



Sundarban ecology endangered

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SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

DHAKA, DEC 28: Speakers on Wednesday expressed concerns over the future of the Sundarbans and stressed the need for government intervention to save the largest mangrove forest in the world.

They said this at the launch of a study report—"Living with Changing Climate: Impact, Vulnerability and Adaptation Challenges in Indian Sunderbans"—at the BIAM auditorium in the city. The report was prepared by Aditya Ghosh, senior coordinator of climate change in Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a Delhi-based research organisation.

"Socio-economic pressures are bringing about changes in the forest's environment, thus altering people's lives and livelihoods. Also, there is a marked change in the area's eco-system," said the president of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA), Prof. Mozaffar Ahmed, at the event.

"The forest doesn't exist anymore at Bagerhat and Jessore. Things have changed drastically over the years. Khulna Newsprint Mill and Mongla Port contributed to clearing of the forest. This has made a variety of local plants extinct in the last few years. The government has yet not taken any step to save the forest," he added.

He said the government should conduct anthropological researches to save the world heritage forest. The launching ceremony was followed by presentations and a panel discussion involving some key Bangladeshi experts and commentators on the Sundarbans. The event was aimed at collating experiences and viewpoints from both sides of the border to reach a common understanding of the climate-vulnerable future.

CSE deputy director Chandra Bhushan, Dr Saleemul Huq, director of International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCAD), S Jahangir Hassan Masum, executive director of Coastal Development Partnership

(CDP), Dr Atiq Rahman, executive director of Bangladesh Centre for Advance Studies, Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri of CSE, Nandan Mukharjee, teacher of BRACV university, and Advocate Sohrab Ali Sana attended the programme.

Chandra Bhushan said: "Development planning in the Sundarbans in India has never considered climate change and its impacts. This is quite evident in the way everything from electrification to land management has been done here."

"Take electrification for instance. Despite the area's fragile topography and frequency of extreme weather conditions, along with the skewed cost of grid, a decentralised distribution network for renewable energy has not been promoted," he added.

"The forest's bio-diversity should be conserved to help fisheries," he suggested.

Dr Atiq Rahman said that NGOs and research organizations should work together for the region's welfare. He also said that the government should take proper measures to save the forest.

Mijanur Rahman Bijoy, coordinator of Network on Climate Change of Bangladesh, highlighted the need to introduce land and embankment management in the Sundarbans area.

Advocate Sohrab ali Sana urged everybody to put a check on shrimp cultivation as it increases land salinity. "We want our fertile lands back," he added.

Sundari and Gewa trees are withering away due to increasing salinity, while climate change is affecting the area's eco-system, observed Nandan Mukherjee, programme manager in Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research of BRAC University.

The report mentioned that the sea surface temperature (SST) in the Sundarbans is increasing at the rate of 0.5 degree Celsius per decade.

The sea level is rising in this region at a rate higher than the global average.

