

## Tk 2,523.5 cr programme to conserve biodiversity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has planned a Tk 2,523.5 crore programme to conserve the country's biodiversity with special focus on forests, wildlife, coastal, hill and agro ecosystems, much of which is on the wane.

The ten-year plan has been revealed in the "Biodiversity National Assessment and Programme of Action (BNAPA 2020)" prepared by the Department of Environment.

State Minister for Environment and Forest Dr Hasan Mahmud officially unveiled the document at a ceremony in the city's LGED auditorium yesterday.

BNAPA 2020 has been prepared to fulfil Bangladesh's commitment towards the implementation of UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

According to the document, there has been degradation of biodiversity because of enormous population pressure on natural resources like soil, water and forest ecosystems.

It said, forest coverage in the Madhupur Tract was 8,875 hectares in 1967 while it came down to 3879 hect-

ares in 2007. Besides, human settlements with vegetation there was on 545 hectares in 1989, which increased to 1165 hectares in 2007.

The general trends in the Sundarbans indicate the reduction of important tree species like the Sundari and Gewa and increase of smaller tree species.

"Species are disappearing at a rate of 100 to 1,000 times higher than normal and the threat like global climate change will significantly accelerate biodiversity loss," said Dr Mahmud while addressing the ceremony as the chief guest.

So far a conception remained dominant that everything around people is meant for human consumption. However, the idea is changing nowadays, meaning that human beings have to take care of Mother Nature. "Otherwise, we human beings will be endangered species," said the state minister.

According to official statistics, Bangladesh has 8.44 million hectares of cultivable land, but agriculturists persistently said unplanned urbanisation and industrialisation are eating up farmland.

Referring to the rapid decline of agri-

cultural land, Dr Mahmud said the government mulls framing a rule to make it binding for anyone building structures, including houses, in the villages must take prior permission from the authorities concerned.

He also said farmers and scientists are doing enough to feed the increasing population, but if there is shortage of cultivable land, there will be no way left to produce crops and help the people survive.

"It is a matter of pride that Bangladesh is one of the first three countries that prepared this document, but such plans can bring no results unless these are implemented effectively," said Dr Mahmud.

Biodiversity target national assessment Project Director Solaiman Haider presented the keynote on BNAPA 2020.

UNDP Acting Country Representative Aminul Islam, Department of Environment Director General Monowar Islam, ncd, its Additional Director General Abdus Sobhan, Chief Conservator of Forests Abdul Mutalib also addressed the programme.



Azam Khan, the Pop Guru suffering from oral cancer, leaves his residence yesterday to fly to Singapore hoping for better treatment. PHOTO: STAR

## Azam Khan leaves for Singapore for better treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixty-one-year old pop legend and freedom fighter Azam Khan who had been suffering from oral cancer left for Singapore yesterday for better treatment.

He expects to return soon to the captivating world of music and mesmerise his fans and audience once again.

Azam Khan reached Hazrat Shahjalal (R) International Airport at 10:55am. Travellers, onlookers and the security guards in front of gate-1 at Terminal-1 started buzzing as the pop guru stepped out of the sports utility vehicle (SUV).

Clad in a blue t-shirt and grey trousers, the singer and composer showed no telltale signs of ailment as he waved smilingly towards the throng of excited fans surrounding him.

With granddaughter Fairuz in his lap, Azam spared a few minutes to talk to the journalists and fans.

"I never wanted to talk about my problem. But now, I feel overwhelmed with the love showered by my children, friends, relatives, fans and media organisations," he said.

"Pray for me so that I can return safely to my country and start working again," Azam said.

He has ongoing recording of two albums, he told The Daily Star, adding, "I hope to release my albums by Eid-ul-Fitr."

Azam's son Ridoy Khan and Cool Exposure Executive Director Ershadul Haque Tinku also accompanied him on his journey. His flight left around 1:00pm.

As he was talking to the newsmen, many people in the terminal gathered to see the imaginative composer and the security guards were seen whistling to lessen the gathering.

Azam Khan, who inspired people to fight against the Pakistani regime with his music, said the thing he wanted most was to see his countrymen living with their heads held high.

Expressing his gratitude, he said, "I am 61 and I have nothing to take from the world. Now it's my time to give back something good to my country," he said.

Family members and well wishers were also present during his departure. Azam Khan will be treated in Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and several media agencies provided financial assistance for his treatment.

## 'Plant trees to protect ecology'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) launched a countrywide tree plantation programme yesterday to protect environment and maintain ecological balance.

Director General of Bangladesh Ansar and VDP Maj Gen Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy inaugurated the programme at its headquarter in the city yesterday, said a press release.

The Ansar-VDP members will plant 1.77 crore trees across the country under this initiative.

Senior officials of the two forces, including Brig Gen ABM Tayeful Islam were present at the inaugural ceremony.

## SAARC MINISTERS' MEET NEXT MONTH

# Nepal meet to discuss conservation of tigers

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) will hold a meeting of environment and foreign ministers in Nepal next month ahead of the heads of state and government's global Tiger Summit scheduled for September in Russia.

Sources said the Nepali government will host the ministerial meeting in Kathmandu in the third week of August to discuss issues related to conservation of tigers in the Saarc region before those figure at the summit.

Environment and forest ministers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan will discuss the issue of endangered big cats and provide inputs for the global summit.

Heads of state and government from 13 "tiger range countries" will attend the global summit in St Petersburg, Russia, from September 15 to 18.

The countries include Bangladesh, China, India, Russia, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

The World Bank is providing financial support for tiger conservation in the world.

Meanwhile, representatives from the 13 countries yesterday drew up a draft rescue declaration in Bali, Indonesia, in a bid to save tigers from extinction.

The declaration, which will be signed by the heads of state and government at the Tiger Summit, aims to double the number of wild tigers across their range by 2022.

At the three-day Bali meeting that ended yesterday, the representatives expressed their commitment to do everything possible to effectively manage, preserve, protect and enhance habitats of tigers. They also pledged to work collaboratively to eradicate poaching, smuggling and illegal trade of tigers, their body parts and derivatives.

Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan are habitats for about 70 percent of the world's tigers. The tiger population has declined to only 3,200 from 100,000 in a century.

## BOMB ATTACK ON RAB

# 50 yrs' RI for 2 JMB men

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced two activists of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to 50 years' rigorous imprisonment each for a bomb attack on the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members in Mymensingh in December, 2005.

Judge Mohammad Rezaul Islam of Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 handed down the verdict as the charges brought against the JMB members were proved beyond doubt.

Both the convicts -- Salauddin alias Salehin and Asaduzzaman Panir -- were present in the dock when the judge pronounced the judgment.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence had completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 11 prosecution witnesses.

According to the prosecution, Salehin and Panir launched the bomb attack on Rab personnel when they raided a house of a JMB activist in Mymensingh Sadar upazila to arrest the then chief of the banned militant outfit Shaikh Abdur Rahman on December 18, 2005.

The elite force members, however, failed to arrest him on that day.

Later, Shaikh Abdur Rahman was arrested and executed along with five other JMB kingpins for killing two judges in Jhalakathi district on November 14, 2005.



Jamaat leaders Muhammad Kamaruzzaman and Abdul Quader Molla are being produced before a CMM's court in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1) PHOTO: STAR

## AGRI RESEARCH INSTS

# JS body suggests filling up vacant posts

BSS, Dhaka

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture Ministry yesterday recommended filling up the vacant posts of agriculture research institutions to accelerate their research activities.

The recommendation was made at the committee's 14th meeting held at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban with committee Chairman Shaikat Momen Shajahan, said a JS release.

The committee members -- Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Khandaker Abdul Baten, Abul Kalam Azad, Shah Zikrul Ahmed, Abdul Mannan and Noorjahan Begum -- attended the meeting.

Introduction of agriculture research service, stimulus for researchers, development of human resource and infrastructure and more allocations for research works were also proposed.

The committee decided to inform the

prime minister about problems in implementing 'one house, one farm' project.

It urged the finance ministry to take steps for formation of guidelines and implementation of crop insurance.

The committee members proposed to raise the manpower of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation from 2088 to 3044.

Agriculture Secretary CQK Mushtaq Ahmed and other senior officials were also present at the meeting.

## Call to speed up war crimes trial

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of student movement against military dictator during 1982-1990 have demanded that the government expedite the trial of war criminals of the Liberation War in 1971.

In a statement on Tuesday, they said the government had to allocate adequate money and appoint sufficient number of lawyers and investigation officers for smooth activities of the war crimes tribunal.

The leaders said Jamaat-Shibir clique and other war criminal groups became active and were hatching conspiracies to foil the trial process.

Moreover, a powerful quarter even within the state apparatus was doing many destructive activities to spoil the move,

they claimed.

The student leaders urged the government to keep cautious adding that all political and social groups with spirit of the freedom war of Bangladesh need to come forward to wage a mass movement against the conspiracies.

They also demanded arrests of people involved in crimes against humanity during '71 war by preparing a list.

The signatories to the statement include Akhtaruzzaman, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Fazle Hossain Badshah, Muniruddin Ahmed, Khandakar Mohammad Faruq, Mizanur Rahman Manu, Anwarul Haque and Aatur Rahman Dhali.

## DCC to dispose of waste of three DU halls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) yesterday took the responsibility of waste disposal management function of three student dormitories of the Dhaka University (DU), says a press release.

The DCC will set 100 containers at the Jagannath Hall, Shamsunnahar Hall, Rokeya Hall and Faizunnesa hostel. The new compactors will collect the waste from 1:00pm to 2:00pm everyday from the dormitories.

DU Vice chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique yesterday inaugurated the new waste disposal management function at the Teacher-Student Center (TSC) on campus.

Speaking as the chief guest, Prof Siddique urged all to transform the cleanliness campaign into a social movement to make the society and environment neat and clean.

Addressing the inaugural session, DCC Chief of Waste Disposal Management Capt Bipon Kumar Saha informed that a total of 1.2 crore permanent and 30 lakh mobile city-dwellers produce 4,200 tonnes of waste everyday. The DCC clears 55 percent of that and 'Tokais' collect the rest.



Readers visit a book festival organised by Oitihya Publication House at the Public Library in the city yesterday. PHOTO: STAR