

# Ensure right to water

*Speakers tell conference on 'Water Democracy' in Kuakata*

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A two-day conference titled "Water Democracy" started at Hotel Nilanjona in Kuakata under the district yesterday.

Speaker at the conference organised by ActionAid Bangladesh urged preparing proper guidelines to save rivers and ensure water rights of people from all sections of the society.

The programme focused on issues like 'Water governance in South Asia', 'Water and ecosystem', 'Water and livelihood', and 'Women and water'.

"Like voting rights, water right should be given due importance as it is directly connected with life. We need water-based urban development plan and research as Bangladesh is a riverine country," Prof Dr Imtiaz Ahmed of the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, said at the conference.

Emphasising environmental, economic, political and social aspects of water, Dr Ainun Nishat, professor emeritus of BRAC University, said knowledge from locals should be taken into serious consideration while planning on water.

Role of women should be increased in water management system as they have

practical knowledge on the issue, the noted water expert said.

"Urgent steps should be taken to save water from pollution and address the problems of salinity rise, threat to biodiversity and livelihood of people near river areas.

"While building bridges on rivers, care should be taken so that the process does not make the water courses narrow," he said.

Unplanned construction of dams and embankments on rivers adds to the problem of already shrinking sweet water sources at home and abroad, speakers said.

Shamsur Ali, manager, Land and Water Rights Department of ActionAid Bangladesh, presented the keynote in the opening session with Farah Kabir, Country Director of the organisation, in the chair.

M Inamul Haque, chairman of Institute of Water and Environment, Nazrul Islam, program director of Asia Foundation, Dr Md Nurul Alam, deputy director of Department of Bangladesh Haor and Wetlands Development, Sabitri Pokharel, adviser of Mahila Adhikar Manch in Nepal, Rahima Sultana Kazol, executive director of local NGO AVAS, addressed the programme.