



Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina speaks at the chehlum of slain party lawmaker Ahsanullah Master at Gazipur Stadium yesterday. Gazipur Awami League arranged the chehlum.

Fund constraints holding back project execution

Water Resources Minister says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Water resources ministry could not implement many projects to improve irrigation system and check river erosion because of fund constraints, Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed said yesterday.

"Personally, I am not happy with the budgetary allocation made for the water resources ministry in the Annual Development Programme for the next fiscal," he said.

"We could not carry out many important and emergency programmes every year because of inadequate budgetary allocation. Although the allocation in the ADP for next fiscal is a little higher than in the current fiscal, it is still not enough," Hafiz added.

Moreover, lengthy approval process causes delay in implementing the projects, he said.

Addressing a press conference, the minister said proper implementation of the projects can help double food production and protect millions of people from river erosion.

Dismissing the criticism that the ministry is wasting money in the name of river protection and other projects, Hafiz said water management in Bangladesh is really tough and the projects seem expensive because of the nature of jobs performed.

The rivers damage vast areas along their banks as they become so furious while flowing towards the Bay after travelling thousands of miles, he added.

Hafiz said his ministry has been playing a key role in increasing



Water Resources Minister Major (Retd) Hafiz Uddin speaks at a press conference at the secretariat.

agricultural output by improving irrigation efficiency, controlling floods and removing water-logging.

Food production went up to 2.50 crore metric tons at present time from 80 metric tons about 40 years ago, he said, adding that this year's food output will touch the 2.90 crore-ton mark.

The minister said the rivers have gobbled up about 8,700 hectares of land and seven to eight lakh people become homeless each year due to river erosion.

To check river erosion, the ministry has already completed projects in Rajshahi, Sirajganj, Chandpur and Bhairab Bazar, he said.

A number of projects are also

being implemented to protect Sariakandi upazila of Bogra district from the erosion of river Jamuna.

The cities and towns of Khulna, Moulavibazar, Habiganj, Chapainabganj, Dinajpur, Panchagarh and Kurigram have also been protected from river erosion under the secondary town flood protection project.

At present, the ministry has been implementing about 71 projects.

Hafiz said his ministry along with eight line ministries has prepared a draft law to stop encroachment of rivers and other water bodies and to preserve them.

A cabinet committee has also been formed to scrutinise the proposed law, he said and hoped that the law will be finalised within next three to four months.

Hafiz also said his ministry has taken up four irrigation and six FCDI projects involving Tk 4000 crore to meet the food deficit. The country presently spends Tk 2500 crore on import of 30 lakh metric tons of food.

The projects are Tista embankment project (2nd phase), Kurigram irrigation project (north and south units), Uttar Rajshahi irrigation project, Dhakshin Comilla and Uttar Noakhali draining and irrigation projects, Upper Surma-Kushira flood control, draining and irrigation project, Jamalpur flood protection, draining and irrigation project, Kalni-Kushira river management project and rehabilitation of polders in coastal areas.

State Minister Goutam Chakrabarti, Secretary Ayub Quadri and other high officials of the ministry and its different departments were also present.

SPEAKER'S DIRECTIVE

Activate JS body to stop extortion in transport sector

BSS, Dhaka

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar yesterday gave directives to the state minister for home affairs to take necessary action to activate the committee formed by the prime minister to stop extortion in transport sector.

The Speaker's directives came when two members of parliament Shahjahan Khan of Awami League and SA Khaleque of BNP indulged in arguments on the issue of extortion in transport sector.

tion in transport sector.

Shahjahan Khan told the House that the committee was not taking actions against extortion in transport sector despite the committee had submitted its recommendations three months ago.

He was, however, countered by treasury bench member and transport sector leader SA Khaleque, who said that the committee was active, as a result there was no extortion now in the transport sector.

PROMOTIONS TO JOINT SECY RANK Bhuiyan refutes allegation of political bias

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday brushed aside the allegation that promotions were given to the deputy secretaries of various BCS batches and cadres on political consideration.

"Officials in the administration were promoted on the basis of their ACR (annual confidential report) and performance, not on political consideration or from communal point of view," he told parliament responding to a point of order raised by an opposition lawmaker.

The minister, however, assured that they would consider the case of any official who was deprived of promotion despite his eligibility for promotion.

He accused the previous Awami League (AL) government of partisan and communal bias in promoting the government officials.

Raising a point of order, AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim alleged that the government elevated 84 officials to the rank of joint secretary on political consideration and from communal point of view, violating fundamental rights.

One gets 7 yrs' RI for throwing acid on wife

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Tribunal in Dhaka yesterday sentenced one person to seven years' rigorous imprisonment for throwing acid on his wife on August 26 in 1998.

Judge Kazi Rahamat Ullah of the Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression gave the verdict in presence of the convict Mohammad Abul Hossain.

The tribunal also fined him Tk 10,000, in default, to suffer one year more in jail.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defense completed their arguments

and the court recorded statements of 6 prosecution witnesses.

In the case filed with Lalbagh Police Station, it has been alleged that Abul tortured victim Aleya Begum for dowry after their marriage in 1994. On refusal, the accused married for the second time and ousted Aleya from the house at about 4:00am on August 26 in 1998 and threw acid on her body that burnt her throat, right hand and right chest.

Later, victim's mother Shahida Begum filed the case accusing Abul Hossain the same day and the investigation officer pressed charges against Abul on December 7.

Plan to lower age limit to make juvenile justice system effective

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is thinking of reducing juvenile age limit to make the juvenile justice system effective, said Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujaheed at a consultation in the city yesterday.

"There is no denying the fact that there has been an alarming rise in juvenile offence taking deadly nature in recent times," he added.

The daylong national consultation on Community Participation and Diversion in Juvenile Justice was held at the Department of Social Services.

It was organised jointly by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) under its legal reform project.

The minister identified unhappy family life, frustration, acute poverty and social erosion as principal reasons for juvenile offence.



Residents of East Maniknagar under Sabujbagh thana formed a human chain at Muktangan in the city yesterday demanding trial of the killers of Yasmin, a housewife.



LGRD and Cooperatives Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan addresses a view exchange meeting with journalists, organised by his party at the Bhasani auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left is Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and on his right is BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman.

Implement govt plans to ensure progress in agri sector

Minister tells agri-scientists, researchers, field workers

BSS, Dhaka

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar yesterday called upon the agri-scientists, researchers and field workers to ensure further progress in the agriculture sector through implementing both short and long-term plans of the government.

The government has identified the challenges of agriculture sector and accordingly taken policy measures to face them, he said this while he was addressing a day-long seminar on "Position of traditional paddy in Bangladesh".

The seminar was organised at Sher-e-Bangla Agriculture University auditorium here to mark the "International Paddy Year-2004" declared by the United Nations.

In his keynote paper, Chairman of the Department of Botanical Reproduction Dr Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan said there were 4,000 varieties of paddy in Bangladesh, but most of them except Kalazira, Chinigura, Binni, Gandha and Kalijuri had already disappeared.

He said high yielding varieties of paddy introduced to harvest increased production had in fact driven out the traditional ones from the country. He, however, advised them for preserving the traditional varieties of paddy at the field-level, motivating the farmers to produce high-flavoured tasty rice and establishing the patent rights of traditional varieties of paddy.

MK Anwar stressed on crop diver-

sification to produce more paddy from the limited arable lands. The gap between the per-hectare productions in the research institute and the field-level is very wide, he said and asked the researchers to find out the reasons behind it.

He said the government had already undertaken due measures to maintain steady supply of seeds of the

high yielding varieties of paddy to the farmers. As much as 55 percent agri land has now come under irrigation facilities with a prospect of further increase in rice production in future, he added.

He said that his ministry was contemplating due steps to ensure fair prices of all agri-commodities for the farmers.

"Most of the juvenile offenders come from the upper class families often disturbed and disintegrated by extravagant lifestyle, lack of care and attention to children," he added.

He laid emphasis on the familial care and poverty alleviation as preventive measures to the problem and said community participation and coordination of the efforts of both public and private sector players are needed to bring an effective juvenile justice system in place.

Deprived class juveniles turn to crimes out of despair and distress, said Abdul Jabbar, social welfare secretary.

"As it's a delicate problem and dealt with in a corrective manner, we need to look for participation of family and community for its justice system," he added.

"My experience as a judge shows the more we punish the youth the more we push them away from their family and community," said Justice Barry Stuart, advisor to the CIDA legal reform project.

"More police, judges and jails do not help much, but partnership with family and community is crucial in addressing the problem," he added.

Describing the Bangladesh situation as very similar to that of Canada, Stuart said participation of community in justice system in Canada helped dispensation of juvenile justice.

To get to the exact nature and scope of the juvenile offence in Bangladesh, a comprehensive and organised research is needed, said the CIDA resident director James Baker.

During the business session, Justice Stuart made a presentation on 'Juvenile justice and community mobilisation'.

Over 1600 held, 8 arms recovered

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested 1,606 people, including two identified criminals, during their countrywide drive in the last 24 hours till 6.00am yesterday.

During the drive, the law enforcers also recovered eight firearms and 26 bullets and filed six cases against nine people under the Arms Act, says a police headquarters press release.