

30 million 'chronically poor'

Seminar told
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday said 25-30 million people in Bangladesh are still 'chronically poor' although the country has come out of the 'shadow of famine'.

They also said about 24 percent of rural population faces the abuses of chronic poverty -- low consumption, hunger and under-nutrition, lack of access to basic health services, illiteracy and other deprivations for more than a decade now.

With greater resource mobilisation and prioritisation of the needs of poor people by the government and its development partners,

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Politics of conflict eats up economic potentials

Speakers at CPD dialogue say

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Policy makers, top politicians, development partners, civil society members and business leaders yesterday unanimously felt that Bangladesh is unable to tap its economic potentials due to confrontational politics.

They also wanted reforms in the

election process as well as in the Election Commission to address overspending in elections.

Speaking at a dialogue styled 'Civil Society's Perspectives on the Bangladesh Development Forum 2004' organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) at the CIRDP auditorium as chief guest, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said confrontational politics is badly

affecting economic development needed for poverty alleviation.

Unless such practice is put to an end, the country would fail to accelerate reforms, he added.

Saifur felt that political parties must have a consensus on economic reforms. Otherwise, it would be

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PHOTO: STAR

Garment employees hold black flags at a procession at Muktagong yesterday to mourn seven workers who died in a stampede triggered by a fire in a Mirpur building housing six apparel industries.

N'ganj poultry trader, son buy freedom from captors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A poultry trader of Narayanganj and his son, both abducted Tuesday, bought their freedom nine hours later after paying their captors Tk 30,000 in ransom.

Quoting the first information report (FIR), police said a 13-member gang picked up trader Yusuf Ali, 50, and his son Musa, 22, from Digubabur Bazaar at 1:30pm and confined them in a house at Palpara in the town.

"The abductors took us blindfolded to a house in Bholali and tortured us as we refused to pay them toll," Yusuf said in the FIR.

The gang called Yusuf's brother-in-law Ahmed on his cell phone and demanded Tk 50,000 ransom. After a

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PHOTO: STAR

A woman makes palm-leaf hand fans at Solomaaid in Badda in the city yesterday. Such fans prove handy for people in a frequently power-outage-hit city amid scorching summer heat.

RAPE IN SUST Teachers demand action against rapist's aide

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Teachers of Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST) brought out a black badge procession yesterday demanding immediate punishment to the accomplice of JCD cadre Mirza Mahbul Haque Sadi charged with rape of a fellow female student.

SUST authorities were compelled to expel Sadi in the face of sustained student agitation over the past few weeks and are currently investigating charges against Sadi's

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Vajpayee casts vote, signals for victory

3 killed, 38 hurt as violence flares at 4th round of India polls

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee sought re-election to his parliament seat and a victory for his governing coalition yesterday as some of the country's most violent regions voted in the fourth phase of national elections.

Vajpayee-- one of over 107

million people eligible to take part in this stage-- cast his vote in his constituency, Lucknow.

But less than 2 percent of voters turned out in Indian-administered Kashmir where violence marred the voting.

Terrorist violence in Kashmir and clashes between rivals groups in Bihar claimed three lives and injured

several others till afternoon.

Suspected Islamic militants exploded a grenade outside a polling station in Anantnag, in Indian-administered Kashmir, killing one person and injuring three others. A second grenade exploded in a polling station in Bijbehara-- part of the same constituency-- injuring five

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Bombs hurled at Meherpur AL office, 1 killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kusthia

One person was killed and 20 others injured when three bombs were hurled at the Meherpur Awami League office at Shah Alam Municipal Market yesterday evening.

Witnesses said soon after a pickup van and a car arrived on the scene at around 7:45pm, the power supply failed and the bombs exploded.

Abul Hossain, 55, a labourer, died on the spot, while President of Meherpur AL Golam Rasul, 45, was injured critically.

The two vehicles drove away towards Mujibnagar border but Meherpur police managed to seize the pickup van and arrested its driver. Ten to 12 criminals crossed the border.

After the blasts local AL activists brought out a rally to protest the incident. Deputy Commissioner Abul Kashem and Superintendent of Police Mainul Hossain visited the spot.

Writ seeking stay on Bar Council polls rejected

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday summarily rejected a writ seeking stay on May 13 election to Bangladesh Bar Council (BBC) on plea of flaws in the voter list.

After hearing both sides, a bench comprising Justice M Joydul Abedin and Justice Sharifuddin Chaklader passed the order.

Advocate Abdul Momen Chowdhury and Zaherul Islam, who are contesting the election, filed the writ.

Attorney General AF Hassan Anif, also ex-officio chairman of the BBC appeared for the government while petitioner Abdul Momen Chowdhury pleaded his case.

Robbers shoot Sonali Bank guards, loot Tk 34 lakh, rifles

UNB, Rajbari

Armed robbers shot and wounded two guards of the Sonali Bank on the Goalunda-Daulatdia Highway at about noon yesterday and took away Tk 34.48 lakh and their rifles with bullets.

Police said a cashier and two armed guards of the Goalunda branch of Sonali Bank were carrying the BIWTA money from Daulatdia ghat in a tempo.

As they reached near Bangladesh Hatchery, a pickup van dashed the tempo that overturned on the roadside. Immediately, seven to eight young men came out of the pick up van and shot cashier Ayub Ali and guards Noor Maula and Siddiqui Rahman. They took away the trunk containing the money and two rifles with 10 bullets from the guards.

Hearing sounds of gunshots, locals came and rescued the wounded cashier and guards and rushed them to Goalunda health complex. As their condition deteriorated, they were shifted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Cashier Ayub Ali said at the hospital that the pickup van followed their tempo from BIWTA ghat at Daulatdia. As the tempo reached near Bangladesh Hatchery at south Daulatdia, the pickup van dashed the tempo from behind. The tempo overturned on the roadside.

Seven or eight youngsters aged 18 to 21 came out of the pickup van, fired at them and took away the money and the rifles, he added.

Shawkat Ali, Goalunda branch manager of Sonali Bank, said they used to collect BIWTA money for deposit under an agreement with the bank's head office. "We have no vehicle and used to hire tempo for collecting the money," he said.

"We used to collect the money this way," said Shawkat when asked why money was being carried in tempo without police protection.

No-one was arrested in connection with the incident till late in the evening.

Angry Iraqis demand release of prisoners

17 killed in fresh fighting; Rumsfeld stops short of saying sorry for abuses

AGENCIES, Baghdad, Karbala

Enraged Iraqis protested against "American savagery" in US-run jails in Baghdad yesterday as fresh fighting between coalition forces and guerrillas loyal to radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr killed 17 people.

Some 500 Iraqis protested outside Abu Ghraib, the US-run jail at the centre of a damaging scandal over prisoner abuse, a day after US officials revealed that 25 detainees had died in US custody in Afghanistan and Iraq since

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Diego back to hospital

BBC ONLINE

Football legend Diego Maradona has been re-admitted to hospital, less than a week after discharging himself.

Maradona left hospital on Thursday after 12 days of treatment for severe heart and breathing problems.

The 43-year-old was due to fly to Cuba on Tuesday to resume treatment for cocaine addiction, but the trip was cancelled at the last minute.

And television reports in Argentina say Maradona returned to hospital early on Wednesday, accompanied by his doctor.

Maradona was first taken ill with a swollen heart on 18 April after watching former team Boca Juniors play.

He was taken to the private Suizo-Argentina clinic in Buenos Aires where he was heavily sedated and put on artificial respiration.

However, he decided to discharge himself after 12 days and went to stay at a country estate in General Rodriguez, near Buenos Aires.

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Prayer Timings		
May 6		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-34	6-38
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

TAGORE FESTIVAL

Artists sing a song of Rabindranath Tagore in celebration of the 15th National Tagore Festival at the Shishu Academy auditorium yesterday.

US envoy supports FBCCI political reform proposal

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

US Ambassador Harry K Thomas yesterday backed the proposals of the country's apex trade body aiming at reforming politics and improving governance, which earlier drew lawmakers' flak.

"I support the courageous steps of FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry) for its proposals to resolve political problem," the envoy said.

"Bangladesh is a democratic country. Every individual and organisation should have freedom of speech in a democratic society," he said at the inauguration of Unique Trade Centre, a multi-storied commercial building, in Dhaka.

Thomas said proposals of the FBCCI would help the government improve governance, which is needed for more investment and business growth.

On April 26, the FBCCI released its recommendations to reform key areas including politics.

The recommendations called for increasing the power of the president, reducing the number of ministries to 20, ban on religion-based politics, creation of six provinces, revival of upazila system, creation of two posts of deputy speaker -- one each from the treasury and opposition benches -- and formation of citizens' committees to curb corruption of police.

The FBCCI proposals came under heavy fire in the Jatiya Sangsad on April 27. Describing the proposals as violative of the constitution, Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Shah Mohammad Ruhul Quddus and Krishak Sramik Janata League's Abdul Kader Siddiqui demanded a ruling from the chair on the issue.

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar in a ruling described the FBCCI statement "contrary to the constitution" and "inconsistent with constitutional provisions."

Speaking at yesterday's function...

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