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Political parties blamed for health woes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday criticised political parties, saying they scrap policies when they go to power forcing the common man and major service sectors including health to pay very dearly.

They called for adopting a long-term policy aimed at widening people's access to health care and offering prompt service to patients.

They were speaking on the 'Health and Population Policy' under the National Policy Review Forum 2003 organised jointly by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo at the National Press Club.

Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain attended the function as the chief guest while former state minister for health Prof M Amanullah as the special guest.

Former secretary Faruq Sobhan Chowdhury presided over the

session while Dr Naushad Faiz presented the keynote paper.

Most of the speakers called for full integration of the health and family planning sectors.

They said the desired progress in the reduction of total fertility rate (TFR) could not be achieved because of the disintegration of the Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP).

The present government is trying to disintegrate the health and population sector, they said.

Several leaders of the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) differed with the government decision on division of the health and population sector.

The discussants called for accountability of physicians. They expressed frustration over lack of provision for punishment for wrong treatment.

They also recommended monitoring and supervision of private

clinics and pathological laboratories.

Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said no significant progress was made despite unification of the health and population sectors under the past government.

"Oil and water never mix up," he added.

The minister said the government took up a decision to separate the health and population sectors considering the deficiencies experienced during the rule of the past government.

"We have planned for a new Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPS) instead of the HPSP," he said.

He called upon all concerned to work together to ensure health for all, saying there was no lack of will to this end.

Prof Amanullah differed with the health minister: "As a practising

physician, I cannot support the disunification of the health and population sector."

He said there might be some flaws at the beginning of a programme and that is why his government could not scrap it.

He said the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had extended support for the HPSP.

National Professor Nurul Islam said people in the rural areas had long been subjected to neglect. Eighty per cent of patients live in villages while 80 per cent of physicians live in urban areas, he added.

Islam said there was no proper treatment at government hospitals so private clinics were largely situated opposite to government hospitals.

G M Kader, MP, accused doctors of neglecting patients at public hospitals.

"Government hospitals have developed into a trap for leading

patients to private clinics," he said.

Prof M S Akbar, MP, underscored the need for accountability of the health sector. He demanded stern punishment for wrong treatment by doctors.

Dr Faiz highlighted some key achievements in the health sector including rise in life expectancy. He, however, expressed concern over the stagnant TFR.

Earlier, Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam welcomed the guests in the session.

Prof Saleh Ahmed, former vice chancellor of the Jahangir Nagar University, Prof Sultana Jahan, additional director general of the health directorate, Faruk Ahmed of BRAC, AKM Azizul Hoque of BMA and Syed Akram Hossain, Fazlul Karim of FBCCI and Kabir Hossain of Bangladesh Centre for Labour Studies also spoke.



Syed Alamgir Farouk Chowdhury chairs a discussion session on "Health and Population Policy" at the National Policy Review Forum 2003 jointly organised by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo at the National Press Club in Dhaka yesterday. Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and former state minister for health Prof M Amanullah are also present.



PHOTO: STAR

BRAC Chairman Fazle Hasan Abed speaks at a discussion on "Poverty Eradication and Employment Generation" at the three-day National Policy Review Forum 2003 jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo held at the Academy for Planning and Development Auditorium in Dhaka yesterday. PKSF Managing Director Salehuddin Ahmed, former finance minister AMA Muhiht, CPD Chairman Professor Rehman Sobhan and Rahmat Ali MP are also seen.

Political commitment a must to eradicate poverty

Speakers at working session observe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Participants yesterday at a working session on poverty eradication and employment generation said strong political commitment is required for eradicating poverty and generating employment.

The observation was made during the working session of the three-day National Policy Dialogue Forum 2003 jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and The Prothom Alo held at the Academy for Planning and Development Auditorium.

Eminent economist Professor Rehman Sobhan chaired the session, which was attended by Rahmat Ali MP as special guest.

PKSF (Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation) Managing Director Salehuddin Ahmed said the Vietnamese government found bureaucratic attitude and corruption of the government officials as barriers to implementing development

projects. "But the government there was able to overcome the problems by implementing the pledges it made before people," Ahmed said.

Imran Matin, member secretary of the task force on Poverty Eradication and Employment Generation and also senior economist of Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC Centre, presented the keynote paper.

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) Chairman Fazle Hasan Abed attended the session as chief guest.

PKSF managing director suggested preparing the interim poverty reduction strategy paper (I-PRSP) in line with the macro-economic policy agenda of the World Bank and the IMF.

He also stressed on devising ways to make poor people owners of enterprises.

BIDS Senior Research Fellow Binayak Sen, who was engaged

with the preparation of PRSP, said development process often takes tumble due to lack of political will.

Rahmat Ali MP said the development works are not progressing, as there is not enough presence of patriotic members in the parliament.

Mizan Khan, faculty member of the North South University Environmental Studies Department, said in addition to all the measures, micro-insurance of the poor people's assets, which might be affected by flood, cyclone or other natural calamities, should also be included in the poverty eradication process.

Taking part in the discussion, a teacher of Bangladesh Agriculture University blasted the government for not taking any member of the Planning Commission, which is planner of the poverty eradication of the country, to the recently concluded Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting.

Credit and Development Forum

Executive Director said NGOs are helping extreme poor groups. "But NGOs should also take initiatives so that people do not reach to the extreme poverty level," he said.

He also urged the government to set up a National Resource Development Institute, which will find out the reason of poverty.

An Awami League leader said actually this type of discussion should be held at the village level. "It will be more helpful for the organisers to find the better measure of poverty reduction," he said.

The task force suggested increasing access of poor people to assets. It also stressed on the enhancing the market power of the poor.

The report also suggested improving the quality of education as it is a strong tool for poverty eradication.

Accent on exploring foreign markets for farm products

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh needs to explore overseas markets for its agricultural products to make farming a profitable business.

There has been an ingrained attitude among farmers and government that farm products are only meant for meeting domestic food demand. So, new initiatives based on technology are not coming in the sector, which contributes 25 per cent to gross domestic products.

Experts, policymakers, politicians, agricultural entrepreneurs and civil society members came up with the observations yesterday in Dhaka at a working session on a Task Force Report on 'Rural Economy: Agriculture and Non-Farm' of the three-day National Policy Review Forum 2003, organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo.

They said although Bangladesh is traditionally an agriculture-based country, this sector cannot emerge as a profitable business due to lack of government support, besides the ignorance of farmers.

They urged the government to increase subsidy in agriculture sector to make it vibrant and profitable.

Reminding of the fact that 80 per cent of the country's population live in rural areas and most of them are farmers, the speakers warned if the government fails to make their occupation profitable, the national economy will be hit hard.

Addressing the session, former agriculture minister Matia Chowdhury said as arable land is shrinking, the government should take vigorous efforts for land reclamation.

Citing example of some European countries who reclaim land from sea, she said Bangladesh has good prospects in reclaiming land from the Bay of Bengal as



PHOTO: STAR

Land Minister M Shamsul Islam addresses a session on "Rural Economy: Agriculture and Non-Farm" at the National Policy Review Forum 2003 at the Academy for Planning and Development auditorium in Dhaka yesterday. From left, Dr Quazi Shahabuddin, director general of BIDS, Abu Ahmed Abdullah, research director of BIDS, and Matia Chowdhury, former minister for agriculture, are also seen in the picture.

many big rivers meander through the Delta to fall into the Bay.

"We have lot of islands but people do not want to live there, as there is no electricity, communication and other required infrastructures. So, these islands remain largely inhabited and untapped," she lamented.

She urged the government to increase agriculture loan and subsidy in the sector to help local agro-products compete in global market.

On patent of agro-products, she said negotiating skills and expertise should be developed to obtain patent rights of indigenous varieties.

Speaking as chief, Land Minister Shamsul Islam said apart from ensuring reasonable prices, farmers should be given required logistics support to preserve and process surplus products to market in foreign countries.

Acknowledging land reforms as a core demand of farmers, he assured owners will be provided with Certificates of Land Ownership (CLO) under a land reform project. Once completed, the entire land ownership status of the country will be computerised, bringing an end to

untold hassles in registration, survey and ownership transfers, the minister said.

Chaired by Abu Ahmed Abdullah, chairman of the Task Force and research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), the session was also addressed by Dr Quazi Shahabuddin, co-chair of the Task Force and director general of BIDS.

Motiur Rahman, editor of the Prothom Alo, made the welcome statement at the session held at the Academy for Planning and Development Auditorium.

MM Akash, member secretary of the Task Force and professor of Department of Economics of Dhaka University, presented the keynote paper on "Rural Economy: Agriculture and Non-Farm."

The Task Force put forward seven recommendations for strengthening rural economy. The recommendations include increasing growth in agriculture sector and food security; ensuring easy agriculture loan; ensuring reasonable price of farm products; inventing modern technology and extending it to field level; reforming land management;

improving fish and livestock resources and help evolving agro-based industries.

It also recommended for increasing subsidy and reducing diesel and power prices.

The Task Force recommended taking efforts to create market of agro-items abroad for sustainable development of the crop sector.

It also called for key diversification and improving preservation and process system.

The Task Force also urged the government to press the developed nations to stop farm subsidies in their agriculture sector, besides calling for united efforts of poor countries to get duty and quota free access to rich countries.

In view of EU's everything but arms system for LDCs, the Task Force asked the government to help local exporters improve quality of their products to reap maximum gains from the offer.

Communications system going through 'revolutionary changes'

Nazmul Huda tells transport and infrastructure session

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda said the communications system is going through 'revolutionary changes'.

"We are exploring all possibilities of bringing new dimensions to the communications system and you will get the results after implementation of various development projects in the sector," he said.

The minister was speaking yesterday as chief guest at a working session of the National Policy Review Forum 2003, co-organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo.

Huda said various proposals

including monorail and circular train services are being examined to improve the city's public transport system.

The government is also thinking of faster train service and a circular waterway around the capital for cheap transport of goods, he said.

About the sufferings due to the insufficient number of CNG (compressed natural gas) stations in the city, the minister said the problem would be over as more such stations would be installed by August this year. If the firms and individuals concerned fail to do this within this time limit, their security money of Tk 25 lakh each would be confiscated, he cautioned.

Huda said negotiations are

underway with the Thai government regarding speedy communications system in the capital.

Sounding a warning to private sector vehicle importers, he said, "We would not allow making the country a dumping ground of faulty vehicles."

The session was chaired by Waliul Islam of USAID. Dr. Rahmatullah, programme director of the CPD, presented the taskforce report on city governance. CPD Executive Director Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Omar Hadi, Shamsheer Ali, Mahmudur Rahman, Abdul Matlub Ahmed and Abdul Haque also spoke at the session, held at the CIRDAP auditorium.

The taskforce report suggested

establishing a national transport coordination council to plan and implement an integrated transport system in the country.

The council should be headed by the finance minister and involve other ministries concerned as members, it said.

The other speakers suggested decentralisation of the government's development efforts.

They stressed strengthening the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) for strong monitoring of faulty vehicles and controlling environment pollution. The railway network should be expanded, they felt.



PHOTO: STAR

Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda speaks at a discussion on the taskforce Report on "Transport and Infrastructure" of the three-day National Policy Review Forum 2003, organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo at the CIRDAP Auditorium in Dhaka yesterday. Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of CPD, Matlub Ahmed, chairman of Nitel Motors Ltd, are also seen.