

Speakers at seminar Arsenic contamination in groundwater nat'l calamity

Speakers at a seminar in the city yesterday said arsenic contamination in groundwater is a national calamity that calls for mobilisation of local expertise and use of traditional wisdom to mitigate, reports UNB.

They observed that the time has come to think twice if the country should allow any more overseas funding as loans to make "only investigations" instead of any curative programme for the exposed victims.

Addressing the seminar as chief guest, Environment Secretary Syed Marghub Morshed said arsenic contamination in the groundwater of Bangladesh is severe and needs to be addressed immediately.

The seminar on "Arsenic Contamination in Groundwater of Bangladesh" at the National Press Club was jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) and the Forum for Environmental Journalists. Bangladesh (FEJB).

It was organised as part of the Sustainable Environment Management Programme (SEMP) of the Environment Ministry.

Presided over by FEJB chairman Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, the seminar was also addressed by UNDP assistant resident representative Shirin Kamal Sayed, Department of Environment (DOE) director general A R Khan, Dr Babar N Kabir of World Bank, Prof A H Khan of Dhaka University, and FEJB vice chairman Gaziur Rahman and general secretary Bakhtiar Rana and Shehabuddin Ahmed Nafa.

Giving an account of the problems relating to arsenic contamination in groundwater in Bangladesh, Dr Babar Kabir said 59 out of 64 districts were already affected by the problem exposing 24 million people to arsenic contaminated ground-

water.

Quoting latest information presented at the coordination meeting of the National Arsenic Committee, he said that 7,000 people were identified as suffering from arsenicosis and another 75 million people are at risk.

"Mere marking of red or green" on tubewells in the rural areas will not solve the problem, Dr Kabir said adding that the community should be allowed to decide their options to operate and maintain their water sources.

UNDP assistant resident representative Shirin Kamal Sayed said the world body had come forward with the biggest global programme at a cost of 26 million US dollars to address various environmental issues, including arsenic problem — a national disaster in Bangladesh.

She said the arsenic contamination was basically related to drinking water, which later manifested as a health hazard.

The primary responsibility of providing safe drinking water to the people should be entrusted with the local government bodies or the public health department, the UNDP representative said.

She lauded the role of FEJB in advocating environmental issues and urged the journalists also to focus the social and economic impacts of arsenic contamination, particularly on rural women and the poor.

A R Khan, DG of the Department of Environment, stressed the need for alternate drinking water sources other than groundwater.

He favoured integrated pest management to minimise contamination of water sources by pesticide and fertilisers.

Khan also suggested hygienic use of surface water from rural ponds to avoid the risk of getting toxicated by groundwater.

Weather

Dry weather likely

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely to occur at one or two places over Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Jessore, Kushtia, Pabna and Bogra in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country, Met office said yesterday.

Day temperature is expected to remain nearly unchanged over the country during the period.

The country's highest temperature yesterday was recorded at 37.0 degree Celsius at Rangamati and the lowest 12.8 degrees in Srimongal.

The sun sets today at 6.11 pm and rises tomorrow at 5.58 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in Percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	35.7	19.0	48	38
Chittagong	34.5	18.5	80	72
Rajshahi	34.0	17.0	49	43
Khulna	34.5	22.2	80	51
Barisal	35.0	19.6	80	56
Sylhet	35.5	19.6	47	29
Cox's Bazar	35.0	21.4	65	80

Fighting abuse of women, children 'South Asian govts should strive harder'

By Staff Correspondent

South Asian governments should strive harder to fight abuse of women and children, who are treated as second class citizens in the region, said Nigel Fisher, visiting new director for South Asia of the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

"There has to be a stronger political agenda for drives regarding violence against women and children to create

people of the world live in South Asia and out of them 50 per cent are malnourished". This problem can be resolved through education of women as mothers can educate their children," he added.

Education for women is an important area for UNICEF in South Asia where women and children are abused most, he said.

"Without education children are virtually condemned to a life with a general lack of material and intellectual well-being," he said.

More than 130 million children of primary school age, in developing countries, including 73 million girls are growing up without access to basic education, a recent UNICEF report has said.

Media can play a vital role to fight issues like child and women trafficking, abuse of children and women, arsenic mitigation programme and others, the UNICEF director said.

Shahida Afzal, UNICEF representative in Dhaka added that UNICEF is seeking more funds for arsenic mitigation programme in the country. UNICEF has already allocated \$2.5 million for arsenic mitigation programme in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, Dhaka will host the next "Media Summit" on child rights and the media scheduled for next March with a view to create awareness among the media personnel on women and children issues.

About 150 media personalities from 27 countries are expected to attend the summit, the last Media Summit was held in Manila of Philippines 1996.

Nigel Fisher, Regional Director for South Asia, UNICEF, addressing a press conference yesterday.

"awareness," he said while addressing the local press yesterday.

Nigel Fisher flew here Monday on a three-day visit at Bangladesh as a part of his six-week tour of the South Asia region.

He said: "Twenty two per cent

of the world live in South Asia and out of them 50 per cent are malnourished".

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