

Plant trees to protect environment

President urges people

UNB, Dhaka

President Zillur Rahman yesterday urged the countrymen to come forward spontaneously to plant trees across the country with a view to protecting the environment from growing hazards, especially the adverse impacts of global climate change.

"We've to plant trees immensely to bring back the lost sane environment," he said this while he was inaugurating the tree plantation programme - 2009 at Bangabhaban in the afternoon.

He said the amount of forest in the country is gradually decreasing for various reasons - particularly for the population growth, building houses and infrastructure, unplanned urbanisation, setting up industries and river erosion -- which cause extinction of biodiversity.

Terming trees as inseparable part of life and livelihood he said, "Bangladesh is a country wrapped with green colour along with sweet noise of birds."

Zillur appreciated the main theme of the national tree planting movement and tree fair-2009: 'Country will be filled with plantation to bring changes in Bangladesh'.

He said the contribution of trees is indispensable in protecting the balance of environment in line with fulfilling people's basic demands -- food, clothing, accommodation, medicine and employment.

"Mainly the trees keep the



President Zillur Rahman inaugurates the tree plantation programme - 2009 planting a tree at Bangabhaban in the city yesterday while State Minister for Environment and Forest Advocate Mostafizur Rahman looks on.

PHOTO: PID

world habitable for human beings. For this reason all will have to be more sincere in developing and protecting this resource," he added.

Describing the climate

change as great problem for the world, the president said the adverse impacts of the climate change are being seen in the country. Environment scientists apprehend that sea level

will rise due to increase in global warming and lowlands of the coastal countries, including Bangladesh, will go under water.

He said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already taken programmes to protect the country from the bad impact of the climate change and the government has launched efforts for making climate change strategy and action plan in this regard.

Zillur said necessary efforts have been taken to build green fence with a view to protecting the river and coastal barrages from flood and sea surges.

"I hope that the government programme for planting some four crore trees across the country will play an important role in achieving the goal," he said.

He urged the people to protect and take care of the planted trees.

The president said the tree plantation movement would continue for three months and urged the people to join the movement to build a country of greenery.

State Minister for Environment and Forest Advocate Mostafizur Rahman and State Minister for Housing and Public Works Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan were present at the inaugural function.

The president planted a tree of Amlaki on the Bangabhaban premises after inaugurating the tree plantation programme.



Sewage pipes kept on the roadside at Nayatola in the city's Maghbazar area cause immense suffering to pedestrians and commuters. The picture was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

WORLD DRUG REPORT '09 LAUNCHED

Call for more resources for prevention, treatment

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Amid an increasingly brutal struggle for a bigger slice of \$50 billion global cocaine market between Central American drug cartels, the head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has warned that legalising narcotics would be a "historic mistake."

In a call for global boost in drug treatment and crime control, UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa acknowledged that laws controlling narcotics have created a huge black market for illicit drugs that thrives on violence and corruption.

However, "a free market for drugs would unleash a drug epidemic," said Costa, as UNODC launched its 2009 World Drug Report on Wednesday in Washington, DC, according to a press release of UNODC received here from Vienna yesterday.

"Proponents of legalisation can't have it both ways," he said, adding, "Legalisation is not a magic wand that would suppress both mafias and drug abuse."

Costa stressed that attempts to remove drug-related crime by decriminalising illicit drugs, as some have suggested, would

be an "historic mistake" because of the danger narcotics pose to health.

He called for more resources for drug prevention and treatment, and stronger measures to fight drug-related crimes.

"International efforts are paying off," said Costa who launched the World Drug Report along with newly appointed Director of the US Office of National Drug Control Policy Gil Kerlikowske.

"As long as demand for drugs persists, weak countries will always be targeted by traffickers," said Costa, adding, "If Europe really wants to help Africa, it should curb its appetite for cocaine."

The new UNODC study reported that opium cultivation in Afghanistan, where 93 percent of the world's total is grown, declined by 19 percent in 2008, and Colombia, which produces half of the world's cocaine, saw an 18 percent decline in cultivation and a 28 per cent decline in production.

"The more opium is seized in Afghanistan's neighbourhood, the less heroin on the streets of Europe, and vice versa, the less heroin is consumed in the West, the more stability there will be in West Asia," said Costa who

plans to bring the message to a Group of Eight industrialised nations (G-8) ministerial conference on Afghanistan later this week in Italy.

"US President Barack Obama's administration is committed to expanding demand reduction initiatives," said Kerlikowske, adding, "Through comprehensive and effective enforcement, education, prevention, and treatment, we will be successful in reducing illicit drug use and its devastating consequences."

The report provides a number of recommendations on how to improve drug control, including the treatment of drug use as an illness.

"People who take drugs need medical help, not criminal retribution," said Costa appealing for universal access to drug treatment with the argument that people with serious drug problems provide the bulk of drug demand and treating this problem would contract the market.

He also pointed out that housing, jobs, education, public services, and recreation can make communities less vulnerable to drugs and crime.

Besides, enforcement of international agreements such as UN Conventions against organised crime and corruption would also help international drug control efforts, he added.

Grameen Veolia launches water treatment plant at Goalamari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Grameen Veolia Water Ltd. launched its first water treatment plant at Goalamari village in Daudkandi, Comilla, on Wednesday.

Health Minister Dr AFM Ruhul Haque inaugurated the plant as the chief guest. Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, chairman of Grameen Veolia Water Ltd, Subed Ali Bhuiyan MP and Antoine Frerot, CEO of Veolia Water, were present on the occasion.

The initiative has been taken following the signing of an agreement between Grameen Bank and Veolia Water, a leading water services company in the world, to provide safe water at a low cost to people living in arsenic-affected areas.

Speaking on the occasion, Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque lauded the role of Veolia Water in establishing the water treatment plant in this arsenic-affected area.

Prof Muhammad Yunus said about five crore people in different areas of the country are affected by arsenic contamination of water like in Goalamari.

From this point of view, it can be said that people of this village are lucky as they would get pure drinking water from now on, he added.

About the price of water, Prof Yunus said the price has been kept to a minimum considering the condition of consumers. Grameen Veolia works as a social business. The aim of the company is not the maximisation of profit.

He also hoped that more such plants will be established in other arsenic-affected areas in the future.

DU Day on July 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) will celebrate the 'DU Day' on July 1 amid a series of colourful programmes with the slogan 'Higher Education for Democratisation', said a press release yesterday.

The celebration programmes will begin at the Teacher Student Centre (TSC) at 9:00am.

The programmes include discussion, rally, photo exhibition, debate competition, charity football and cricket match and a colourful cultural programme.

DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique will preside over the discussion where former vice chancellors (VCs) and pro-VCs, emeritus professors and distinguished guests will speak.

There will be no classes and examinations on that day but the offices will remain open.



Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus speaks at the inaugural ceremony of the first water treatment plant of Grameen Veolia Water Ltd. at Goalamari on Wednesday. Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque inaugurated the plant as the chief guest.

Global meltdown threat to gains in AIDS response

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The global economic crisis that has forced cutbacks in the government spending also threatens efforts to mount an effective response to HIV and AIDS, according to the head of the United Nations agency coordinating fight against the epidemic.

"This crisis is a direct threat to progress in health and development and to our fragile gains in the AIDS response," Michel Sidibé told the governing board of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on

Wednesday.

In a wide-ranging 'address to the board', the agency's Executive Director Sidibé noted that almost \$14 billion was spent on AIDS last year. While calling for full funding to reach universal access to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, he said the world can no longer afford to keep AIDS in isolation.

"We must reposition UNAIDS in a crowded global health landscape. We must ensure that our future leaders stay focused on AIDS - not fatigued by it," he stated,

according to a UN report received here yesterday.

The challenge in the midst of the current crisis, said Sidibé, is not only how UNAIDS can do more with less, but how it can leverage existing resources and partnership to produce more measurable results.

In a related development, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Dr Paul De Lay and Jan Beagle as the deputy executive directors of UNAIDS. Dr De Lay will be responsible for overseeing the agency's programmatic aspects and Beagle for management and external relations.

Ban urges G8 to combat climate change

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Climate change and development top the list of challenges requiring action that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has laid out in a letter to leaders of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialised nations ahead of their upcoming summit.

In the letter, Ban asks G8 governments to take the lead on the issue of climate change by making "ambitious and firm commitments" to slash greenhouse gas emissions by 25-40 percent, the levels the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says are required on the part of industrialised countries to ward off the worst effects of global warming.

"He says that he hopes that

G8 governments will commit to a specific timetable and modalities to deliver the billions of dollars needed during the next few years to assist the poorest and most vulnerable to adapt to climate change," his spokesperson, Michele Montas, said, according to a message of UN News Centre received here yesterday.

Resources must be committed to help the poorest and most vulnerable adapt to climate change as well as to "seal the deal" on an ambitious new pact in December in Copenhagen to replace the Kyoto Protocol, whose first commitment period ends in 2012, the letter says.

This year's G8 summit will be held from July 8 to 10 in the Italian city of L'Aquila.



Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik Jote takes out a procession from Mukhtangan in the city yesterday demanding introduction of rationing system for workers as per the election pledge of the ruling Awami League.

PHOTO: STAR

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