

Poor villagers have poorer diets

A couple of months ago, there was much hoopla about the Prime Minister being on the cover of the Time magazine that ran an exclusive interview of her in which she said all sorts of nice things about the country. Apart from pointing out her government's commitment to the war on terror, evidenced by dramatic haul ups of masterminds behind numerous bomb attacks, the PM made a very strange statement saying that there was no hunger in Bangladesh." Ordinary folk of the country can only beg to differ. After all the reports on the terrible plight of Monga affected farmers and their families in the northern districts, it is indeed hard to agree with the PM's complacent statement.

A recent survey has found that only a measly 4 percent of households can afford an optimal diet and 39 percent of under-five year olds in the rural areas are stunted.



People in the rural areas spend 60 percent of their total expenditure on food. But with skyrocketing prices of essential food items and no real improvement in income it means that people are consuming less and less food and are therefore chronically hungry. Poor nutrition in children is a major cause of disease and ill health as malnourished children have weak immune systems and are vulnerable to diseases. Poor sanitation, unhygienic environment in the households and overall poverty only exacerbate the situation. The results of malnutrition and chronic hunger include low productivity, ill health and stunting of generations of Bangladeshis. If the PM still believes there is no hunger in Bangladesh she should go to the poor Northern districts and ask the people what they eat the whole day.

The evils of Polygamy

According to the web definitions online, Polygamy is defined as having more than one spouse at a time. The men of the Muslim faith are allowed a total of four wives at the same time. In many of the developing Muslim societies around the world, this has been interpreted as a privilege, which can be enjoyed by Muslim men. Most of them even tend to think that keeping four wives happen to make them better Muslims than other men. However, what most men ignore or rather choose to ignore is that there is a certain policy that governs the act of polygamy in Islam. According to an Islamic scholar, "Marriage from multiple women in Islam might not be allowed for those who might result in damaging the society with their marriage by bringing more illiterate, poor, and in many cases starving children to the society." Even today, polygamy is practiced in many parts of Bangladesh. Men see it as a noble act asked of them by God Himself and women simply go along with the

decisions made by their parents, ever eager to get them hitched.

To put a damper on this practice has recently the Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) proposed to impose higher taxes on polygamist men in the budget for 2006-07 fiscal, according to which, one will have to pay the RCC Tk 10,000 for a second wife, Tk 30,000 for a third wife and Tk 40,000 for the fourth.

Currently the tax is at Tk 1,000 for keeping a wife after the first wife according to the RCC sources.

This was done for the welfare of the families, according to Mizanur Rahman Mintu, the City Mayor of Rajshahi, and also to discourage the idea of multiple marriages itself. "Multiple marriages in some cases result in women repression and increase population growth," he said.

Though it was a very small step towards uplifting the status of women, it was definitely a brilliant one taken towards the betterment of the society.