



The Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) and The Daily Star organise a roundtable on "Fire Safety in Our Buildings" at The Daily Star conference room yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

MJF helps marginalised people claim their rights, promote HR

Dev experts tell workshop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Development experts at a workshop yesterday said Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has set a unique example by helping marginalised people claim their rights and advocating policy changes to promote human rights and good governance.

Partner NGOs funded by MJF also got used to be more transparent and efficient in implementing the projects, they added.

The experts said this at a workshop on an impact assessment study on first five-years' activities of MJF at Brac Centre Inn in the city where a study was jointly presented by MJF and Department for International Development (DFID).

MJF was created in 2002 with funding from DFID and

now funds projects implemented by 123 national and international partner NGOs on good governance and human rights nationwide. Some funding also comes from Norway.

"The linkage between individual households and policy level makes MJF uniquely effective," said Dr Timothy J Finan, consultant of the study, which covered 64 projects, interviews of beneficiaries, MJF staff, surveys and review of documents.

Presenting the study, Finan, also director of the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona, the USA, said MJF programme has effectively targeted many of the 'invisible' and hard-to-find populations of Bangladesh through its network partners.

Over the first five years, it is estimated that the direct beneficiaries are several million people, while the number of indirect beneficiaries is several times higher, he added.

For example, Dr Timothy said, in Dinajpur and Satkhira, poor families have acquired access to land by exercising their rights, while several thousand street children in Dhaka have been enrolled in informal education and hundreds rescued from police stations.

The marginalised groups including workers, Dalits, tribal people were sensitised to raise their voices and claim rights because of actions of the MJF partner NGOs, while they advocated for enacting of Right to Information Act, Labour Law and minimum wages of the workers of

readymade garments, the study said.

Timothy, however, said MJF has to strengthen collaborations with the partners, use problem-solving methods and better document the impacts of their activities.

DFID Mission Chief Chris Austin said, "MJF is the perfect development partner for the excluded people and also for the government," adding that it also engages media and civil society in awareness building which is very crucial.

Norwegian Ambassador in Dhaka Ingebjorg Stofring said they are very impressed by MJF because of its critical research before starting programme and accountability.

Speaking as the chief guest, NGO Affairs Bureau Director General Mustak Hassan Md Iftekhar said as NGOs are development partners of the government, they have to design programmes in line with the government's goals.

"We hope that NGOs will work to reduce poverty and create employment opportunities, apart from other activities," he said, adding that the impact assessment study did not, however, consider social capital which is very important for socio-economic development.

MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam said the fund NGOs get is public money and so spending of this money must be transparent. At the same time, they also should be given freedom of work for better impacts.

Representatives from MJF's partner NGOs also participated in the workshop.



Dr Timothy J Finan speaks at a workshop at Brac Centre Inn in the city yesterday. On his right are Mustak Hassan Md Iftekhar, Norwegian Ambassador Ingebjorg Stofring and Chris Austin.

Govt keen to implement CHT accord

Says JS body chairman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of CHT Affairs, Promod Mankin at a seminar yesterday said the government is keen to implement the CHT Agreement to ensure fundamental rights of the indigenous people.

He said, "Land rights issue is one of the main reasons behind the crisis of the indigenous people and without implementing the agreement it is not possible to solve the land disputes and ensure basic rights of the indigenous people".

The government is also keen to bring back the settlers

from the hill tracts in phases if they want to move, he added.

Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) and Kapaeng Foundation jointly organised the seminar on 'Government's commitment to implement the CHT accord and active popular support' at the National Press Club in the city.

Speakers at the seminar demanded a clear roadmap from the government to implement the agreement.

They called on the government to reform the CHT Land Commission. One of the preconditions of the accord is to settle the land disputes but none of the disputes were settled even 11 years after

signing of the accord in December 1997, they said.

They stressed the need for withdrawal of the six permanent military camps from the hill tracts according to the agreement. They also demanded cancellation of leases of lands there and restoration of the traditional communal land ownership of the hill people.

Barrister Sarah Hossain said, "CHT Land Commission needs reform. It remained dysfunctional from the very beginning for which none of the disputes were resolved".

She called for increasing representation of the indigenous people in the administration in the hill districts.

Chakma circle chief Raja Debashish Roy said sensitising the mainstream about the agreement is necessary to elucidate that the rights issues mentioned in the accord clearly corroborates with the basic rights mentioned in the constitution.

"Ensuring basic rights of the indigenous people is not possible without giving constitutional recognition to them," he said.

Jatindralal Tripura MP, Pankaj Bhattacharya, ALRD Executive Director Samsul Huda and Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity Publicity Secretary Mangal Kumar Chakma also spoke at the seminar.

Observer staffs threaten 'fast unto death'

UNB, Dhaka

Journalists, workers and employees of The Bangladesh Observer and the Weekly Chitrali on yesterday threatened 'fast unto death' demanding payment of their arrears salaries of 78 months.

The protesters announced it at a three-hour sit-in in front of the National Press Club.

"We will go further, observe hunger strike unto death if our demands are not met," said Mubarak Hossain, Observer Unit chief.

He urged the government to compel the owners to pay their salary and other dues.

They submitted a memorandum to the prime minister on March 24 seeking redress of their grievances.

Plot on to embarrass govt: AG

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attorney General Mahbub Alam yesterday said all the political parties should have stood by the government after the BDR carnage instead of trying to make the government embarrassed by delivering confusing statements.

"After the overwhelming mandate from the people for the government many quarters are trying to make it embarrassed by hatching conspiracies," Mahbub said.

He said this while addressing a discussion on 'The Bangladesh Bangabandhu dream of and present reality' organised by Bangabandhu Parishad to mark the Independence Day at the National Press Club.

Mahbub also said the return of thousands of workers from Malaysia was also a conspiracy.

"It is propagated now in the villages that more workers would come back from abroad if the war criminals were tried," he said, adding, "We, the public prosecutors, are trying our best to give proper support to the government against such conspiracies."

The attorney general also said Bangabandhu's historic address on March 7 in 1971 was the proclamation of independence and the announcement on March 26 was only a formality.

The speakers at the discussion said Bangabandhu always dreamt of a secular and democratic government

where people would not be repressed.

They urged countrymen to be united to make Bangabandhu's dream of a golden Bangladesh a reality.

Freedom fighter Mahbub Uddin Ahmed Bir Bikram said conspiracy was hatched to

lead the country to a civil war with the BDR carnage but due to sensible decisions from the prime minister the country survived.

The discussion presided over by National Professor Kabir Chowdhury was also addressed by Dr Abdul Khalek,

former vice chancellor of Rajshahi University, and Prof Shamsuzzaman Khan, former director general of National Museum.

Dr SA Malek, general secretary of Bangabandhu Parishad, presented the keynote paper at the meeting.

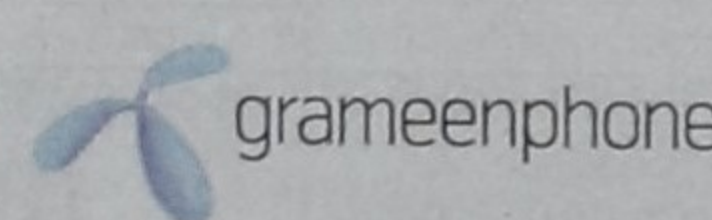


Stay Close to the journey of glory

At the Special Olympics 2007, the largest sporting event on earth for athletes with intellectual disabilities, the amazing victory of Bangladesh team made us all proud. The 47-member Bangladesh team sponsored by Grameenphone brought home 71 medals, indicating sheer insignificance of the word 'impossible'.

To blaze with triumph once again and to prepare ourselves for the next Special Olympics in 2011, nation-wide regional talent hunt began in Rajshahi in November, 2008.

April 01, 2009 marks the beginning of the second regional talent hunt in Chittagong which will be extended to other divisions in phases. Spirited Bangladesh Special Olympics team will once again stand high. Your inspiration will again lead the way towards victory.



block annoying callers!

banglalink™
call block

to subscribe, type **SUB**
and send **SMS** to **8181**

block the first **10** numbers for free!

• monthly subscription fee tk. 30 • after initial subscription, tk. 5 will be charged for each number enlisting in white list or black list • tk. 2/ SMS charge applicable • VAT and conditions apply • for details dial 121

making a difference



banglalink
An ORANGE Telecom Company



Barrister Sarah Hossain addresses a seminar at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On her right are Pankaj Bhattacharya, Jatindralal Tripura and Promod Mankin.