

BEN Celebrates World Environment Day 2010

- Ajoy Kar

Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), Canberra Chapter held the World Environment Day (WED) discussion on 6th June 2010 in Bangladesh High Commission Auditorium, Canberra. The discussion was attended by Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) and Environmental Activists from the Canberra's 'Climate Action' and 'See Change' organizations.

Local BEN member, Dr Ajoy Kar, welcomed the participants and encouraged all members to contribute to the discussion on the theme of 2010 WED- International Year of 'Biodiversity Ecosystems Management and the Green Economy'. While Mr Kamrul Ahsan Khan, Coordinator of BEN, Australia, chaired the discussion, His Excellency Lt Gen Masud Uddin Chowdhury, the High Commission for Bangladesh, took part in discussion as a special guest.

Lively discussion took place in the meeting with the presents of Canberra's Bangladeshi Australian and local Australians, including Dr Umme Salma, Dr Nilufar Jahan, Dr Ezaz Al Mamun, Mrs Mehnaz Chowdhury, Dr Hilal Ahmed, Dr Nahida Bhuiyan, Dr Shariar Ahmed, Mr Ali Hosain, Mr Anamul Bhuiyan, Mr Borhan Ahmed, Mr Geoff Iazarus, Mr Jainal Abedin, Mr Taherul Ahsan, Mr Zillur Rahman, Mss Anne O'Brien, Mss Laura Stuart, Mss Rebecca Horridge, Mr Mohammad Quddus, Mr M Faruk, Mrs Marry Hosain and many others.

Hon. High Commissioner said the Government of Bangladesh in consultation with civil society, including NGOs, research organisations and the private sector has developed a Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) to build the capacity and resilience of the country to meet the challenge of climate change. Under this 10 year Action Plan (2009-2018), the needs of the poor and vulnerable, including women and children, have given the priority in all activities. CCAP is going to be implemented under the overall guidance of the National Environment Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister. In the first five year period (2009-13), the program is comprising six pillars: Firstly, Food security, social protection and health; Secondly, Comprehensive disaster management; Thirdly, Infrastructure; Fourthly, Research and knowledge management; Fifthly, Mitigation and low carbon development; Finally, Capacity building and institutional development.

He also added that the Government of Bangladesh is committed to increase the country's resilience to climate change; reduce the risks climate change poses to national development; and rapidly develops the country, following a low-carbon growth path. To do this, Bangladesh has already made climate change an integral part of its national development strategy and have started to build the country's capacity (communities, civil society, the private sector and Government) so that the impacts of climate change can be tackled, in a routine way, as part of the development process. While Bangladesh's strategy prioritises adaptation, the Government of Bangladesh has recently established a National Climate Change Fund, with an initial capitalisation of \$45 million.

Bangladesh is also going beyond its borders to try to find common cause with her neighbours to manage climate change impacts through regional action plans, as demonstrated in the 2008 SAARC Ministers of Environment meeting, held in Dhaka. Bangladesh is also seeking to enhance cooperation with neighbors on key issues, including water security.

The Hon. High Commissioner praised BEN's bolder steps in the global environmental movement, including its participation & organising in Bicycle Rally to promote environmental awareness and to popularise bicycle among mass population in Bangladesh.

Environmental Activists from Canberra's Climate Groups and BEN members spoke about how they can all work together to help Bangladesh- one third of Bangladesh is threatened with inundation from rising sea levels. An AusAID Officer, Borhan Ahmed briefly spoke on how AusAID is responding to the climate change challenge in the South Asia region, including in Bangladesh through Australia's bilateral and multilateral engagements. He added that Bangladesh is one of the eight countries invited to participate in the World Bank Pilot Program for Climate Resilience which is assisting these countries for scaled up action and transformational change to integrate climate resilience in national development planning. 'Australia is also exploring a contribution to Phase II of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Program in working with various ministries of the Bangladesh Government, coordinated by UNDP', he further said. Adapting to climate change impacts is a major element of this Program. An AusAID-funded South Asia Water Initiative is also working closely with the internationally respected Bangladesh Institute for Water Modeling to help improve water resource management in the region, including in Bangladesh through supporting research and project preparation work. Climate activists shared with participants on what strategies were taken and used to date. Further discussions will be held and a concerted "plan of action" will be determined to alert the world to the plight of Bangladeshis and the need for practical action in this front.

Renowned scientist and activist, Mr. Walter Jane, mentioned while Bangladesh may be one of the first and most severely impacted countries, the reality of and responsibility for action can not be avoided by anyone. We are 'one people' on 'one planet'. Instead we must welcome Copenhagen as it forces us to the reality, and that climate change can only be addressed by us, as communities via direct local responsibility and action.

Speakers from Canberra's 'Climate Action' and 'Sea Action' actively participated in the discussion, and showed their keen interests in working together with BEN to spread out Bangladesh's concern to the wider Australian community through various campaigning programs. Environmental Activist and BEN Coordinator, Mr Kamrul Ahsan Khan, welcomed the proposal, and agreed to form a 'working party' in consultation with members from BEN and Climate Action, Canberra to chalk out a realistic Action Plan. He said, 'we are not only worried about Bangladesh, we are worried about the whole world'. At the end of formal discussion, all were invited for a cup of tea and exchange

views and opinion to work together to protect environment with the spirit of World Environment Day observed through out the world.

On Friday 5 June 2010, BEN Coordinator along with other friends joined ACT government's 'day-long program', which included free distribution of tree for plantation; information stall from government & environment groups; song; dance; and exhibition.

BEN's Special Issues on World Environment Day 2010:

PriyoAustralia.com.au published BEN's World Environment Day Special Issue focusing Bangladesh environment and climate change. Writers across the world contributed to the issue, which could be viewed at:

<http://www.priyoaustralia.com.au/specialissues/index.php?page=world-environment-day-by-ben>

BEN Observed the World Environment Day 2010 in Sydney:

On the 6th of June 2010, Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) Sydney Chapter observed the World Environment Day 2010 (5 June). The discussion that was especially focused on the current pressing environmental issues in Bangladesh was presided by Mohammed Abdul Matin, member of BAPA and conducted by Dr Swapan Paul Coordinator BEN, Sydney Branch. The discussion was held at the Bangladesh House, 65 Spurway St, Ermington, Sydney.

A one-minute of silence was observed on the loss of lives by the recent fire in Dhaka City and the collapse of a building. Mr Nazrul Islam, Mrs Yasmeen Islam, Dr Narayan Das, Mr Sayeed Ashifq Sujjan, Dr Debashish Mazumder, Mr Babu Ignatious Gomes, Mr Rahamat Ullah, Mr Md Sazzad Hossain, Mr AKM Shafiqul Alam, Mr Avijit Barua and Mrs Piyasa Barua spoke briefly about the pressing issues.

Brief discussion was also held on the preparation of a proposed seminar on the environmental issues in Bangladesh to be held in Sydney in November 2010.

Since 1972, the World Environment Day is being observed on 5th June to stimulate worldwide awareness of the environment, encourage political attention and public action.