

Brief Report on the First National Convention on Rivers

183 participants discussed on 163 rivers and formed a 'Jatyo Nadi Raksha Andolon'

Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) in association with Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) organized the first National Convention on Rivers (NCR) on 23 December 2006 at the auditorium of Bangladesh Academy of Planning and Development, Nilkhet, Dhaka with the thematic call: **"Save the Rivers from Cordons, Encroachment, Pollution, Obstruction, Diversion and Degradation"**.

The brief opening session of the daylong program was chaired by Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad, President of BAPA where Prof. Nazrul Islam, Coordinator of BEN and Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin, Member Secretary of the convention Organizing Committee addressed the gathering explaining contextual background and details of the program. Mr. Ferdous Ahmad Qureshi, an eminent & experienced environment friendly journalist and the Editor of the daily Desh Bangla spoke to the convention as a guest speaker. Total seven international notes of greetings received from friendly organizations of different countries were read out in the convention. Among the participants Advocate Firoz Ahmed (Khulna), Azizul Hoque Moni (Jessore), Debashish Pramanik (Rajshahi), Kazi Akhter Hussain (Brahmanbaria), Prof. Dr. Mohammed Ali Azadi (Chittagong), Zahed Hussain Khan (Barisal), Anwar Saadat (Gazipur) and Ashraful Alam Tutu (Khulna) greeted the convention with short felicitation statements. Total 163 registered persons including a bulk of representations from local river and environmental movements participated in the convention. In his opening remarks, Prof Muzaffer Ahmed said "saving the rivers was never a part of the national development plan in Bangladesh. Now it is the moment when water will have to be considered as a resource and river saving effort will have to be the first task in this regard."

Six parallel area based workshops were conducted with the agenda of "Experiences of Local River Movements". Group wise intensive discussions were held on the basis of the previously circulated a common questionnaire for every river basin which was actually designed to extract out brief information on the prevailing situations of the rivers, causative factors behind, ways of recovery, possible role for the government, civil society organizations and the people living there. Numerous information sheets received from different sources like the river activists, organizations, press men, researchers, environmentalists on total 163 rivers of the country were used as foundation of the final compilation of the situation report by the participants after their final inputs in these workshops. Mihir Biswas, AKM Sirajul Islam, Zahidur Rahman, Sharif Jamil, Sharifuzzaman Sharif and AB Siddique Titu worked as the rapporteurs for these groups under the guidance of the workshop Coordinator Prof. Md. Khalequzzaman (Lockhaven University, USA & BEN). Consequently the document achieved from the workshops was placed, discussed upon and accepted as a "Memorandum on Rivers" in the Strategy Session of the participants.

The first Plenary entitled " External threats to Bangladesh rivers" was presided over by Eng. Qamrul Islam Siddique (Bangladesh Water Partnership) where three different topics like " Indian River Linking Project", "Tipaimukh Project" and " The Degraded Brahmaputra" were presented respectively by Barrister Khalid Raihan (BELA), Eng. Md. Hilaluddin (Angikar Bangladesh) and Eng. Taqsem Khan (BAPA). The convention expressed deep concern on the IRLP affecting the Ganges, Tipaimukh on the Barak and different river degrading activities going on or planned for in the north east India and Sumatan water diversion project of China on the river Brahmaputra. The meeting also unanimously demanded for immediate cancellation of these projects of intensive atrocities on the concerned rivers, environment, livelihoods, people and the very existence of the region.

The second plenary entitled " Dhaka City Eastern Bypass and Embankment Project" was presided over by Prof. Nazrul Islam (Center for Urban Studies) where the key presentation was done Prof. Md. Khalequzzaman(BEN) and Architect Iqbal Habib spoke as the discussant. The speakers explained the project and its possible impact on the environment in the capital city as well as the nearby river Balu and the habitation beyond the proposed embankment. They clearly opposed such an anti-river and anti-environmental project and pleaded for a flying bypass for the transport facility to satisfy the objective of the project.

The third plenary was held on "Progress toward a regional river movement" where Prof. Firoze ahmed of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) chaired, Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin spoke as the key presenter informing and explaining the necessity of an effective, united & coordinated peoples movement for saving the rivers on the basis of regional cooperation among the South Asian states in the light of ecological approaches to the rivers. He also informed the meeting about the BAPA steps and activities taken so far in developing an effective South Asian river saving network including joining South Asian Solidarity for Rivers and Peoples (SARP), initiatives for making SARP more active, attending international efforts in Brazil, Netherlands, India, Philippines and the strategy meeting for water and rivers in Nepal. Prof Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University discussed on the topic. The convention expressed its wish for a successful regional move to save the rivers in near future. Mihir Biswas, Member Secretary for Buriganga Bachao Andolon also spoke in the occasion.

After finalization of the "Memorandum on Rivers" the Strategy session chaired by Prof. Nazrul Islam (BEN) concentrated on another topic namely: "National Alliance for Bangladesh Rivers". Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin placed brief report on the situations prevailing among the objective and subjective dimensions of the persons and organizations working for rivers all over the country, similarities and dissimilarities between them and BAPA, role of national politics in between; necessity of a non-partisan, ecology-based united drive to motivate and organize the vast population through the local organizations. After thorough discussion a loose open-ended steering committee named "National River Saving Movement" was formed with representations from BAPA and other organizations from all over the country. Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin was elected as the Coordinator for this committee.

The concluding session was presided over by eminent literary, social worker and BAPA Vice President Prof. Abdullah Abu Sayeed. Kamrul Ahsan Khan of BEN Australia addressed and

Mohidul Hoque Khan, General Secretary of BAPA offered vote of thanks. The chair termed the government as a "heavy stone" but having a rounded shape & some extent of mobility whenever pushed from outside. Now for saving the rivers & environment, people will have to push the government & National Convention on Rivers would be the amazing start in this respect.

Rivers Reported in the Convention

North East: (Sylhet & Comilla)

Surma, Kushiara, Manu, Dhalai, Juri, Fonai, Gopla, Ratna, Sutki, Veramohona, Poyenda, Surmato, Goain, Sharee, Jadukata, Bibiana, Kalni, Sheola, Kangza, Pian, Khoai, Titas, Gomati, Dakatia, Noljur, Magur, Meghna, Norshunda, Ghungur, Laghata.

East: Noakhali, Chittagong & Hill tracts)

Feni, Karnaphuli, Naaf, Rahmatkhali, Halda, Sarta, Matamuhury, Bak Khali, Dhanaguda, Dhurang, Shankha, Chengi, Mainymukh.

North: (Dinajpur, Rangpur, Pabna, Bogra & Rajshahi)

Teesta, Mohananda, Dahuk, Korotoa, Pathar Raj, Bengrang, Versa, Ghora Teesta, Tangon, Shenua, Shuk, Teernoi, Nagoor, Kulik, Atrai, Punarbhava, Isamoti, Shaildaha, Ghugra, Chaoai, Talma, Tisha, Haturi, Ghoramara, Tolai, Chhoto Jamuna, Tilai, Sonadighi, Barnoi, Boral, Hura Sagor, Gumani, Jamuna, Doi Bhanga, Padma, Pagla, Mathabhanga, Kumar, Arialkha, Buri Teesta, Charalkata, Burikhora, Dhum, Kumlai, Nautara, Chikli, Brahmaputra, Dudkumar, Dharla, Ghagot, Fulkumur, Bangali, Jumuneswari, Chandana, Badargonj, Kageswari.

South West: (Khulna, Jessore, Barisal & Kushtia)

Nolia, Rupsha, Madhumati, Nabagonga, Palordi, Teka, Kirtonkhola, Shaulda, Naya Bhangni, Korkhana, Kapotaksha, Bhairab, Gorai, Bhola, Chitra, Betraboti, Dhanshiri, Gabkhan Channel, Kirtinasha, Hisna, Khajora, Andharmanik, Shandha, Buri Bhadra, Sreenadi, Mukteswari, Lower Meghna, Ilsha, Shabazpur, Ghagri, Barasia, Madhumati beel route, Baghia, Khakdon, Katakhal, Mangla, Pashur, Kalibasa, Keya, Bhadra, Harihar.

Mid region: (Faridpur, Dhaka except capital, Tangail, Mymensingh)

Jhinai, Zharkata, Chotol, Kaliganga, Dhaleswari, Mogra, Old Brahmaputra, Shumeswari, Belgazi, Chinaduli, Kulkandi, Guthail, Kangsha, Karnajhuri, Rajat Rekha, Chhoto Meghna, Bishkhali, Paira, Dhaleswari.

Dhaka City: Shitalaksha, Buriganga, Turag, Balu.

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