

# Protect arable land, save Bangladesh's future

Experts say at ALRD discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Approximately one percent of Bangladesh's total arable land is gone every year, and if this continues, the country will soon face a crisis in food production, land and environment experts said yesterday.

They came up with the cautionary remark at a roundtable on "Necessity of laws to protect arable land", organised by Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), a non-government organisation, at Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka.

Experts suggested that the government should immediately approve the proposed "Protection and Usage of Agricultural Land Act" and implement it strictly in order to save the country from barrenness and food shortage.

Citing the data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) from 2015, ALRD Executive Director Shamsul Huda said the country is losing approximately 68,700 hectares of arable land every year -- most of it going to housing and industrialisation.

Besides, brick kilns are a major threat to arable land and the environment, as they mostly use top soil -- the most fertile part of land -- to produce bricks and burn a huge amount of fossil fuel, Huda said in the key-note presentation.

"The government in 2001 formed a policy to protect arable land but people hardly care about the policy. That's why, we need stringent law and its implementation," he said.

A confusing situation has been created over the proposed act's approval as its draft

was prepared in 2011. It was modified twice in 2015 and 2016. "We are yet to see the final draft or any sign of approval," he added.

Huda alleged that a group of influential people, who want to use up arable land, are behind the delay.

ALRD Chairperson Khushi Kabir said, "The government doesn't seem to be serious about introducing the act... Laws are passed in the parliament, and most of the parliament members are involved in the non-agricultural sector."

Besides, the parliament has no "effective opposition party" that can protest this, she added.

"So, the responsibility falls on us. For the sake of our country's future, we, the civil society, have to raise our voices and put pressure on the government so that it approves and implements the act immediately," said the noted activist.

Dhaka University Professor MM Akash said the government's goal to be a middle-income country will not be sustainable if Bangladesh does not have enough land to produce its own food.

Former judge of Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, Nizamul Haque, said, "If arable land is not protected, our future will see extinction."

Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) Executive Director Meghna Guhathakurta and INCIDIN Bangladesh Executive Director AKM Masud Ali, among others, spoke at the discussion.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

**RISKY JOB WITHOUT SAFETY MEASURES... Workers painting outer walls of a high-rise on Dhaka's Abdul Gani Road yesterday. Due to this unsafe practice, accidents often occur, with some of them turning fatal.**

# Learn from EVM-related mistakes

CEC to election officials ahead of upazila polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) KM Nurul Huda yesterday asked the election officials to take lessons from the polls-time mistakes while using Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) during the December 30 national election and be prepared for the upcoming upazila elections.

There were issues in some places where EVMs were used during the general election, the CEC said while addressing a training programme in Dhaka yesterday.

The programme was organised for trainers of election officials and on voting through EVMs at the Electoral Training Institute (ETI) in the capital's Agargaon.

Since EVM is a fairly new means for voting, people will be confused if any error occurs, the CEC said, and advised election officials to participate in the training attentively.

The first phase of the upazila polls is set to be held on March 8 or 9. The Election Commission (EC) will hold a

meeting on February 3 to finalise the election date.

The last phase of the five-phase polls would be held after the Ramadan, which will likely begin on May 5.

EC sources said they were planning to hold the second phase of the election on March 18, third phase on March 24, and fourth phase on March 31.

The fifth upazila polls will be held in 480 out of the 492 upazilas, said EC officials, adding that over Tk 500 crore would be required to hold the polls.

**DNCC BY-POLLS: 6 SUBMIT NOMINATION FORMS**

Six aspirants submitted their nomination forms for Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) mayoral by-polls, returning officer Abul Kashem said.

The deadline for nomination submission was yesterday, and 26 aspirants collected nomination papers, he said.

Aspirants submitting nomination forms yesterday are: Awami League's Atiqul Islam, Jatiya Party's Shafin Ahmed, National Democratic Party's Boby Hajjaj, Pragatishil Ganatantrik Party's Shahin Khan, National People's Party's Anisur

Rahman and independent candidate Abdur Rahim.

DNCC mayoral by-polls as well as election to councillor posts in 36 new wards -- 18 each under Dhaka north and south city corporations -- will be held on February 28. Last date of withdrawal of candidature is February 9.

EC officials said that 167 candidates submitted nomination papers for ward councillor posts for DNCC and 158 candidates for DSCC.

**PETITION SEEKS STAY ON DNCC BY-POLLS**

Meanwhile, a writ petition was filed yesterday by Advocate Eunus Ali Akond, challenging the legality of holding Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) mayoral by-polls and election to councillor posts on February 28.

The petitioner argued that as legal tangles over demarcation of many wards of the two city corporations have not been resolved, the by-polls will be "illegal".

# 45 acres of hilly land saved from grabbing

STAR REPORT

Forest Department recovered about 45 acres of hilly land from grabbing in Cox's Bazar and Mymensingh in the last two days.

On Tuesday, ACC learnt that a group was razing hill in Cox's Bazar but the local administration was not taking any step.

Later, ACC Director General (Administration) Mohammad Munir Chowdhury asked the district's deputy commissioner to take steps in this regard.

Following the instruction, the department stopped the illegal hill cutting on about 10 acres of land in Cox's Bazar town. It also arrested three persons.

In another drive yesterday, a team of the Forest Department recovered about 25 acres of land in the district's Fatergona area.

The team also removed more than 100 houses and shops from the land.

Forest Department started planting trees on those land, reports our correspondent.

In Mymensingh, the department recovered its 10 acres of land in Bhaluka upazila. A local influential person enclosed the land by erecting boundary walls.

On Tuesday, an ACC team with the help of local administration demolished the walls.

# Abu Sayeed Chowdhury's birth anniversary today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 97th birth anniversary of the late Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, former president of Bangladesh.

On the occasion, Utsho Publishers will reprint Bengali literary journal "Rupayan", which was edited by Abu Sayeed Chowdhury in 1940, inspired by national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, said a press release.

Justice Chowdhury resigned from the post of vice chancellor of Dhaka University on March 15, 1971, protesting murders of two students by Pakistani occupation forces.

He played a significant role in mobilising the world opinion for the cause of Bangladesh as a special envoy of the provisional government. In 1985, he was unanimously elected chairman of UN human rights commission.



# DIU celebrates 17th anniversary

CITY DESK

Daffodil International University (DIU) organised a two-day gala event on its Ashulia permanent campus to celebrate the university's 17th founding anniversary.

A weeklong inter-department sports competition, math Olympiad, inter-university cultural competition, IT quiz, project showcasing and exhibition were arranged. The main event included bus rally, pitha utsab, blood donation programme, discussion panels, picnic, tree plantation, games and sports, raffle draw, and musical soiree with participation of students.

Dr Jonathan Ortman, president of Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN), was present as the chief guest. Dr Md Sabur Khan, chairman of DIU Board of Trustees and Daffodil Family, presided over the ceremony. The programme was addressed by Vice

Chancellor Prof Dr Yousuf M Islam; pro-VC Prof SM Mahbulul Haque Majumder and Treasurer Hamidul Haque Khan, among other esteemed professors of the university.

Jonathan Ortman said, "Bangladesh is now a country where one-third of the population are in their youth. I have already known that many young people of Bangladesh are becoming successful entrepreneurs, and a huge number of them are interested in entrepreneurship. So, there is no doubt that these young people will change Bangladesh."

Sabur Khan said in his speech that students should develop skills during their student life, and DIU is helping them through initiatives like art of living, employability 360, and one student one laptop programmes.

"DIU students wouldn't search jobs, rather they would create jobs," he said.



Chief guest Dr Jonathan Ortman, Chairman Dr Md Sabur Khan and VC Prof Yousuf M Islam with other guests at the closing ceremony of DIU's 17th founding anniversary.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

A man keeps his hand outside the bus window while smoking a cigarette. Though prohibited by law, smoking in public transport continues unabated, causing discomfort and harm to others. The photo was taken in the port city's Fakirhat area yesterday afternoon.

# Brothers to walk gallows for killing man in Fatikchhari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

A Chattogram court yesterday handed down death penalty to two brothers, on charges of killing an expatriate in Fatikchhari upazila in the district over a land dispute in 2011.

The convicted are Md Jahedul Alam alias "Loha Jahed" and Khorsheedul Alam Kalam alias "Jongi Kalam", from Dhali Kata of Chattogram's Fatikchhari upazila.

Chattogram Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal Judge Md Abul Halim delivered the verdict against the duo, after the court found them guilty beyond doubt examining all records and witnesses, said Public Prosecutor of the tribunal advocate Ayub Khan.

Both accused were tried in absentia, said the PP.

According to the case statement, the convicts had longstanding feud with Yunus, an expatriate to India, of the same area over a piece of land. Yunus and his cousin Hasan erected a fence on the land boundary, triggering an altercation on April 11, 2011. The two brothers called Yunus and Hasan to come to their house to settle the issue. When Yunus and Hasan entered their residence, Jahed and Kalam started hacking them with sharp weapons, locking the gate.

Hearing their cry for help, neighbours rescued the injured and informed police, who arrested the two after the incident. Yunus died on the way to hospital.

Yunus' wife Khotiza Akter filed a case accusing the duo, while police pressed the charge sheet against them June 5, 2011.

The complainant's lawyer advocate Tarun Kishor Deb said a total of 13 witnesses out of 20 testified in the case.

# EWU holds 18th convocation

CITY DESK

Minister for Liberation War Affairs AKM Mozammel Huq yesterday advised fresh graduates of East West University that morality, responsibility, skill, professionalism, and patriotism should be their guiding spirits.

Some 2,073 undergraduate and graduate students were conferred degrees at the university's 18th convocation yesterday; eight of them were awarded gold medals for outstanding results.

Convocation speaker Dr Yasmeen Haque, professor of physics at Sust, said Bangladesh is now turning into a country with the capacity to meet all expectations. Universities here are not only distributing knowledge to students but also creating new sectors of knowledge, she said.

Prof Abdul Mannan, UGC chairman; Dr Md Farshuddin, chairperson of EWU board of trustees and former Bangladesh Bank governor, and VC Prof Dr M M Shahidul Hassan, spoke at the ceremony.

# NEWS IN brief

## KU hosts Khulna IT-ITES job fair

KU CORRESPONDENT

A daylong job fair titled "Khulna IT-ITES Job Fair" was held at Khulna University (KU) yesterday.

The fair was organised by Leveraging ICT Project Bangladesh with the assistance of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) and Bangladesh Association of Call Center & Outsourcing (BACCO). A total of 41 leading IT companies including 10 companies from Sheikh Hasina Software and Technology Park Jessore selected eligible candidates at the job fair.

Prof Dr Mohammad Fayek Uz Zaman, vice chancellor of KU, inaugurated the fair as the chief guest.

Around 10,000 candidates registered to participate in the fair.

## Faruqui elected Rotary governor

CITY DESK

Barrister Mutasim Billah Faruqui has been elected governor of Rotary International Bangladesh (district 3281) for the session of 2021-22 on Tuesday in Dhaka, says a press release.

He served as the lieutenant governor of Rotary, treasurer of Dhaka Officers Club and played important roles in various organisations.

A distinguished writer, athlete and trainer, Faruqui was awarded for his achievements from Rotary and other organisations.

Barrister Faruqui is currently working as additional commissioner of taxes at National Board of Revenue.



## Ali Akbar Khoka no more

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Ali Akbar Khoka, a journalist, passed away after suffering a heart attack at Madaripur Sadar Hospital on Tuesday. He was 51.

District correspondent of the daily Independent, Ali Akbar left behind his wife and two daughters to mourn his death.

His first namaz-e-janaza was held at Charnugria Mahabidyalaya and the second one at Puran Bazar Boro Mosque yesterday.

He was buried in the municipality graveyard of Madaripur.

## Job fair at Green University today

CITY DESK

A job fair will start at Green University of Bangladesh (GUB) today, says a press release.

The daylong event will be held at the university's Centre for Career Development on the capital's Begum Rokeya Sarani from 10am to 5pm.

Mohammad Fazlul Haque, chairman of Nobel Group of Companies, will be present as the chief guest.

GUB Vice Chancellor Prof Golam Samdani Fakir will attend as the guest of honour.

A total of 25 companies are participating in the fair.

