



Barisal Shilpakala Academy, the only government establishment in the city to lead cultural endeavours of the residents, having pisciculture instead, in front of its dilapidated building in a makeshift pond, with an adjacent vegetable patch, maintained by the security guard. The academy has only three staff, who have nothing better to do. The building gets flooded every monsoon, while the academy has been waiting for an executive council election since 1996.

PHOTO: ARIFUR RAHMAN

ACC, PIB award five journos for exposing corruption

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five journalists from the print and electronic media yesterday received a media award for exposing corruption in different sectors of the government through investigative reporting.

Each of them received a crest and a certificate, and will leave for Germany today to join the three-day "Global Media Forum" organised by Deutsche Welle.

The media award is part of the national project, "Justice Reform and Corruption Prevention", funded by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

PLAIN LAND ADIVASIS

Create separate land commission for them

Experts, indigenous leaders urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts and indigenous leaders yesterday recommended creation of a separate land commission for the plain land adivasis to resolve the long-standing land disputes, which are threatening their existence.

They also laid emphasis on strengthening the indigenous organisations and their leadership to defend the interests of the minorities.

They were speaking at a seminar, "Land Rights of the Plain Land's Indigenous People, Problems and Deprivation", at the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

The Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) organised the seminar to reveal the findings of a recent research on the rights and problems of indigenous people living in four districts--Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Tangail.

Abul Hossain, who conducted the research with Parag Richil, said they found weakness in indigenous organisations and

leadership, non-recognition of the customary land laws, and false cases implicating the community people as the main reasons for land problems.

The study also revealed a lack of responsible behaviours from the local administration towards the indigenous people, he said, adding that a sense of deprivation and insecurity was intensifying among the people, and some were silently leaving the country.

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of the Indigenous People's Forum, said the land commission for plain land adivasis should comprise members of the communities. He demanded a national policy for all indigenous communities and a separate ministry for the indigenous people in plain lands.

Meshbah Kamal, a Dhaka University history professor, who is working for adivasis, said there should be a law banning transfer of land from indigenous people to non-indigenous people. He also demanded more budgetary allocation for these people.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Participants at a discussion yesterday on the government initiative to set up a university and a medical college in Rangamati. The programme was organised by Chittagong Hill Tracts Citizens' Committee and Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum (BIPF) in the capital's The Daily Star Centre.

PHOTO: STAR

Govt out to establish

FROM PAGE 3

Paper Mill, Ghaghra Rayon Mill and other industrial units in the CHT."

In 1997, the government signed the peace accord with indigenous leaders to maintain the region's original features, establish autonomy, rehabilitate the refugees and settle land disputes, but over the last 17 years, it has moved away from its position.

"If the government was really sincere about promoting education among hill people, it would have consulted the CHT regional and district councils for setting up the educational institutions," said Dewan.

Speakers said quality at the education institutions in CHT was quite low, and that there were huge teacher crises. Many CHT villages have no primary schools, so many students cannot eventually qualify to fill the admission quota in public universities, they said.

Amid this situation, the adivasis believe the university and medical college will bring no good for them.

"We're not against the university and medical college, but we want the government to ensure quality at existing educational institutions first," said Ushatan Talukder, MP of Rangamati.

He said the adivasis were already in trouble, and if 20 to 25 thousand students from the mainland studied in Rangamati, they would control politics in that area.

"There will be no shortage of people for instigation...so there are risks of ethnic clashes," Ushatan said, urging implementation of the peace accord before setting up any university or college.

"We'll not endorse any project that creates the foundation for our extinction," said Gautam Dewan.

Columnist Syed Abul Maksud urged formation of an expert committee, comprising university teachers and CHT representatives, for making recommendations on establishing the university and medical college.

"Otherwise, the initiative would make the situation complicated," he said.

N'ganj journos condemn

FROM PAGE 4

The statement quoted Shamim as saying, "Journalists are dogs. In our childhood, the people who gained wealth used to keep pet dogs...Later, the people who grew richer started to have media. These [media] are Alsatian dogs."

Shamim made the comments while talking to several journalists on Thursday, and the Bangla daily Prothom Alo published his remarks on Saturday, it said.

Fire guts 160 shanties in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No fewer than 160 shanties of a slum in the capital's Mirpur were gutted in a devastating fire yesterday.

The fire broke out around 11:45am, when most of the working class inhabitants of the slum were out at work. Thus no lives were lost.

Since most of them were not around, very little possessions could be saved.

Rahela Begum, 28, broke down in tears in front of the flames after having lost her painstakingly built home.

"My biggest regret is having lost a pair of gold earrings I had made for my ten-year-old daughter. I am a garment worker living in the city. My daughter lives in the village with my mother. It took me a year to save the money needed to buy the earrings. I got them back from the jeweller just yesterday and was hoping to give it to her in the upcoming Eid," said a sobbing Rahela.

The shanties, built crudely on stilts above a sewerage pit of a lake called Jhutpatti, were constructed of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

KURMITOLA KILLINGS

Biharis give up on hope for justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the investigation into the Kurmitola Camp killing making little headway, the dejected Biharis gave up their movement yesterday afternoon, saying they had waited for two weeks with the hope for justice but not a single perpetrator had been arrested in the meantime.

"We give up...Now we wait for the final Day of Judgment after death where we will get justice for the 10 lives taken," said Shawkat Hossain Pachu, general secretary of the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee's Kurmitola camp unit.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

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