

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY-2016 Greens again call for raising awareness for conservation

The World Environment Day-2016 was observed in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world yesterday with a focus on creating awareness about protecting national resources, including the wildlife and forests.

The United Nations set this year's slogan "Go Wild for Life." The theme carries the message of a fight against the illegal wildlife trade, which not only contributes to the extinction of biodiversity, but also threatens the survival of elephants, rhinos and tigers, among many other species.

Government and non-government organisations in the country organised different programmes including colourful procession, rally, painting exhibition, essay writing competition among juveniles and children and open discussion, in the Dhaka city and beyond, marking the day.

Green activists at a discussion held by Poribesh Bachao Andolon (Poba) at its office in the capital, underscored the need for protecting forests to ensure safe habitats for wildlife as well as a sustainable environment in the country.

They said the country's forests were gradually dwindling thanks to the unchecked deforestation and rapid growth of population and its pressure on them.

Addressing a World Environment Day programme at Independent University, Bangladesh, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat laid emphasis on taking joint initiatives involving the young generation to

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Majority of crops into which the paddy growers had painstakingly been putting backbreaking efforts hoping for a bumper harvest in the haor (swamp) region of Sylhet, submerged into water due to the recent floods caused by heavy rain for almost a month there. The farmers tried their best to salvage as much submerged paddy as possible, but they had no place at home to store it, as the homes were under water too. So they kept the crop out in the open on any dry space they found on the banks of the haors. And most of it got rotten. As the rain subsided in the last few days they are desperately trying to salvage whatever little is left unrotten. But the hope is very slim for thousands of households. The photo was taken yesterday at Shimul Kandi, on the outskirts of Sylhet city. PHOTO: SHEKH NASIR

JATRABARI ARSON CASE Hearing on charge framing against Khaleda July 18

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday fixed July 18 for hearing on charge framing against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and 37 others in a case filed for an arson attack on a passenger bus in the capital's Jatrabari last year.

Judge Kamrul Hossain Mollah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order.

The court also transferred the case to the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka for its quick disposal.

Khaleda could not appear before it yesterday due to her "physical illness".

Earlier on March 30, the same court accepted the charges against Khaleda and 37 others and issued arrest warrants against Khaleda and 27 others as they did not secure bail from any courts.

Of the accused, Khaleda and nine others are now on bail while six including barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah, Shawkat Mahmud and Tanvir Ahmed Robin, son of former BNP lawmaker from Demra in Dhaka Salauddin Ahmed, are now in jail.

And 22 others, including BNP leaders Salauddin Ahmed (now in jail in India), Barkatullah Bulu, Khaleda's special assistant Shimul Biswas and press secretary Maruf Kamal Khan are absconding.

Detectives on May 19 last year pressed charges against Khaleda and 37 others, mostly her party men, for allegedly carrying out subversive activities through a petrol bomb attack on the bus on January 23, 2015.

One person was killed and 30 others were injured in the attack during the BNP-led 20-party alliance's blockade.

Evidence Act too chaste for prosecuting rapists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"Licentious", "hired" or "unchaste" women, prostitutes, or women used to sexual relations cannot be raped, shows a report analysing judgements of cases, which took Section 155 (4) of the Evidence Act 1872 into consideration.

The report titled "Sotirai Kebol Dhorson Hoi" (Only the Chaste are Raped) showed what rape survivors, seeking justice, experience because of this section.

Fatama Sultana Suvra, assistant professor of anthropology, Jagannath University, prepared the report based on oral history and case analysis.

The findings show that a rape

survivor's alleged character is taken into consideration at courts, and it affects the verdict.

Any suggestion that the victim is of "easy virtue" (sexually promiscuous behaviours or habits) may result in an acquittal of the defendant even if the court has found that non-consensual intercourse occurred, found the study.

The report, published by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), was launched yesterday at Bangla Academy.

It recommended that Section 155 (4), which allows consideration of a woman's character constructed from her romantic or sexual history, must be repealed.

In preparing the report, the researcher went through documents of about 300 rape cases recorded by BLAST between 2000 and 2010 and talked to 15 rape victims, five doctors, five lawyers, three retired judges and five rights activists and five accused of rape cases.

Section 155 (4) reads, "When a man is prosecuted for rape or an attempt to ravish it, it may be shown that the prosecutrix (victim) was of generally immoral character."

In one judgment, presented in the report, where all seven accused of gang raping a 13-year-old girl were acquitted, the court took into consideration

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Country sees 10 lakh unwanted births a year

REVEALS ANALYSIS OF BANGLADESH DEMOGRAPHIC HEALTH SURVEY 2014

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly 10 lakh children born annually in Bangladesh are unwanted due to a lack of family planning services and contraceptives, says a new analysis on the Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey (BDHS) 2014.

"Here unwanted birth means either the parents didn't want the child in that time or never," said Karar Zunaid Ahsan, senior monitoring and evaluation adviser at the programme management and monitoring unit of the health ministry.

According to the BDHS 2014, the fertility rate in Bangladesh is 2.3 children per woman, and it has been stagnant since 2011,

becoming a cause of concern.

If the present rate continues, Bangladesh may not achieve the goal of reducing the fertility rate to 1.7 children per woman by 2021 as per the commitment made to the Global Partnership on Family Planning 2020, Zunaid said.

"In that case, our population by 2050 will cross 20 crore," he told a workshop, organised by the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) and Bangladesh Health Reporters Forum (BHRF) with support from USAID at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laying the foundation stone of Bangladesh Chancery Building in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on Saturday. She said the Bangladesh government would also construct own consulate in Jeddah to provide improved services to the expatriate Bangladeshis living there. PHOTO: BSS

SC upholds Shakila Farjana's bail in terror financing case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court today upheld the High Court order that had granted bail to lawyer Shakila Farjana in two cases filed over her alleged involvement in financing a terrorist outfit.

An Appellate Division bench of the SC headed by Chief Justice SK Sinha dismissed two petitions filed by the government challenging the HC orders of bail.

There is no legal bar to Shakila's release from Chittagong jail following the SC orders, her lawyer Sagir Hossain Leon told The Daily Star.

Earlier on February 22, the HC granted bail to SC

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WAR CRIMES TRIAL OF KISHOREGANJ 'RAZAKARS' First PW links one to killing of 35 Hindus

SAYS HE ALSO ORDERED FORCED CONVERSION OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN DAMPARA TO ISLAM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first prosecution witness of a war crimes case yesterday linked one of the two accused alleged Razakars to the killing of 34 Hindus in Kishoreganj and accused him of ordering the forced conversion of the religious community in Dampara village to Islam.

Syed Mohammad Hussain alias Hossain, the alleged Nikli Thana Razakar commander and younger brother of convicted war criminal Syed Hasan Ali, and Muhammad Moslem Pradhan face six charges of crimes during the 1971 Liberation War.

Moslem is now in jail and pleads not guilty while Hussain is on the run.

Badal Chandra Barman, 59, told International Crimes Tribunal-1 that many Hindu families of their Dampara village had left for India during that time while those staying back were in panic.

In the first part of the Bangla month of Bhadra, one Teku, the then chairman of both Dampara union and the Peace Committee formed there, arrived with his associated and conveyed Hussain's offer to choose forced conversion or death, he said.

The victims were given Muslim names and kept under watch to see whether they practiced Islam, he said, adding, "They told the women not to use vermilion and bangles made of conch and keep idols of gods and goddesses in their houses."

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UNHCR lauds Dhaka for 'best practices'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) yesterday lauded government steps in recent years and expressed satisfaction over the state of refugees in Bangladesh, saying it was among countries having the "best practices".

However, becoming a refugee hosting country in 1992 by accepting Rohingyas, Bangladesh still has no mechanism to process asylum applications, said UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh Stina Ljungdell, offering to provide assistance in this regard.

At a briefing in a hotel in the capital on UNHCR's activities here in the last three years, she also pointed out that though party to major human rights instruments, Bangladesh has neither ratified The 1951 Refugee Convention nor the subsequent 1967 Protocol.

"A country that produced 10 million refugees during the 1971 war time is now host to thousands of refugees from Myanmar," said Ljungdell, adding that this was a historically proven fact.

She also commended the 2008 High Court decision to grant citizenship to Biharis.

Listing developments during September 2013-June 2016, she said some 32,984 documented Rohingyas were living in two Cox's Bazar camps and another 3 to 5 lakh undocumented ones outside.

Ljungdell applauded a joint database of the government and UNHCR which became effective from June 2014 and removed discrepancies. She also talked about the urgent need to provide legal status and access to justice to refugees.

On the introduction of secondary level informal education at the two camps from January 2014, she

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