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# ENVIRONMENT NEWSLETTER

Year 17, No. 33-34 (August 23, 2020)

Presented by **Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN)**

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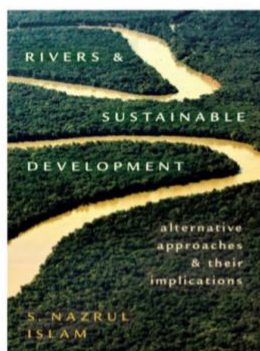
This issue of the Environment Newsletter includes the following items:

- 1) A special webinar on Dr. Nazrul Islam's new book, "Rivers and Sustainable Development" organized by BAPA
  - 2) International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (August 9) reminds Bangladesh of the importance of ethnic diversity and environment
  - 3) Human-altered Nature makes us more susceptible to animal-borne diseases like COVID-19
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- 1) **A special webinar on Dr. Nazrul Islam's new book, "Rivers and Sustainable Development" organized by BAPA**



Special BAPA Webinar  
9:00 AM, Dhaka Time on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

Presentation, Discussion and Q & A  
On a new book **"Rivers and Sustainable Development"**  
Published by The Oxford University Press



Presided over by:  
Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin  
EVP, BAPA and  
Coordinator, National  
River Saving Movement



Presented by:  
Dr. Nazrul Islam  
Author of the Book  
Founder, BEN and Initiator, BAPA



Moderated by:  
Sharif Jamil, General Secretary, BAPA



Discussant:  
Dr. Muzibur Rahman Hawlader  
Chairman, National River Conservation Commission



Discussant:  
Dr. Ainun Nishat  
Emeritus Professor  
BRAC University



Discussant:  
Prof. Md. Khalequzzaman  
Lock Haven University, USA

Live at the Facebook page of:  
বাংলাদেশ পরিবেশ আন্দোলন-বাপা Bangladesh Environment Movement-BAPA

On August 16, BAPA organized a successful special webinar on Dr. Nazrul Islam's new book, "Rivers and Sustainable Development," published recently by the Oxford University Press. The webinar was moderated by BAPA General Secretary Sharif Jamil. Many river scholars, policy makers, and activists joined the event. It began with a presentation by Dr. Nazrul Islam of the contents of the book and its policy messages. His presentation was followed by discussion by Prof. M. Khalequzzaman of Lockhaven University of USA, Dr. Ainun Nishat,

professor emeritus of BRAC University, and Dr. Muzibur Rahman Hawladar, Chairman of the National River Conservation Commission. All of them appreciated the book and expressed their support to the policy analysis and views presented in it. They thought that river policy makers, scholars, and activists of Bangladesh would benefit greatly from the book and recommended its wide dissemination. They also offered constructive suggestions regarding future editions of the book. The discussion was followed by a lively Q&A with wide participation. All participants were appreciative of the book, wanted to know more about many issues, and expressed their desire to get hold of copies of the book to read it.



<https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=320951622574690>

An newspaper [report](#) (by the Daily New Age) documented the key points made by the speakers and discussants of the webinar. The report emphasized that India built many barrages upstream the Teesta River with the goal of withdrawing and diverting the water during the dry season. The keynote speaker of the webinar Dr. Nazrul Islam observed that India does not provide Bangladesh its fair-share of river water during dry season, when, as a result, river beds get sedimented. Then, when in the rainy season, India opens all the flood and sluice gates, letting out the full monsoon flow the Bangladeshis rivers cannot carry the water and expand sideways, causing bank erosion. Another New Age article, titled “[Make transit for India conditional on water-sharing deal: Nazrul,](#)” reports Dr. Nazrul’s suggestion of making granting of transit facilities to India conditional on its opening up the shared rivers through removal of all dams, barrages, and other river intervention structures that it had built upstream. He noted that so far Bangladesh had been providing all the transit and transshipment facilities without getting anything in return from India regarding rivers.

He therefore reiterated his “Transit in exchange of rivers” formula as a win-win formula for sharing of rivers by Bangladesh and India.

## **2) International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (August 9) reminds Bangladesh of the importance of ethnic diversity and environment**

On the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (August 9), a colorful program highlighting unique culture, dance, and music of the hilly people of the country was organized by Bangladesh Adibashi Forum at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka premises. This year's theme was “COVID-19 and indigenous peoples' resilience.” The day was also observed in several districts and upazillas of Bangladesh, including Bandarban. In the program, held in Dhaka Bangladesh, Adibashi Forum presented 10-point demand highlighting rights of tribal populations. The program speakers included Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon, Adibashi Forum President Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma (Santu Larma), CPB President Mujahidul Islam Selim, renowned writer Prof Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, and noted columnist Syed Abul Maksud. The speakers expressed their concerns about how indigenous populations in Bangladesh were still deprived of their fundamental rights regarding land, culture, language, health and education. They therefore urged the government to ensure the indigenous peoples' rights and preserve the integrity of diverse ethnic communities and their surrounding environment in Bangladesh.



<https://www.thedailystar.net/country/intl-day-indigenous-peoples-observed-1446070>

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/indigenous-day>



Dr. Jahirul Huq Shakil, a professor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, wrote an [opinion piece](#) in daily *Ittefaq* highlighting the importance of ethnic diversity and problems that different ethnic communities are facing in Bangladesh. The author claims there are more than 5,000 different ethnic communities in the world comprising 30 to 35 crores of world population. They are the stewards of 80% of the world's ecosystems and biodiversity. Similarly, in Bangladesh, although a fraction (about 1.11 percent) of the population belongs to at least 27 distinct ethnic groups, they play an important role in economy, environmental stewardship and enhancing diversity with unique culture and traditions. However, in COVID-19 pandemic, although lives and livelihoods of adibashi peoples are hard hit like mainstream people in Bangladesh, government support reaching to them is often inadequate and disproportionate. The author urged targeted initiative and actions from the government with financial incentives and other program support to these marginalized ethnic communities. More robust government and organizational initiatives are also necessary to recognize the importance of ethnic diversity in Bangladesh, ensure the rights of these deprived ethnic populations and help preserve their surrounding environment and biodiversity.

### **3) Human-altered Nature makes us more susceptible to animal-borne diseases like COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by a coronavirus, most possibly transmitted from animal to humans (zoonotic virus), has awakened the global communities about the risks of animal-borne diseases that can pose an immense threat on human health. A recent [article published in \*Nature\*](#) shows that extensive conversion of natural habitats into cities, suburbs and agricultural land and so on for human uses makes humans more susceptible to zoonotic infectious diseases.

Apparently, humans already have altered half of Earth's habitable land that caused decline or disappearance of many key animal species such as rhinoceros or ostriches. These key or special species require specific ecosystem/habitats compared to many other abundant non-specialist animals such as rats, bats, starlings that are often generalists in terms of habitat requirements. Experts conducted a global analysis of vertebrates and shows how land-use change increases the risk of zoonotic diseases. According to the authors, the natural habitat conversion favors the generalist animals that harbor agents causing human disease. The striking results of the analyses shows that "as human-dominated land use increased, so did the total number of zoonotic hosts, whereas the total number of non-hosts declined". Experts suggest that "restoring degraded habitat and protecting undisturbed natural areas would benefit both public health and the environment".

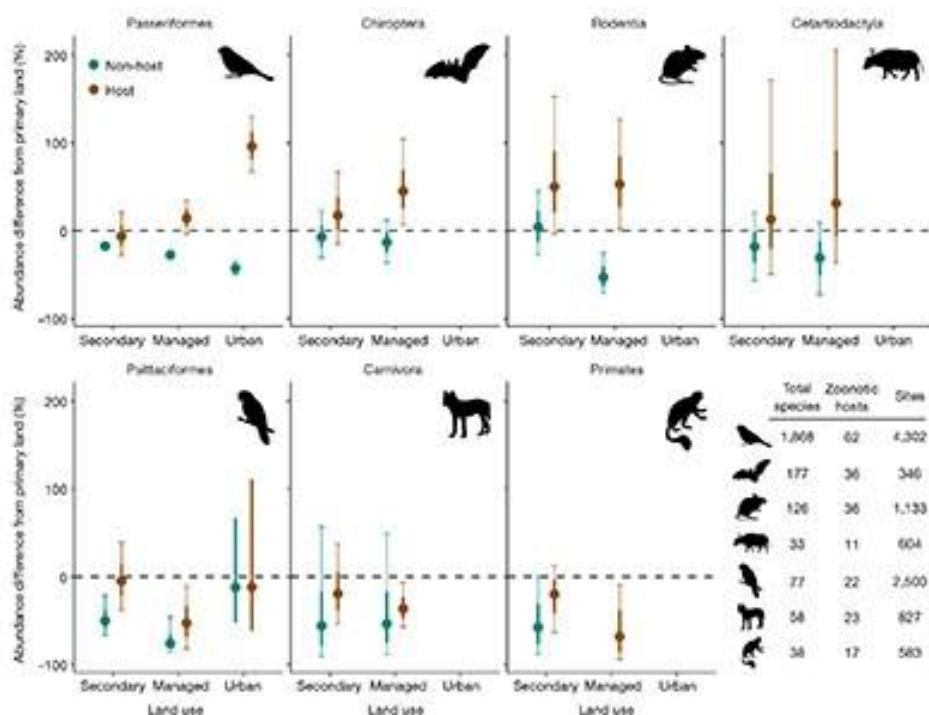


Figure: Zoonotic host diversity increases in human-dominated ecosystems  
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02189-5>

BEN supports these calls and urges all societies to work for protection of nature and for sharing the nature equitably with other animals and species.

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