

## RDA to conserve 165 ponds, canals

BSS, Rajshahi

The Rajshahi Development Authority (RDA) has included 165 ponds and canals in its conservation list aimed at protecting environmental balance in the city.

RDA Town Planner Azmery Ashrafi told BSS that none would be allowed to fill up the ponds and canals according to the RDA Master Plan till 2024.

"We have taken strong step to protect the existing 165 ponds and canals in the RDA's 364.19 square kilometer area from filling," Azmery said adding that legal action would be taken against those found to be guilty in this regard.

She, however, said legal action has already been taken against three offenders while necessary process is underway against some others.

She informed that RDA has a plan for acquiring the ponds and canals in phases side by side with conserving those at

present.

Talking to BSS Superintending Engineer of Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) Ashraf Haque said there were 728 ponds and canals in the metropolis in 2000, but the figure was declined to 165 at present due to indiscriminate earth-dumping and unplanned urbanisation.

Due to abnormal declining of surface water, Engineer Ashraf said dependence on groundwater has been increasing for ensuring of supply water to the city dwellers causing unusual lowering of groundwater table for the last couple of years.

The situation becomes worse during the dry season leaving most of the hand-driven tubewell inoperative. "We have no way to conserve the surface water resources from all sorts of depletion to make the groundwater table intact," he opined.

## 32,000 posts vacant in health sector

Says DG

UNB, Dhaka

Some 32,000 posts at the different levels of the health sector in the country remained vacant, 6,500 of those for physicians, as healthcare services for the people proved shockingly inadequate.

Director General of Health Services Prof Dr Shah Monir Hossain disclosed the figures of vacancies yesterday while addressing a roundtable titled 'Tuberculosis control programme: Present context and future plan' in the city.

Health Directorate, The daily Jugantar and Brac jointly organised the discussion at Brac Centre.

Senior journalists from print and electronic media and government and NGO officials took part at the discussion.

Speaking at the function, the director general of health said the government has already taken initiative to gradually increase the manpower through giving appointment to the vacant posts. "Some 4,500 posts of doctor are vacant at the entry level alone."

About tuberculosis, he said

TB is an old disease and people could not get hundred percent free from this disease due to various circumstances. "There are some economic, nutritional and environmental causes for TB in the country."

Monir stressed involving the media people along with other government and non-government agents to successfully fight tuberculosis and other diseases across the country.

"Illiteracy is our great weakness. We can't make success in the TB programme as hardly 30 percent of patients report to the health centres concerned," he told the function.

He said the mass media could play an important role in creating awareness among the people and encouraging them through reports and programmes about the treatment and causes of tuberculosis.

Senior journalist Ataus Samad said the government should directly interact with the newspaper editors for giving focus on tuberculosis and they should be involved in combating the disease by fulfilling their commercial demand.



A big crowd of patients scramble in Pangu (Orthopaedic) Hospital in the city yesterday for treatment as doctors were on a long vacation on the occasions of Eid and Durga Puja.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Banglalink observes Int'l Coastal Clean-up Day

METRO DESK

Banglalink, a mobile phone operator in the country, celebrated the 'International Coastal Clean-up Day 2009' in Cox's Bazar sea beach on Saturday, says a press release.

The day gets celebrated on the September 19 every year through various activities in more than 90 countries.

On this day, people from various corners come together to remove trash and debris from different beaches and waterways around the world and generate awareness about the many activities that cause beach pollution.

The day has been celebrated in Bangladesh for the last two years under auspices of Banglalink in line with its yearlong beach-cleaning project.

The event began with a rally being carried out by volunteers, who then moved on to cleaning the beach.

## Ensure right to use water in Barind area

Farmers tell public hearing

BSS, Rajshahi

A large number of farmers at a public hearing here yesterday unequivocally called for undertaking a need-oriented step to ensure right to use water for drinking and irrigation purposes in the vast tract of dried Barind area.

They viewed that a large number of surface water have become derelict while the existing ones are being used for commercial purposes by the landlords forcing the poor and marginal people out of using those.

Enriching the surface water through re-excavating the derelict 'khas' (fallow) ponds and canals across the area could be the means of overcoming the crisis, they mentioned.

The farmers made these observations while addressing the 'Climate: Poverty Hearing' hosted by Agriculture Sustainable and Socio-Economic Development Organisation (ASSED) under its 'Potential of khas ponds and canals in Barind area: Sustainable rural livelihood in the face of climate change' programme on the Dubai Hat High School premises under Tanore upazila.

Panchandander UP member Zaidur Rahman opened the programme as the chief guest, saying that climate change has now caused a major concern to agriculture, environment, ecology, biodiversity, climatic patterns and even existence of the habitation and civilisation in the Barind area.

Apart from this, he said rights of poor and marginal farmers on the existing natural resources, including khas

ponds and canals, are gradually receding due to various reasons especially the climate change impacts leading to their livelihood vulnerable.

"We are very anxious over the coming drought season, so we appeal to the government for taking urgent step," Zaidur said, adding that rights on water must be ensured.

About 1,000 people, who are victims of drought, comprising farmers, fishermen and landless male and female farmers, including aborigines, from the surrounding villages attended the gathering.

The speakers revealed that there are 693 ponds and eight canals in seven unions of the upazila but most of those were derelict due to lack of proper maintenance and called for re-excavating those as early as possible.

They said importance should be given on renovating and preserving the derelict ponds and canals through re-excavation to ensure sustainable livelihood of the poor farmers.

In his address of welcome, Executive Director of ASSED Rabiul Alam said the farmers should adapt with the climate change and escape from drought and flood in particular.

A group of five judges -- social worker Rabiul Islam, freedom fighter Sirajul Islam, schoolteacher Hamidur Rahman, UP member Zaidur Rahman and female UP member Zarina Begum -- listened to the problems and gave elaborate explanations in this regard.

Victim farmers Yusuf Ali, Lokman Hossain, Zafar Ali

and Mofiz Mian, among others, took part in the plenary session.

They viewed that excessive use of groundwater through irrigation depletes groundwater table, which makes the hand-driven tubewells inoperative and the area experiences a drinking water shortage.

As part of arranging a series of climate-poverty hearing at different drought-prone areas in Rajshahi, Naogaon and other adjoining districts, Oxfam-GB under its Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihood (CSRL) programme extended necessary support to hold the farmers meeting with the slogan of "Richer nations are responsible for climate change that is depleting Bangladesh".

Because of the adverse impacts of climate change, they said extreme droughts,

abnormal lowering of groundwater, pest attacks in the crop fields and many other natural calamities have been causing huge damages in the area too.

In the closing session, they also put forward a set of 11 recommendations which included ensuring free of cost irrigation water to the poor and crop-sharers, right to access to khas ponds and canals, conservation of derelict ponds and canals, best uses of surface and rainwater water, stern action against the sellers of adulterated fertiliser and pesticides, exploring economics of rice and fish-based farming in ponds and canals, feasibility of integrated agriculture-aquaculture practices in irrigated land towards the increase in water productivity and livelihood impacts of integrated farming under diversified irrigated ecosystems.

## 'Bangla language to be enriched'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Any standard style of Bangla language is yet to be developed in the country, said a researcher at a lecture session in the city yesterday.

Prof Golam Murshid, an eminent researcher and a fellow of Bangla Academy, was speaking at the lecture titled 'Present state of Bangla language and possible future' on its premises.

He said media is playing a significant role in changing the style of Bangla language.

"Both electronic and print media are involved in changing the language. So they have to come forward to take the language on right track," he added.

Prof Murshid said Bangladesh would have to take the responsibility for enriching Bangla language.

Bangla Academy Director General Shamsuzzaman Khan said if the present anarchy in the use of Bangla language continues, it could lose its own characteristics.

## Singer finances level crossing guards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Singer Bangladesh Limited will bear financial responsibilities of three guards of Bahontoli level crossing under Mirzapur upazila in Tangail, says a press release.

To avoid accidents in level crossings, government has taken steps to involve private initiatives to manage the guard less level crossings.

Responding to the initiatives, Singer under its corporate social responsibilities is sponsoring the Bahontoli level crossing. Five most risky crossings in Tangail have been selected for private financing.

## Rab DG leaves for UK

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Director General (DG) of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Hasan Mahmud Khandaker left Dhaka last night to attend an international conference in the UK.

Hasan is scheduled to attend the four-day conference 'Terrorism, Security and Human Rights' at Wilton Park beginning from October 1 at the invitation of the UK government, says a press release.

High officials, political experts and resource persons of the United Nations, the countries of the European Union, the UK, the USA and other countries will exchange their views in the conference.



Major General Sir S.J.L. Roberts KCVO, leader of Overseas South Asia Tour Group of UK Royal College of Defence Studies, calls on Principal Staff Officer of Armed Forces Division Major General Abdul Wadud at Armed Forces Division, Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.

PHOTO: ISPR

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