

Raise rice output to meet growing demand: PM

UNB, Gazipur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said rice production must be further increased for alleviating poverty and building up food security in the country to avert any unforeseen crisis.

"Otherwise we may have to face disaster for food crisis. Our scientists and policymakers will have to work in unison from now to meet a growing food demand in the future," she said inaugurating a function in celebration of three decades of founding of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI).

Since its inception in 1970, BRRI has evolved 41 high-yielding varieties (Ufshi) of paddy, including one hybrid variety. Now paddy cultivation land of Ufshi has increased to 65 per cent from 5, which covers 78 per cent of paddy output in the country.

The rice research institute was set up in 1970. After independence, the East Pakistan Rice Research Institute was renamed Bangladesh Rice Research Institute.

Addressing the scientists, researchers, and staff of BRRI at its auditorium, the prime minister said she came to know that so far the institute had developed technologies for high-yielding paddy seeds mostly suitable to friendly environment.

Danes admit

FROM PAGE 1 inland water sector this year has been withdrawn and will not be reallocated.

However, sources indicated that Denmark would carry forward all sorts of co-operative in other areas. Assistance in such areas as agriculture and pest management is also likely to be made by Denmark besides normal sectors.

The Danish charge of corruption whipped up a diplomatic storm and embarrassed the government.

The Danes first brought 'intention of corruption' charge against the shipping minister in a letter written to Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman on February 15.

Later on, they also pursued the matter with Law Minister Moudud Ahmed and Communication Minister Nazrul Huda.

Immediately after the April 13 press conference, where the Danes brought the corruption charge, the Danish envoy was summoned to the foreign office.

On April 17, Dhaka sent a note of protest to Copenhagen through its mission in Dhaka. Ambassador Munk was summoned to the foreign ministry and handed the protest note.

A day after the Danes brought

"From now on more stress will have to be given to developing technologies for paddy cultivation suitable to unfriendly environment," she told the function calling for evolving rice that can be produced in all weather conditions, fair or foul, in order to meet any exigencies for natural calamity.

Khaleda noted that a huge amount of money is spent for producing paddy seeds, irrigation and fertiliser, and said researchers and scientists would have to think deeply how to reduce the production costs further.

She observed agriculture production in the country is largely depend on the nature as crop loss in droughts, excessive rain, storms and floods are still a perennial feature here.

"So you have to try to develop more high-yielding varieties of paddy for growing when the weather remains good," she told the BRRI scientists and researchers, adding that the nation expects more contribution from them as an advanced segment of society.

So there is no scope for complacency for the previous successes," she told her audience.

Later, the prime minister visited an exhibition of varieties of high-yielding rice plants, seeds and agricultural equipment evolved by BRRI.

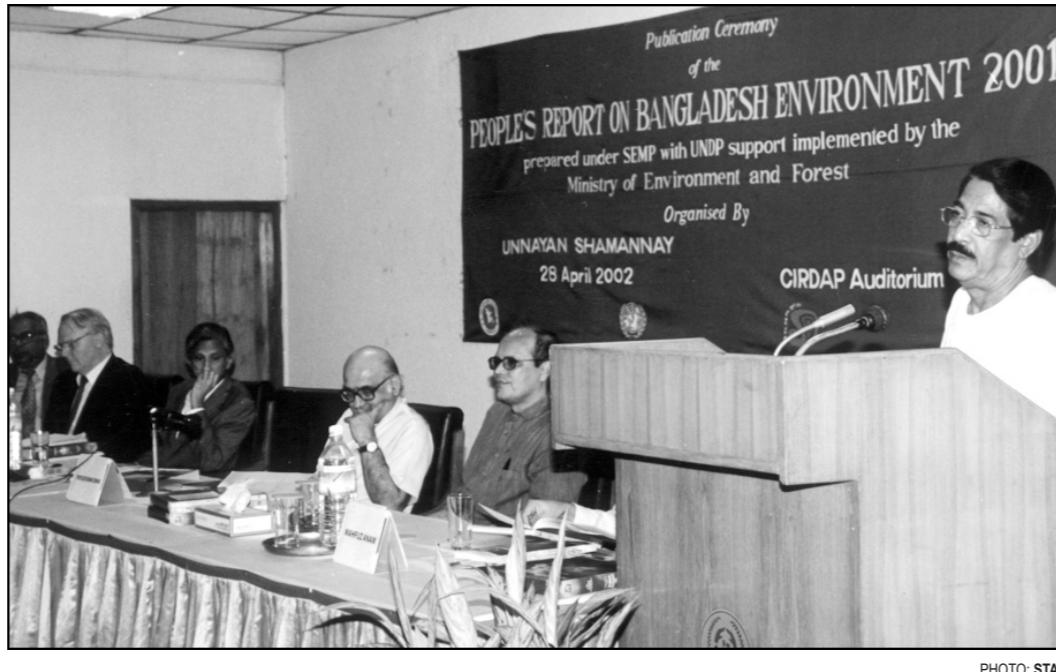


PHOTO: STAR

Environment and Forest Minister Shahjahan Siraj speaks at a publication ceremony at the CIRDAP auditorium in the city yesterday.

End deadlock, make JS effective

Speakers urge govt, opposition at seminar in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar in the city yesterday appealed to the government and the opposition to make serious efforts towards ending the current deadlock in parliament and the hostile relation between them in order to make the parliament truly responsive for the betterment of the people through democracy.

The seminar titled 'Beyond Patronage: Rights and Responsibilities of Members of Parliament' was jointly organised by Legislative Support Service Project (LSSP) of Manabik Sahajya Sangstha (MSS) in collaboration with the European Commission and National Democratic Institute (NDI) of USA. It was the second of a series of five scheduled seminars on 'Making Parliament Responsive'.

The speakers stressed the need for changing the behavioral attitudes of the leaderships of the major parties in a democratic manner to strengthen the country's democratic process.

Participants who took part in the discussion included MPs from both sides of the present parliament.

They emphasised the need to bring suitable amendments to article 70 of the constitution to give the MPs a wider legislative status so that they could practice actively in the process of formulating necessary laws.

Referring to article 70, MPs said they are not involved either in legislation or development process, and are not allowed to speak against any bill placed in the house by their respective parties even if it goes against the interest of common people.

Article 70 of the constitution bars floor crossing by the MPs and voting against party decision in the parliament.

Terming the local government as the heart of democratic process, speakers also emphasised the need to strengthen them.

The programme was moderated by Dr Alaudin Ahmed, an MP and former vice chancellor of Jahangirnagar University while noted academicians and politicians took part in the discussion.

Among others, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Faruk Khan MP, Zahir Uddin Swapan MP, Haider Akbar Khan Rono, Prof Dalem Chandra Barman of Dhaka University, and Akbar Ali MP were also present in the occasion.

Dominic Cardy, senior programme officer of NDI coordinated the seminar while Feroz M. Hassan, president of MSS gave the vote of thanks to the participants.

They arranged delivery of passes much ahead for 'fees' ranging from Tk 2000 to Tk 3000.

"Amidst the current crisis one cannot guarantee the delivery. We can bribe officials to get passports in advance but the price is heavy," said Hossain, one of the *Dalal* at the Agargaon passport office.

Asked about the crisis, Md. Wahidul Haq, director general of the Agargaon passport office, said, "We do not have enough books in stock and for that reason we are facing a temporary crisis, which we expect to overcome shortly."

He said to rationalise distribution of passport books all offices have been asked to issue passports sparingly.

"We have formed a three-member committee to figure out the basis of the recommendation of the committee books will receive deposits or fees," said Haq.

"Since we now have limited stock of books, those are being distributed on priority basis to serious patients, students and employment seekers. We are asking people to submit relevant documents along with the application so that the committee can carefully evaluate the applications," said the director general.

Police-mob clash leaves 20 hurt at Khagrachhari

UNB, Khagrachhari

At least 20 people were injured in a police-mob clash at the district council office here on Saturday.

Witnesses said the clash erupted at noon when the police were trying to prevent the mob from ransacking the district council office.

Two police personnel, SI Lutfor Rahman and Subedar Fazal Ali, were also injured during the clash.

About 5,000 people, who applied for financial assistance to the district council went on the rampage and attacked the office as the relief officials stopped distributing money after payment to some of them, witnesses said.

Traffic movement on Panchkhali-Khagrachhari road remained suspended during the clash. The protesters damaged two vehicles on the road.

The agitated people shouted against the Chairman of the District Council and the Relief Officer.

Police rushed to the spot and resorted to baton charge to disperse the protesters, who also pelted stones at the police.

As the mob turned violent, police fired 10/12 rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrators and arrested six of them from the spot.

Army personnel were called in to restore peace. They were patrolling the area.

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fails to deliver the passports in time, one official anticipated.

Although people are having a tough time, a section of the passport office staff and *Dalal* or middlemen are taking cashing in on the crisis, charging twice as much for delivery of a passport applied for earlier.

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Meanwhile, delivery of more than 20,000 applications including those under urgent category has been held up due to the crisis. An estimated 10,000 or more applicants in the headquarters, 5,000 in Sylhet and some 1,000 in Barisal office are awaiting delivery of the passports.

According to officials, about 1,500 books are issued everyday from the headquarters, 500 from Sylhet regional office, 300 from Chittagong regional office and 200 from Barisal regional office. In fact, issuance of new passports has almost stopped due to the crisis.

The banks where fees are deposited with for the books have been asked not to take any deposits until further notice.

A 'very urgent' passport, which is usually supposed to be delivered in three days at a fee of Tk 3,150, is being delivered after 16 days. An 'urgent' passport normally delivered in 11 days at a fee of Tk 1250 is being delayed by up to 60 days.

Meanwhile, the police had to be deployed at the Sylhet regional passport office premises recently to bring order. "We may have to take similar measures if the government

cannot withdraw them overnight".

As low as nine per cent, the tax-GDP ratio in the country is one of the lowest in the region, he said. "Even a country like Nepal has improved its tax-GDP ratio to 16 per cent."

The country's agriculture and export sectors do not contribute any tax, he mentioned.

Saifur was critical of existing budget for haphazard imposition of supplementary duties and said it was difficult to work out the mess at one go in the next financial year.

On behalf of the trade chambers and associations, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) placed some 137 proposals related

to customs duty and 76 for supplementary duty at the meeting.

In response to the proposals, Saifur said: "Revenue measures, especially the tariff structures, must be in line with WTO trade regime, whether we like it or not."

State ministers for finance and planning Shah M Abul Hossain and Anwarul Kabir Talukder, National Board of Revenue Chairman (NBR) Dr Shoeb Ahmed, FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun also spoke at the meeting.

The NBR chairman said duties on raw material of the industries would be reduced in the next budget and the VAT collection system would be easier.

The FBCCI president said the country could be self-dependent if misuse of Tk 7,000 crore in SoEs, gas, petroleum and power sectors could be stopped.

The meeting, organised jointly by the NBR and the FBCCI, focused on different measures for direct and indirect tax prior to formulation of the 2002-03 budget.

The supplier sent two other letters to the Director of Stores and Supplies of CMSD on December 26 and 27 last year, to the effect that it had received no reply from the CMSD and that the installation site was not ready as per Siemens design. As such, despite satisfactory installation, commissioning and functional tests were not possible due to lack of power lines in the

rooms housing the machines.

Two more letters followed on January 27 and February 12, stating that the power lines necessary for commissioning of the equipment was not in place despite repeated requests, and that "hand-over of the equipment could not be completed, as there was no electric line available."

According to engineers, the grid line for power supply is not ready and it would cost an estimated Tk 21 lakh to have the power line extended to the NICVD.

"We have informed the Public Works Department (PWD) about the lack of power line and they are working on it," said Prof Nazrul Islam, Director of NICVD.

Director of CMSD, Brigadier General Md Abul Kalam Azad said, "We are not responsible for giving power connection. The engineers responsible for the job are working on it. I have also informed the health secretary about the matter and hope the problem would soon be over."

Financed by the World Bank, the Tk 10-crore equipment are sup-

posed to be frequently used to detect specific ailments of the heart through Cardiac Catheterisation, a process that takes about 30 to 40 minutes. The doctor directs a movable table where the patient lies. An X-ray machine rotates around the table and takes pictures at various stages during the test.

The procedure uses a catheter or a small long tube, which is inserted into the femoral artery at the groin and threaded up into the brain or spinal cord.

Dye or contrast is injected into the catheter, which passes along the artery, such that the doctor may see the inside of the blood vessels and take X-ray images. These images are then photographed showing any blockage in the arteries.

Experts are apprehensive about the performance of the machines after such a delay following installation.

"My experience is that such delay in use after installation may

cause substantial damage to the machines," said a cardiologist.

The NBR chairman said the interest of a particular group. Priority determination is very important and there must be focused use of resources for areas like human resource development and institutional capacity building."

The minister termed advance income tax, license fee and supplementary duty in case of imports "the most non-transparent systems in revenue collection" but said he "cannot withdraw them overnight".

As low as nine per cent, the tax-GDP ratio in the country is one of the lowest in the region, he said. "Even a country like Nepal has improved its tax-GDP ratio to 16 per cent."

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