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HSBC-Star honour climate heroes

4 pvt organisations, 1 govt dept awarded for contributions to environment conservation

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From left, Riyadh Ali, managing director of Butterfly Park Bangladesh; Namal Rajapakse, chief financial officer of Kenpark Bangladesh Apparel; Ashit Ranjan Paul, divisional forest officer of Tangail Forest Division; AH Md Maqsood Sinha, executive director of Waste Concern; Shitangshu Kumar Sur Chowdhury, deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank; Food Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Andrew Tilke, CEO of HSBC Bangladesh; Muqeed Majumdar Babu, chairman of Prokriti O Jibon Foundation; Rokia Afzal Rahman, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Niaz Rahim, chairman of Rural Services Foundation, and Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, pose at the HSBC-The Daily Star Climate Awards ceremony in Dhaka yesterday. Photo: Amran Hossain

A government department and four private organisations yesterday received the country's top environment awards for their eco-friendly efforts and mitigation of climate change impacts through sustainable business activities, community-based programmes and awareness campaigns.

The "HSBC-The Daily Star Climate Awards", now in its third year, was jointly organised at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital by one of the world's leading bank HSBC and the most-read English language daily of the country The Daily Star.

Riyadh Ali, managing director of Butterfly Park Bangladesh Ltd; Niaz Rahim, chairman of Rural Services Foundation (RSF); Namal Rajapakse, chief financial officer of Kenpark Bangladesh Apparel (Pvt) Ltd; Muqeed Majumdar Babu, chairman of Prokriti O Jibon Foundation; and Ashit Ranjan Paul, project director and divisional forest officer of Tangail Forest Division, received the awards from Food Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque on behalf of their organisations.

The award ceremony started with a one-minute token silence in honour of the country's best academics, journalists, educationists, humanists and social workers who were brutally killed on December 14, 1971, during the Liberation War.

The Tangail Forest Division, a government department, received the award in the Climate Champion in Community Engagement category for turning 700 inhabitants of Madhupur forest from encroachers into volunteers, who now protect and conserve the once-endangered greenery.

The project is a glaring example of how community engagement can help save a forest if the locals are made stakeholders of an effort. The initiative has provided means of livelihood to around 5,000 families that previously used to depend on the forest for earnings.

The Butterfly Park Bangladesh Ltd, the country's first butterfly-themed amusement park and entertainment zone of Intraco Group, received the Climate Champion award in Green Business category for its effort to protect the fast reducing population of butterflies and attract people towards nature in the seaside town of Patenga in Chittagong.

Kenpark Bangladesh Apparel (Pvt) Ltd, a leading readymade garments manufacturer, received the Climate Champion in Green Operation award in companies with full or partial foreign ownership category for installing energy-efficient equipment and integrating sustainable procedures like usage of natural light, water treatment plant, proper waste management system, complete recycling policy and extensive vegetation in its factories, as part of its plan to cut the emission of greenhouse gases by one-third.

Prokriti O Jibon Foundation, a non-profit organisation, got the award in Knowledge Management category for its awareness campaign on biodiversity, nature and climate change adaptation and risk mitigation.

The foundation researches and explores the latent biological resources of the country and broadcasts a documentary, Prokriti O Jibon, every Sunday night on private television network Channel i.

Rural Services Foundation, a non-profit organisation of Rahimafrooz Group, working since 2006 to make renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies accessible to remote rural communities, received the Climate Champion in Green Operation award as the fully-Bangladeshi-owned company for promoting renewable energy and adopting in-house environment management practice in its zonal offices across the country.

Speaking as the chief guest, Food Minister Abdur Razzaque said the government did not wait for donors' support to act on the climate change challenges. "We are spending \$100 million every year to fight the impacts of the climate change."

He said the climate change is not a national or regional issue, but global. "That is why policymakers around the world are concerned about it."

The impacts of the climate change are now visible in different parts of the globe, said the minister.

Razzaque said in case of natural disasters, it is always the poor that are the most affected. "Poverty also needs to be addressed alongside environmental concerns if we are to mitigate the effects of climate change."

Shitangshu Kumar Sur Chowdhury, deputy governor of the central bank, thanked The Daily Star and HSBC for taking up the issue very timely.

He said climate change is a very important issue for an emerging country like

Bangladesh and although it is a low emitter of greenhouse gases, the government has opted for low carbon path.

Chowdhury highlighted Bangladesh Bank's comprehensive green banking initiatives. "Green banking is not just limited to awareness but now we are putting it in practice."

Rokia Afzal Rahman, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka, lauded The Daily Star and HSBC for choosing “a subject relevant to the daily life which needs consideration, advocacy and awareness about.”

Andrew Tilke, chief executive officer of HSBC Bangladesh, said the climate awards have motivated individuals, communities and businesses to increase their green initiatives and take environmental concerns very seriously and found better ways to manage the impacts of climate change.

He also highlighted HSBC's continuing efforts to promote green initiatives globally. "HSBC understands that protecting our climate is also vital to ensuring a long-term business model. And we have engaged in many programmes globally and locally."

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said there are people who think that the climate change would not put impact on them, but in the lives of their next generations.

“So they wonder why they should be concern about the issue. I think this type of mentality is amounting to living in fools' paradise,” he said, adding that Bangladesh has already started to see changes in the natural consistency “we are accustomed to”.

Bangladesh would face two challenges -- the melting of snow in the Himalayas and rise in sea level, Mahfuz Anam continued, “We have to be aware of these challenges as Bangladesh always tops in all surveys and studies when it comes to which country is the most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

“So we have to have an all-out preparation. It's an opportunity for us to reinvent,” he observed.

Anam said the solutions to the climate change challenges must and can only come from science rather than approaches based on backwardness, prejudice and religious conservatism.

The editor of The Daily Star also announced that from next year The Daily Star and HSBC would organise quizzes and debates on climate change in schools at district levels to raise awareness about global warming.

AH Md Maqsood Sinha, executive director of Waste Concern, the knowledge partner of the awards, said the government cannot tackle the challenges of the climate change alone. “It has to be participatory.”

He said there is a common misperception among businesses that going green is expensive and increases cost of production. “But we have observed that the cost of production has rather gone down at factories that have adopted green business practices.”

RSF's Niaz Rahim said the corporate sector has a duty to develop the country. “We set up the RSF to take solar energy to every house of the country out of our social responsibility.”

He said the RSF is a social business and all of its profit is reinvested in the company.

Md Riyadh Ali said it is very important to preserve butterflies to fight climate change impacts, as they keep the trees healthy.

He also said he took up the initiative as it is a green business.

Namal Rajapakse of Kenpark apparel said it was a policy of their group to make all of its business sustainable. “So we have incorporated sustainable features in our every initiative.”

Muqeed Majumdar Babu said the biodiversity across the world, including in Bangladesh, is disappearing due to lack of awareness. “Our aim is to stop the disappearance of the natures' various species and preserve what we have.”

Ashit Ranjan Paul said the Madhupur Forest was thinning fast because the local community, that was heavily dependent on the forest, was not engaged with the process.

“Now, they are protecting the forest. If this system is applied in every forest of the country, we will be able to save them all,” he said, terming the climate award initiative a noble step.

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