6 feet along with his family on the bank of the Louhajang river.

As this community does not have a place to make their permanent homes, its members have to move from one place to another very often whenever the locals want them to go away.

Traditionally Bedes live on boats. But as their boats have been damaged and they could not afford to repair them because of financial constraints, Soud Sarder and his community members tried to settle down on Khas lands but failed. They even cannot fight legally as they are not permanent residents of any area.

The Bedes living in Manikganj are deprived of fundamental rights to land, treatment and education, Soud Sarder said while elaborating the plight of his community at a discussion yesterday.

The National Committee to Celebrate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination organised the discussion at Cirdap auditorium in the city as part of its 10-day programmes marking the day.

A total of 15 NGOs in association with Manusher Jonno Foundation have arranged the programmes, which will continue up to

March 27 covering different districts.

Like Soud Sarder, there are 55 lakh people in the country who belong to various small communities and are considered either Dalit or Harijan or Antya. They are socially oppressed and marginalised.

The Dalit community comprises people from small communities, who are known as untouchables in society, such as Rabidas, Rishi, Shabdakor, Behara, Kaora, Joldas, Nikari, Hajam, Dhopa and Manta.

Speakers at the discussion placed a 14-point demand for elimination of racism against these communities.

The demands include ensuring fundamental and

human rights of Dalits; formulating a law to eliminate racial discrimination against them; setting up special cells for Dalits and women at the National Human Rights Commission and the ministry for women and children respectively; and framing a national development policy to include Dalits in the mainstream development programme.

Other demands are introduction of quota in educational institutions and the service sector for Dalits, allotment of Khas land for them, bringing them under safety net programme, ensuring free movement of Dalit people in hotels, restaurants and salons, ensuring their participation in social activi-

ties and enrolling them in the national census list with their full identity.

"We are yet to build a democratic society. Racism will be eliminated once a democratic society is established. We have to pledge that we will build a democratic society and ensure rights of every human being," said Dhaka University Vice Chancellor AAMS Arefin Siddique while inaugurating the 10-day programme.

"Only rice and clothing cannot satisfy people. They want dignity. It must be ensured that every human being has dignity," said Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation Shaheen Anam.

Abed Khan, former editor of the Shamakal, called on the deprived people to come forward to establish their rights.

Renowned human rights activist Dr Hameeda Hossain, Prof Borhan Uddin Khan Jahangir and Meghna Guho Thakurota also spoke at the discussion moderated by Prof Mesbah Kamal.

Maj Hakim laid to rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Major Ahmed Azizul Hakim killed during the bloodbath at BDR headquarters was laid to eternal rest with state honour at Banani Army Graveyard in the city yesterday.

The body of Maj Hakim was identified through a DNA test on March 11 at Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue.

Sources said the burial was delayed as his identity was cross-checked several times.

Before Maj Hakim's burial in the afternoon, his namaz-e-janaza was held at Army Stadium at Banani. Chiefs of

three services, relatives of the deceased and a large number of military and civilians attended it.

The coffin of Maj Hakim draped in national and army flags were brought to the stadium in a vehicle.

After the janaza, military secretaries of the president and the prime minister placed wreaths on the coffin on behalf of them. Chiefs of three services also placed wreaths.

A total of 74 people, including 53 army officers, were killed in the February 25-26 bloody mutiny, while two army officers still remain missing.



PHOTO: PID

Head of Delegation of the European Commission and Ambassador Dr Stefan Frowein calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the city yesterday.

SHIP-BREAKING YARD MJF hails HC directive

METRO DESK

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) yesterday welcomed the High Court directive to close down within two weeks all ship breaking yards operating without environmental clearance.

The foundation hoped that all relevant authorities will ensure compliance to the directives, says a press release.

It also welcomes the court order to ensure safe working conditions for workers and directives to prevent ships from entering Bangladesh territory without cleaning its hazardous material at source.

At present, approximately 30,000 workers are directly involved in ship breaking, of which 25 percent are children. MJF expressed concern about the fate of workers of the industry and requested the authorities as well as the owners to make sure these workers do not lose their employment or sources of livelihood.

MJF also requested the authorities to remove children from this industry as this is considered hazardous labour and violates labour law 2006.

Number of urban slum dwellers to swell over 3cr by 2020

Speakers say at meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 30 percent of the country's total population live in urban areas, of which 33 percent (around 1.6 crore) people live in the slums and this figure is expected to increase to more than three crore by 2020.

The speakers said this at a meeting organised by Gazipur municipality and Practical Action, international development organisation, at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday.

The number of slum dwellers continued to increase significantly due to more secure income and employment opportunities in urban areas, they said, adding a decrease in the number in rural areas due to river erosion, low productivity and lack of social security.

Presiding over the meeting, acting mayor of the municipality Abdul Karim said fund mobilisation and proper execution are the key challenges in reducing urban poverty.

He underscored the need for more funds to implement the slum improvement plan that is carried out the municipality to achieve sustainable urban poverty reduction in phases.

Speaking as the chief guest, AKM Mozammel Haque said the slum improvement plan would be the milestone for the urban poverty reduction across the country.

He underscored the need for strengthening the local government for the overall development of the country.

"Local government should have to be a self-governed institution to fulfil people's demands," he said, adding: "It wouldn't be possible to reach our desired goal to build poverty-free Bangladesh unless we free local government from national government."

About scanty budgetary allocation for local body, he said only two percent of the

national budget is spent by the local government, while other countries expend 40 percent of the national budget to meet the demands."

Mansoor Ali, urban project manager of Practical Action,

underlined the importance of taking a comprehensive policy to get more effective results to develop every sector like health, education and employment opportunities and other challenge to reduce

poverty. The programme was also addressed by Nazrul Islam, water superintendent of the municipality, and Iqbal Karim, team leader of Practical Action.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolon and Bangladesh Adivasi Chhatra Sangram Parishad jointly form a human chain at Shahbagh in the city yesterday demanding steps to establish their right to land and forest. (Story on Page 5)

Father seeks help to diagnose son's disease

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A two-month-old baby born with severe respiratory distress has been put on supplemental oxygen since his birth, but the



doctors are yet to find out the cause of his disease.

The entire body of the baby boy turned blue soon after his birth at Ibne Sina Hospital on January 19. He is now undergoing treatment at Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital under the supervision of Prof

Shahidullah.

His father Dr Abid Imtiaz, a young nuclear scientist, has appealed to medical experts, donor agencies and charity organisations at home and abroad to help diagnose the disease of the boy.

"Although two months have passed since his birth, doctors could not find out the cause of the disease," said Dr Imtiaz, senior scientific officer at Nuclear Energy Division of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

The causes of central cyanosis in the baby are yet to be known, Prof Shahidullah said, adding that the patient is not stable enough to undergo CT/MRI/USG of brain.

Prof Shahidullah sought support of any national or international team of medical professionals to address this problem.

So, the boy's father urged medical experts and various agencies from home and abroad to help save the life of his son.

For further details, interested persons can contact Dr M Abid Imtiaz (phone: 880 1678 141626; email: mabidimtiaz@yahoo.com).

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