

NEWS IN *brief*

Brac to award journalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac, a development organisation, will award journalists who have contributed to strengthen the national tuberculosis control programme through their reporting, say a press release.

Interested journalists from seven divisions of Bangladesh have been invited to send their reports on tuberculosis published or broadcast between January 2008 and December 2011 with two copies of photograph by March 15.

Detail information is available at www.brac.net/tb-media-award-2012.

Fire guts 16 Ctg houses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A fire gutted 16 houses, causing around Tk 10 lakh worth damage, at Akil Pur under Sitakunda Police Station in Chittagong yesterday, said fire brigade sources.

The fire originated from an electric short circuit in one of the houses around 2:55am. Three fire fighting units from Kumira and Sitakunda fire stations rushed to the spot and doused the flames around 5:30am, they added.



Bangladesh Paribesh Bachao Andolon forms a human chain in front of Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University yesterday protesting India's National River Linking Project and Tipaimukh Dam.

PHOTO: STAR

'Announce 8th wage board by March 10'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing discontent over delay despite the prime minister's directive, journalists and media employees yesterday demanded announcement of the eighth wage board by March 10.

The new wage board was supposed to be announced by the first week of February according to a press release issued by the information ministry, they said.

The government has already appointed the chairman of the eighth wage board, yet the gazette was not published in time, they said.

In a statement, Sangbadik-Sramik-Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SSKOP) said the information minister had breached pledges made to journalists, media employees, and pressworkers.

The parishad will launch protest programme unitedly demanding resignation of the information minister and formation of the eighth wage board if further delay happens, it said.

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad told journalist leaders about the February deadline when a delegation of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) called on him at his office on January 22.

The statement was signed by co-conveners of the parishad Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Ruhul Amin Gazi, Alamgir Hossain Khan, member secretary Matiur Rahman Talukder, joint member secretary Abdul Jalil Bhuyian, Shawkat Mahmud, and members Md Khairul Islam, Md Kamal Uddin, Omar Faruk, Abdus Shahid, Shaban Mahmud, and Md Baker Hossain.

WATER MANAGEMENT IN PVT HAND 'Govt move will deprive citizens of basic right'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though the government, in a draft water law, recognises that access to safe water is a basic right, its intention of handing over services like drinking water supply and sewage management to profit-seeking private sectors will deprive citizens of this right.

The comment came at a discussion organised by Bangladesh Water Rights Forum on the draft Bangladesh Water Law 2012, being formulated under Bangladesh Water Policy 1999, at Dhaka Reporters Unity in the city.

The Ministry of Water Resources formulated and uploaded a part of the draft on its official website in the last week of February for comments within March 8, 2012.

Sub-section 1 of Section 16 of the draft law says that the government will formulate rules and regulations to control private sectors involved in supplying drinking water and managing the sewage system.

However, it does not go into the details of the rules and regulations, said the discussants.

Similarly, the draft law mentions the names of four authorities, including National Water Resources Council, Executive Committee of the National Water Resources Council, Tribunal and Appellate Authorities.

But it has neither finalised the authority nor the activities of these four bodies. It only mentions that those would be formulated later by the government and published through gazettes, they added.

Though the draft recognises the right to water as a fundamental right, it has not ensured people's "traditional rights" to water and did not take their perceptions on certain water related issues into cognisance, said the speakers.

Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association Chief Executive Syeda Rizwana Hasan was the keynote speaker at the discussion.

She said the draft should specifically mention the minimum amount of water a citizen can avail.

It should also mention that the aim of water management is to ensure the rights of the present population over water and make sure that water is available for the next generation, she added.

She criticised Section 18 of the draft for providing the ministry with the authority to declare an area as a special zone based on its economic activity without making it mandatory to take people's opinion first.

Such provisions will raise questions on the objectivity of the law, creating apprehension in people's minds over whether any vested group is behind any declaration, she added.

Section 25 of the draft too could raise controversies as it is about filling up one or more branches of a river to reclaim land, she said.

Shamsul Huda, executive director of Association for Land Rights (ALRD), moderated the session.

Zakir Hossain, chief executive of Nagorik Udyog, Rezanur Rahman, representative of Nijera Kori, and Advocate Rafiqul Alam of Incidin Bangladesh also spoke at the programme.

'Hacking, slashing' left constitution's essence in ruins, say speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said the country's constitution had been "hacked and slashed" so many times over the years that its very essence now remains in ruins.

What was meant to be a secular constitution with democracy as its core principle has now become a tool for political games, they added.

A book "Muktijuddher Dalil Londobhondo Ebong Otopor" (Documents of the Liberation War in disarray and afterwards) was unveiled at the discussion in Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Prof Abu Sayeed, an Awami League (AL) leader and former

minister, has authored the book.

The speakers said the "Documents of the Liberation War" in the book's title refer to the country's constitution.

"Disarray is a very soft word for what has been done to the constitution. It needs a stronger and stricter word," said noted columnist and writer Syed Abul Maqsood.

He observed that the way the constitution was treated reflects the country's present situation, with bureaucrats running the government instead of the politicians "who earned the country's liberation".

"The disarray happened at two levels, one at the constitutional

level and the other at the legal level," said Dr Akbar Ali Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government.

He said the country must take lessons from its past mistakes instead of repeating them.

Senior AL leader Tofail Ahmed said the constitution, the country's first document, was accurate.

"It was a praiseworthy document and if it was messed up, it was done after 1975," he said, adding that the present government was trying to reinstate the constitution to its original state of 1972.

"We have come a long way in that regard. But it is easier said than done," he said.

The problem lies in the way leadership was created, said Abdul Jalil, a veteran AL leader, adding that in a democracy leaders are created or rise through a continuous process, something that is not being followed in the country at present.

Noted journalist Mizanur Rahman Khan moderated the programme.

National Human Rights Commission Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman, noted writer and historian Prof Syed Anwar Hossain and former AL organising secretary Mahmudur Rahman Manna also spoke at the discussion.

Withdraw cases against Madhupur Adivasis

Speakers urge government

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday urged the government to withdraw hundreds of cases filed by the forest department against the indigenous people of Madhupur forest in Tangail.

They claimed that most of the cases were fabricated and filed to save locally powerful people like timber traders, brick kiln owners, and corrupt officials of the department.

A study shows the forest department has filed 314 cases against the Adivasis on allegations of illegal timber trading and massive deforestation over the last 30 years (1980 to 2010).

Due to the costs of running cases, the economic condition of the victims—Garos, Koch, and Barmans—living in Madhupur forest since time immemorial, has been deteriorating.

The Adivasis have to sell assets, cut back on household expenditures, take loans from NGOs, and mortgage lands to run cases, the study says.

"Almost every forest official is corrupt and has links with timber traders. The officials sue the Adivasis, as they (officials) have to find some scapegoats to pin the blame", said Ojoy A Mri, chairman of Adivasi Cultural Development Forum.

Dr Monirul Islam Khan, a professor at Dhaka University, presented the findings of the study, "Madhupur Forest, State and the Lawsuits: A Case of Ethnic Marginalisation in Bangladesh". Research and Development Collective (RDC) and Oxfam, two NGOs that organised the seminar at Cirdap auditorium in the city, conducted the study.

Dr Monirul said the victims used to flee houses and live in the jungle for months to avoid arrest and hassles of attending court and frequent pressure from creditors.

"I think, these cases have been filed to drive the indigenous people out of their land, as we see that the forest department never filed any case against timber traders and brick kiln owners who are responsible for deforestation".

Prof Monirul also urged the government to legalise the residential rights of the Adivasis in Madhupur forest area to protect the forest.

'Mar 12 rally a bid to save war criminals'

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League Acting General Secretary Mahub-ul-Alam Hanif yesterday termed BNP's March 12 mass rally a programme to save the war criminals and urged Khaleda Zia to cancel it.

"Withdraw the March 12 mass rally, otherwise the people will face the programme jointly to give you a good lesson", the ruling party leader warned.


"If you [Khaleda] have any respect for the martyrs and the spirit of the independence, stop supporting the war criminals".

Khaleda Zia has proved herself that she has no faith in the spirit of Liberation War, the AL leader said. "Khaleda Zia has betrayed the cause of 30 lakh martyrs in the war".

He urged AL leaders and activists to stay on the streets till the completion of the trial of the war criminals who are responsible for committing crimes against humanity in 1971.

Hanif made the remarks at a joint meeting organised by Awami Swechchasebok League (ASL) at the Bangabandhu Avenue Office yesterday.

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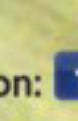
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WEATHER TODAY

Rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely to occur at one or two places over Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Dhaka and Faridpur with moderately heavy falls at places over Chittagong division.

Weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country in 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country during late night till morning, Met Office said.

Night temperature may rise slightly and day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:03pm today and rises at 6:16am tomorrow.
Country's highest temperature 32.6 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and lowest 13.5 degrees Celsius at Rajshahi and Ishwardi.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max:	Min:	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	31.2	18.8	61	22
Chittagong	26.7	19.3	94	81
Rajshahi	32.6	13.5	67	32
Rangpur	29.4	13.7	66	35
Khulna	31.2	20.5	58	50
Barisal	30.0	21.3	81	63
Sylhet	31.5	16.9	72	30
Cox's Bazar	22.5	19.0	96	95