



(From left) Regional Director Theofil Nokrek of Caritas-Mymensingh, Land Minister Rezaul Karim Hira, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Advocate Pramod Mankin and Prof Mesbah Kamal at a discussion titled "Khas land for indigenous people and amendment of the Vested Property Act" jointly organised by Caritas-Mymensingh Region and Manusher Jonno Foundation at Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday.

# No move yet to implement CHT deal

## Speakers blame govt for following previous land laws

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No government order has been passed in 13 years to realise many terms of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Agreement signed in 1997, a discussion was told yesterday.

Though the agreement nullifies many land related laws in the CHT region, local government authorities there are following previous laws because they did not receive any government order in the matter, the speakers said.

The speakers demanded effective and sincere implementation of CHT Peace Agreement, changes in Vested Property Act and government intervention on the matter.

The discussion titled "Khas land for indigenous people and amendment of the Vested Property Act" was jointly organised by Caritas-

Mymensingh Region and Manusher Jonno Foundation at Jatiya Press Club in the city.

Vested Property Act, namely Enemy Property Act before the War of Liberation, was enacted for the government to take over land left behind by Hindu citizens during the 1947 partition and the India-Pakistan war in 1965.

The law still retains the fundamental ability to deprive a Bangladeshi citizen of his/her property simply by declaring them as enemies of the state.

"As long as the Vested Property Act is not amended, Bangladesh will remain a non-secular state," said Prof Mesbah Kamal, general secretary of National Coalition for Indigenous People.

Even though debate on the rights of indigenous people is ongoing for many years, very little has been done, said Shaheen Anam, executive

director of Manusher Jonno Foundation.

Giving collective ownership of land to an indigenous community could be a solution to the existing land problems in the CHT region, said Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum.

However, self-governed indigenous communities could also be a permanent solution to most of their problems, he added.

Speaking as the chief guest, Land Minister Rezaul Karim Hira assured of solving land related problems faced by indigenous people.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs Advocate Pramod Mankin was present as the special guest while Zubaida Nasreen of anthropology department of Dhaka University and Hindu community leader Advocate Rana Das Gupta also spoke.

# Plan to restrict tobacco farming

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will impose restriction on tobacco cultivation to minimise its negative impact on the environment and public health, said a ruling party lawmaker yesterday.

"We should think of the economic part of tobacco farming, as it brings foreign currency," said Shawkat Momen Shahjahan, president of the parliamentary body on agriculture.

"So, restriction will be imposed rather than banning of its cultivation."

Shahjahan was speaking as the chief guest at the 4th technical session of two-day international workshop on "Impact of tobacco cultivation and policy advocacy for shifting to food and other agricultural crops" yesterday.

The workshop was organised by a non-government organisation, Ubinig, at Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban in Dhaka University (DU).

Shahjahan said the government will take necessary initiative so that tobacco cultivation does not affect environment, public health, and food production.

He also stressed the need for mass campaign to motivate the people to reduce domestic consumption of tobacco.

Shujan President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad urged the government to form an all-party parliamentary caucus on anti-tobacco campaign.

"Tobacco cultivation can earn revenue, but it directly affects public health and the environment. We demand banning of its cultivation completely in the country for food security and environment."

It would not be good for the nation to allow tobacco cultivation more in the excuse for revenue, he said.

Addressing the concluding session, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Mizanur Rahman

blamed the policy makers for patronising multinational companies to create opportunity for them to expand tobacco cultivation.

Both cultivation and marketing of tobacco are violation of human rights, and the government should take the responsibility to protect the rights, he said.

Bangladesh Bank Economic Adviser Akhtar Uz Zaman said the government has to spend US\$ 2-3 billion for food import after any natural calamity. This cost can be reduced if food grains are cultivated in the lands used for tobacco farming, he said.

Ubinig managing director Farhad Mazhar chaired the concluding session. Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) Director General Rafiqul Islam Mondol, and representatives from different local and foreign organisations, also addressed the event.



Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson offers ziarat at holy Raoza Mobarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) in Madinah of Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

# Khaleda to perform Umrah today

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, who is now in Saudi Arabia, will perform holy Umrah early today.

She offered ziarat at holy Raoza Mobarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) in Madinah at 11:00pm (Saudi local time) on Tuesday.

Khaleda prayed for peace, progress and prosperity of Bangladesh and its people as well as unity and solidarity of the Muslim Ummah.

She also offer her Asr, Maghrib and Esha prayers at Masjid-e-Nabubi.

She left Madinah for Makkah via Jeddah yesterday at 1:00am (Saudi time), her press secretary Maruf Kamal Khan told UNB over phone.

The BNP chairperson is expected to return home on April 3.

Khaleda left Dhaka for Riyadh on March 20 at the invitation of Saudi government for her medical treatment.

# 17,000 edn institutions to get book on war documents today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government provides today a 15-volume book on the liberation war documents to about 17,000 schools and colleges each at no cost to help students learn true history of the war.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid will give out the book "Bangladesher Swadhinata Juddho Dalilpatra" edited by Hasan Hafizur Rahman to the teachers of the institutions.

The distribution ceremony will be held on Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex ground in Dhanmondi of the city at 10:00am today.

This year 16,666 institutions, both private and public, will receive the book, said an official of the education ministry wishing anonymity.

The document-rich book would be used as a reference tool for the students and would help them learn the real history of the War of Liberation in 1971, he said.

The initiative was first taken during the tenure of the last caretaker government when some 2,317 sets of the book were distributed, he added.

The official also said the ministry has a plan to distribute the book to 17,000 schools and colleges more next year. Last year 898 institutions received the book, he added.

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