

'Stop climate change, save Bangladesh'

Non-resident Bangladeshis observe Climate Change Global Action Day

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DR. NAZRUL ISLAM

Non-resident Bangladeshis observed September 18, 2009 as the Bangladesh Climate Change Global Action Day (BCCGAD). Initiated by Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), the global network of non-resident Bangladeshis, non-resident Bangladeshis across the world came forward on this day in defence of Bangladesh with the slogan "Stop Climate Change, Save Bangladesh!"

The main event was held in New York, at the Ralph Bunche Park, across the street from the United Nations main secretariat building, where BEN, together with Bangladesh Society New York (BSNY) and other community, professional, and voluntary organizations, held a colourful rally and submitted a Memorandum written to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon.

Dr. Tariq Banuri, Director of the Sustainable Development Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) accepted the memorandum on behalf of the UNSG. Mr. Banuri appreciated the memorandum very much and expressed the hope that the government of Bangladesh would express views along the lines of the memorandum in the UN Climate Change Summit and at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) forums. He also apprised the delegation about the latest with regard to the UN-led process to confront climate change.

The rally in New York was attended by representatives of the local Bangladeshi community, Bangladesh government, international civic movement against climate change, and international com-

munity of New York. The newly appointed Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Dr. Abdul Momen, and the Consul General of Bangladesh in New York, Mr. Shamsul Haque spoke at the rally appreciating the initiative of non-resident Bangladeshis and emphasizing the necessity of the government and the civil society working together on the issue of climate change.

The Australia chapter of BEN held two rallies, one in the capital Canberra and the other in Sydney. After handing over the memorandum to the local UN office, the participants of the Canberra rally held a discussion at the Bangladesh High Commission office and presented a copy of the memorandum to the High Commissioner. The rally in Sydney was held at Hyde Park and ended with submission of a copy of the memorandum to the local UN office.

In Japan, the local BEN Chapter organized a rally in Kitakyushu and a signature campaign covering other Japanese cities and sent the memorandum by fax to the UN Tokyo office. Similar initiatives were taken by BEN members elsewhere in the world.

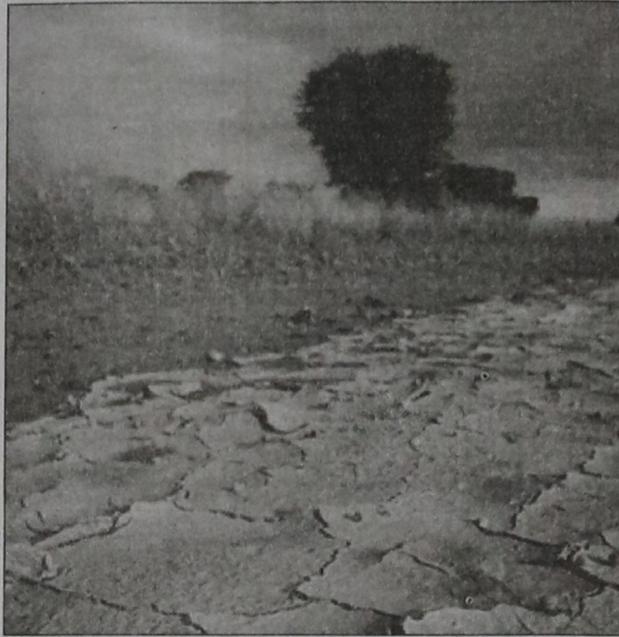
In Bangladesh itself, Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) held rally in Dhaka in support of the initiative of the non-resident Bangladeshis.

It is now widely realized that Bangladesh is going to be the worst victim of climate change, set to suffer in at least five dimensions. First, the rising sea level caused by global warming will lead to the submergence of large part of Bangladesh, rendering tens of millions of people bereft of homestead and livelihood. This effect alone will be enough to destabilize the country. Second, even the part that will escape submergence will

be affected by salinity that will intrude deep inside, causing havoc to the vegetation, crops, flora, and fauna. Third, melting Himalayan glaciers will render Bangladesh rivers dry in the winter, while excessive rainfall in summer will aggravate flooding. Fourth, the frequency, intensity, and scope of extreme weather events (such as cyclones and tidal bores) will increase, brining ruin to the country's coastal areas. Fifth, increase in the incidence of known and new diseases will exacerbate the public health situation of the country, already vulnerable to epidemics due to its tropical location.

Climate change therefore represents multiple injustices for Bangladesh. First, she is going to be its worst victim when she had virtually no role in causing it. Bangladesh's share in the cumulative GHG emissions since the industrial revolution is close to zero percent, and Bangladesh's emission accounts for only 0.1 percent of the total global GHG emission, with a per capita CO2 emission of 0.3 ton, which is only 1.5 percent of that of the United States.

Second, climate change presents a severe challenge to Bangladesh at a time when she is already burdened by the huge development challenge. Centuries of colonial and semi colonial exploitation has left Bangladesh deeply mired in poverty. Bangladesh's per capita energy consumption in 2004 was only 154 kilowatt-hours (kwh) compared to 14,240 kwh of the United States. Only 32 percent of the population has electricity, which means 96.2 million people still remain deprived of this basic facility. Bangladesh lacks the financial, technological, human, and institutional capability to confront the additional chal-



lenge posed by climate change.

The UNFCCC of 1992 and the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 have recognized the above injustices and thereby adopted the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility and respective capability," with regard to climate change action, and required developed countries to take mitigation measures and provide assistance to developing countries for necessary adaptation measures. The Bali Action Plan of 2007 has reiterated this principle.

Unfortunately, developed countries have by and large failed to meet the undertakings that came up under the Kyoto Protocol. Whereas the Kyoto Protocol postulated a reduction of emis-

sions by 5 pct relative to the 1990 level by 2012, data collected by UNFCCC show that if Economies in Transition (EIT) are excluded, the actual emission of Annex I countries actually increased by 11 percent over 1990-2004. The US, the leading contributor to cumulative GHG emission, did not even sign the Protocol.

Developed countries have also failed to provide adequate financial and technological help to developing countries to support their mitigation and adaptation activities. Many in developing countries therefore worry that procrastination on the part of developed countries with regard to climate change action is leading to a *fait accompli* under which more burden will be shifted on to the

shoulders of developing countries.

It is therefore urgent for people of climate change frontier countries, such as Bangladesh, to rise up and demand meaningful actions. As the countries negotiate the climate change undertakings for the next budget period of the Kyoto Protocol and try to reach an agreement at the 15th Conference of Parties to be held in December in Copenhagen, now is the time to voice concerns and raise demands. The Bangladesh Climate Change Global Action Day of September 18 on the eve of the UN Climate Change Summit of September 22 has therefore been a very timely initiative.

To many in the West, the climate change threat posed to Bangladesh and other developing countries is still quite abstract. The rallies under BGCCAD have now put concrete faces behind this abstract notion and thereby helped to raise the consciousness level. Second, the rallies have added force to the demand for necessary financial and technological assistance that developed countries are obligated to provide to Bangladesh and other vulnerable countries to cope with the detrimental consequences of climate change that they have already started to experience.

The organizers of the rallies have rightly noted that just as the problem of climate change was not created in a day, so it would also not be solved by one day's rallies. Instead, Bangladeshis should be ready for a protracted struggle to save their country from climate change. In the rallies of September 18, NRBs have expressed their resolve to build over time a strong movement in defence of their country. The NRB movement will be complementing in a very important way the climate change related efforts by resident Bangladeshis and the government of Bangladesh. Bangladeshis everywhere should consider it a patriotic duty to join this movement.

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The amazing tigerland of Indonesia

If the human disturbance is as such in a tiger territory it is no wonder that the conflict between tigers and people takes place. There are reports of eight human deaths by a tiger in three months. The ZSL staff, together with the local authorities, is trying to solve the problem by capturing the man-eater and releasing it inside the NP far away from human habitations.

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INDONESIA is a mega-diversity country and the largest archipelago in the world. With 17,508 islands of different sizes, the country is famous for its endemic fauna and flora. The total land area of the country is 1.9 million km², of which 73% is covered by tropical forests. The tiger is one of the flagship species of the country. Once the country had three out of eight subspecies of the tiger (Sumatran, Javan and Bali tigers), but today only the Sumatran tiger exists in the forests of Sumatra.

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL), together with the Indonesian Government and the local stakeholders, is fighting to save the Sumatran tiger in its natural habitats and I was lucky to have the opportunity to visit the tiger territories, during 09-19 March 2009,



Core area of Berbak NP— view from river.



Logging area near Berbak NP.

and exchange the knowledge and experience with my colleagues who are working over there.

We all (Sarah Christie, Tom Maddox, Dolly Priatna and myself) had gathered in a meeting in the headquarter of the Indonesian Forest Department, or 'Departemen Kehutanan' as it is locally called, in Jakarta and afterwards we flew to Jambi a province in Sumatra. From there we went to a conflict area near Berbak National Park (NP). Once the entire area was peat-swamp forest, but today the oilpalm plantations dominate the landscape. Anyone would assume that tigers would cross the oilpalm plantations, where tiger's preferred prey wild boar is quite common, but the research that was conducted by ZSL has revealed that they don't. That means the oilpalm plantations are responsible for fragmentation of tiger population, which is probably the biggest threat to tigers in Sumatra, and emphasizes the need for making corridors through the oilpalm plantations.

The forests outside Berbak NP are declining due to legal and illegal logging. In an area called Panchoran we witnessed how the organized gangs of loggers extract the timber. Since the area is swampy, they use the trolley above wooden tracks to carry the timber up to the edge of the forest where the timber is shifted to a truck and taken to the cities for sale.

If the human disturbance is as such in a tiger territory it is no wonder that the conflict between tigers and people takes place. There are reports of eight human deaths by a tiger in three months. The ZSL staff, together with the local authorities, is trying to solve the problem by capturing the man-eater and releasing it inside the NP far away from human habitations. A tigress was already captured, but probably this was not responsible for any human death since the last case of human death took place after it was captured. The tigress is now in Jambi Zoo, waiting to be released in Berbak NP. Hopefully, the man-eater will be cap-

tured successfully. Based on the locations of eight human victims it appears that the man-eater has no stable territory, which means that it is either an old or a subadult tiger. In case it is an old tiger, probably it will die soon and no more human will be killed.

In the mangroves of the Sundarbans of Bangladesh, i.e. the area where I work, many tigers have the reputation as man-eaters, and as many as 50 people die every year in tiger attacks and many more get injured. These man-eaters are not necessarily old or injured, but healthy tigers that treat humans as natural prey. Therefore, the situation in the conflict area near Berbak NP is not too

bad. Hopefully, capturing the actual man-eater and relocating it will solve the problem. This, however, is not an option for man-eaters of the Sundarbans, because there are many of them and people mainly get killed inside the forest.

After visiting the conflict area near Berbak NP we went to the core area of the NP. Having an area of 162,700 ha, this NP is situated in the southeast of Sumatra. From Jambi it was a day-long journey by car and speedboat. We spent the night in a wooden house owned by a local fisherman. We had to enter the core area (Simpang Malaka) through a river from the east coast of Sumatra. The water of the river was as dark as the black coffee due to the high proportion of organic materials. Since it is a peat-swamp forest, the forest-floor was soft and wet, and as dark as the water.

The river was beautifully margined by nipa palm (*Nypa fruticans*) and Pandanus that reminded me the Sundarbans, but the vegetation inside



Camera-trapping in Berbak NP.



Tigress captured from the conflict area near Berbak NP.

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the forest was completely different. There were very tall trees and palms, together with a lot of climbers and epiphytes, making the forest interior very dark. We were lucky to see two species of primates (long-tailed macaque and silver leaf monkey) and many species of birds (rhinoceros hornbill, southern pied hornbill, hill myna, black-and-red broadbill, ashy tailorbird, kingfishers, green pigeons, drongos, barbets, etc.). Moreover, we saw the footprints of tiger, tapir, wild boar and deer.

From the river we entered different parts of the forest in order to get the camera-traps back, which were set there three months earlier (after coming back to Bangladesh I came to know that many photos of three individual tigers were obtained from those camera-traps). The

mon and tea plantations instead of oilpalm.

During my stay in Kerinci Seblat NP I made a presentation in the NP office to share my experiences of working with tigers in Bangladesh and spent most of the time watching wildlife in the wet hill forests. The forest harbours many species of wildlife, including the tiger. The most notable sighting for me was a pair of siamang a kind of arboreal ape.

Other than this I saw a few other arboreal mammals (banded langur, giant squirrel and small squirrel) and wide variety of birds including large miltava, shiny whistling thrush, mountain tailorbird, snowy-browed flycatcher, long-tailed shrike, bulbuls, mynas, minivets, babblers, swiftlets and swallows. A treefrog was also found that I could not



Checking tiger-tracks in Berbak NP.

field-researchers also kept records of tiger pugmarks, together with the measurements. While Sarah and I took shelter in the speedboat to save us from the tropical rain, our colleagues continued venturing into the forest for bringing back the camera-traps.

On way back to Jambi we spent some time at Sungai Rambut, which is the western end of Berbak NP. The area is known to harbour 20 individual white-winged ducks -- a globally threatened species, but we had no time to search for them.

After returning to Jambi I said goodbye to my ZSL colleagues and started the 11-hour-long overnight journey to Kerinci Seblat NP the second largest NP (1,375,350 ha) and one of the few UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Indonesia. This NP is situated along the Kerinci and Seblat mountains in central Sumatra. Having an altitude of 3,805 m, Mt. Kerinci is an active volcano that continuously emits gas through its crater.

I spent three days in and around this NP watching the wildlife. The NP officials and the local researchers of Fauna & Flora International were very cooperative. Unlike Berbak NP, the surrounding areas of Kerinci Seblat NP have cinn-

identify. However, I could not find any rafflesia flower (the largest flower in the world) that I had tried hard to see.

This trip gave me an opportunity to observe and experience the attempts to solve the man-eater tiger problem, together with how the research and conservation are going on in partnership with the local stakeholders in Sumatra. Thanks to ZSL Conservation Grant that made this trip possible. Since both Indonesia and Bangladesh are Asian countries, where the tiger and its habitats are facing similar threats, it was a wise idea to arrange an exchange visit and share experiences.

Last year when Tom Maddox from Indonesia Programme had visited Bangladesh it gave me the opportunity to discuss the challenges of the project. While I was in Indonesia I experienced the mechanism of partnerships among the international organizations, the Forest Department and the local community. The way ZSL team is working over there is an example of well-organised conservation work that needs to be followed by us in Bangladesh.

Photographs by the writer

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