

Formulate nat'l policy to eliminate child labour

Speakers tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Child labour must be brought to an end to break the vicious cycle of poverty in Bangladesh, said United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) Country Representative Louis Georges Arsenault at a seminar yesterday.

"Income-poor families tend to have more children who are more likely to be engaged in work. As a result they miss education and thereby miss the opportunity to earn a decent income in future. That's why we call it a vicious cycle," he said.

The national seminar on 'Hazardous child labour in an urban informal economy' was jointly organised by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Unicef at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city.

According to National Child Labour Survey 2003, there are over seven lakh working children and more than 90 percent of them are in the informal economy both in rural and urban areas.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Louis Georges explained the

implications of vicious cycle of poverty and said child labour affects the development of a country.

If children can never break the cycle of poverty, the human resources of a country will also never develop, he noted.

"In a globalised world, a country's development depends on the quality of its human resources. So, I can safely say that preventing and avoiding child labour will contribute to the development of Bangladesh," the Unicef Country Representative observed.

He suggested formulation of a national policy and concrete action plan to address the issues relating to child labour, particularly hazardous labour, including commercial and sexual exploitation of children and child domestic workers.

"There are some factories of international standard in the country, but hazardous child labour is seen mainly in the small workshops and households," Secretary to the Ministry of Labour and Employment Ashfaqur Hamid said, suggesting setting up of vocational training centres for the children who fail to pursue education.

Former vice-president of

Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) Kamran T Rahman, who read out the speech of BEF President Manzur Elahi, said child labour is deeply linked to poverty and unequal distribution of resources.

"Elimination of child labour is not possible without promotion of their families," he said, adding that socially acceptable measures should be taken to stop hazardous child labour.

A paper presented at the working session of the seminar said the root causes largely relate to unemployment in rural areas, urban migration, lack of education and social awareness.

"There is a need to develop and implement community, local and municipality-based child labour monitoring systems involving all major stakeholders," the paper said.

It identified city corporations to be the best-suited public and primary authority to implement the programmes that address child labour in an urban informal economy.

Gopal Bhattacharya, director of International Labour Office in Bangladesh, and Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan, chairman of National Coordination Committee on Workers' Education, also spoke at the seminar.

Cheating case against deputy speaker dismissed

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The cheating case filed yesterday against Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui for misappropriation of Tk 12 lakh from his former gunmen on different dates was dismissed.

Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullah Baqui passed the order after SM Julfikar Rahman, former gunman of the deputy speaker, filed the case with the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka seeking an arrest warrant against the accused.

In his order, the magistrate mentioned that the documents submitted by the complainant in support of taking money by the accused are unclear. So, the complaint was dismissed, the magistrate added.

In his complaint, Julfikar, who was former member of Special Branch (SB), mentioned that Akhter Hamid took Tk 12 lakh through him from 11 people promising jobs to the posts of scientific and fire service and civil defence officials.

But the victims neither got jobs nor took the money back that they paid to the accused. Moreover, the accused sacked the complainant as he requested the deputy speaker to give their money back, Julfikar added.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, the deputy speaker brushed aside the allegation and accused Julfikar of cheating people using his office.

"The gunmen took money from people of Birhampur of Dinajpur promising them jobs, but he failed. The people, who gave money came to me and complained against Julfikar."

Then I sent to the matter to special detective branch for investigation in 2004. In the investigation, Julfikar was found guilty and he was sacked from the service," the deputy speaker said.

"Zulfikar came to me in 2006 again to provide him a job. But I did not entertain his appeal," he said.

Ainuddin resigns from LDP

Major General (retd) Mohammad Ainuddin Bir Pratik yesterday resigned from Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

He was the vice president of LDP, formed under the leadership of Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and former BNP lawmaker Olk (retd) Oli Ahmed on October 27 last year.

In a letter sent to LDP Maghbaraz office, Ainuddin said he resigned voluntarily for personal reasons.

Ainuddin was not directly involved with any political party when LDP was formed.

"We are yet to receive his resignation letter," said an LDP official.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1 Monday, February 19, 2007 issue published a long interview as a lead news with the sole intention of maligning before the nation the former prime minister and chairperson of BNP Begum Khaleda Zia, members of her family and some other former ministers and government officials.

The title of the interview was, "Khaleda Zia became reckless in her second term." The interview was given by Mr AHM Nurul Islam, who worked initially as private secretary (PS) to the then prime minister and subsequently as secretary in-charge at the prime minister's office (PMO) during the four-party alliance government.

Mr Hanif Mohammad took the interview. Before publishing such an interview, a daily newspaper such as Prothom Alo or the interviewer did not feel it at all necessary to contact Begum Zia or anyone else figuring in the interview on any issue discussed in the interview. This is undoubtedly repugnant to universally accepted norms of journalism. We have been surprised to see that such a report could be published by a daily of Prothom Alo's stature.

On every point mentioned in the interview, Mr AHM Nurul Islam's views are totally baseless, ill-motivated and are full of distortion of facts. In every matter, Mr Islam has tried with ill motive to assassinate the character of the honourable former prime minister, her family and the concerned respectable persons. As a result, on the one hand, the image of Begum Zia and others has been tarnished and their reputation tainted, and on the other, the whole nation has been misled with false and fabricated facts.

In actuality, Mr AHM Nurul Islam was retired compulsorily from service on some proven specific and serious charges during his terms first as PS to prime minister and then as secretary in-charge in the PMO, both the posts being very important and extremely sensitive. The Bureau of Anti-Corruption also filed a case against him. He then filed a writ petition in the High Court which is still pending for disposal. The then government allowed the case to proceed and the law to take its own course. But now it appears that at the end of the term of the alliance government, Mr Islam has launched with vengeance, an ill-motivated effort to destroy the image and honour of the former prime minister and chairperson of BNP. His statements are absolutely out of grudge, and are baseless and false. He has thereby tried to confuse the people.

We hereby lodge a strong protest to this interview given with an ill motive and also to its publication in Prothom Alo.



PHOTO: STAR

(From right) Dr M Zahir, Barrister Amir-Ul Islam, Dr Kamal Hossain and Abdul Baset Majumder talk to reporters at Supreme Court Bar Association office yesterday after the Supreme Court recalled its order regarding submission of eight-point information of election candidates.

Donors likely to increase funding for power sector

UNB, Dhaka

Donor agencies are likely to increase their funds for the power sector to tackle the problem of power crisis across the country.

Finance Adviser Dr Mirza Azizul Islam informed reporters of the possibility of increased funding after his meeting with USAID Bangladesh Mission Director and Local Consultative Group (LCG) Chairman Gene V George at his office yesterday.

Representatives from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations and DFID were also present at the meeting.

In reply to queries from the funding agencies, the finance adviser told them that power, port, education and health are now on the priority list of this

caretaker government.

"There are three plans of this government to improve the power sector situation: short, medium and long-term plans," Dr Islam told reporters.

Under the short-term plan, the government will take initiative to fix technical problems of the power plants. Under the medium-term plan, there will be generation of power while the government will look after the generation and demand management simultaneously under the long-term plan, he added.

Talking to reporters, Gene V George said they wanted to know the priority of the government. "The government's priority is our priority; our work is to harmonise the government projects by smooth financing

and increase the financing as per government requirement."

ADB country director Hua Du said they would sit in a meeting to look after the projects that move at a very slow pace.

She also expressed her satisfaction over the functioning of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). "We are observing their activities like the mass people of the country."

In the meeting, the donor representatives agreed to have the scheduled meeting on the Poverty Reduction Strategy within the shortest possible time.

Economic Relations Division (ERD) secretary will communicate with the donor representatives in this regard and fix the date for the meeting.

Nation salutes Ekushey heroes

FROM PAGE 1 Hossain Khoka, foreign envoys and Dhaka University Vice-chancellor SMA Faiz on the leafy campus abuzz with the milling crowd breaking the night time silence with the theme song - Amar bhaiyer rokte rangano Ekushey February.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and LDP President Badruddoza Chowdhury laid wreath at the Shaheed Minar, followed by hundreds of others streaming in to mark the great event.

Following Unesco's November 17, 1999 declaration of February 21 as the International Mother Language Day, 188 countries across the globe observe the day to promote linguistic diversity and

multilingual education and raise awareness of cultural traditions based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

On this day in 1952, students and the general public in Dhaka took to the streets in protest against the then government's denial of Bangla as the national language and imposition of Urdu as the sole official language of Pakistan.

Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Shafiur, Jabbar and many others sacrificed their lives as the then Pakistani rulers ordered firing on the agitation.

The brave children of the soil established mother tongue Bangla as a state language through shedding their blood.

The protest sparked on February

21, 1952 progressed into the long-drawn struggle that eventually led to the birth of Bangladesh.

The Shaheed Minar and its adjacent areas went through a facelift, and roads and medians were festooned with Bangla alphabets and national flag.

The Dhaka University authorities that are supervising the Ekushey February (February 21) programmes have prohibited display of portraits, posters or banners and processions or rallies in and around the Central Shaheed Minar.

The day is a public holiday and the national flag will fly at half-mast atop government, autonomous and private buildings.

PDB sticks to Harbin

FROM PAGE 1 manipulation in which the company hides cost of plant spare parts to show a low cost offer. "Besides, after the ERL blacklisted the company how can any government agency even want to use this company to install a new power plant?" asks a PDB official.

Sources said this demonstrates that the PDB is still under the grip of the same corrupt axis of officials who pushed the Harbin deal ahead to comply with the wishes of Hawa Bhaban, and thereby undermined the national interest.

The cabinet purchase committee and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) during the four-party alliance rule had played a part in this scam to overrule the decision of the first Review Panel formed by the Central Procurement Unit (CPU), Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Planning.

The panel was formed late in 2005 to investigate corruption allegations against the PDB brought by another Chinese company— CMEC — that participated in the Chandpur bid.

With the help of a powerful syndicate of politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen and lobbyists, Harbin Power Engineering bagged contracts for most of the power projects — Tongi 80 MW, Fenchuganj 90 MW and Chandpur 150 MW — during the alliance rule.

The Ecneec, in one of its last meetings on October 04 last year, under Clause 10.1 recommended further examination of Chandpur 150 MW combined cycle power project. On the one hand it mentioned that cost can be saved by setting up the 150 MW power plant through one tender and on the other hand recommended that only additional 50 MW should be sourced through a fresh tender. This implied upholding the awarding of contract for 100 MW to the disqualified bidder Harbin.

Due to time constraint, the alliance government could not have the RDPP prepared by the PDB before leaving office.

Industry experts pointed out that although prices of materials may have gone up and dollar has been devalued in one and a half years since the bid submission on June 28, 2005, in no way a 50 percent jump from the bidder's quoted price can be explained in the revised cost estimate

of the PDB.

On condition of anonymity, a senior PDB official said the actual cost has emerged in the RDPP to cover cost of items and spare parts that Harbin omitted in its proposal to show it quoted the lowest price. Revised estimates reveal the price gap that enabled Harbin to quote an abnormally low price compared to that of the other two bidders — CMEC, China and BHEL, India— both of whom included price of necessary spare parts in their bid and were unfairly deprived due to connivance of corrupt PDB officials and Harbin lobby.

The RDPP includes some new items and puts some items into two categories while a few items have been shown with exaggerated price. For example, the cost of foundation, installation, erection, testing and commissioning has shot up by more than \$ 3.27 million. Civil and building work costs have shot up by \$ 2.14 million. Landing charges, inland transportation costs, insurance and others have increased by \$ 410,000. The above facts will be clear if estimate of the RDPP is thoroughly scrutinised and compared with what was shown in the original PP of the project. Costs are now plugged back in exaggerated form under different heads to cover the items and spares missing from Harbin's proposal.

The Daily Star had earlier extensively reported how by omitting price of essential spare parts Harbin became the lowest bidder in the Chandpur project and how the PDB is set to sign with Harbin an agreement full of legal loopholes.

The same technique has been used by Harbin repeatedly to secure contracts for projects and make the clients suffer due to its poor workmanship and charging for spare parts at exorbitant rates. An example is the Harbin-built Tongi 80 MW Plant that has failed to deliver from the very first day of its inauguration in September 2005.

"In spite of the negative Tongi experience and the ERL's blacklisting, nothing could stop Harbin due to intervention from the Hawa Bhaban," noted one source. "The then state minister for power Anwarul Kabir the Talukder drew the wrath of the PMO and Hawa Bhaban for filing a case with the ACC against the PDB officials involved in supporting Harbin in the Tongi 80 MW Plant."

In its scrutiny, the IMED Review

Panel found that Harbin did not submit the technical proposal at the second stage of the two-stage tendering process. In violation of Regulation 29 of the PPR 2003, Project Director Tulsi Das Saha in his letter dated July 9, 2005 sought from Harbin a Revised Technical Proposal which it did not submit on June 28, 2005, the last date for submission. Surprisingly, Tulsi continues to be the project director and no action has been taken against the corrupt officials against whom the Review Panel recommended specific disciplinary measures in its report. The Review Panel also declared Harbin's proposal as null and void.

Using the argument of price difference, the then PDB chairman ANH Akhter Hossain and state minister for power Iqbal Hassan Mahmud convinced the Cabinet Purchase Committee (CPC) to legalise an illegal act by awarding the project to the disqualified bidder Harbin. Regulation 53 (8) of the PPR 2003 states, "Decision of the Review Panel shall be final and a Procuring Entity shall act upon such findings." But the PDB and Power Division did not act on the directives of the panel.

"A bad precedence was set whereby the verdict of an independent review panel appointed by the government has been overturned by the accused PDB. Chandpur case continues to be an example of how the PPR 2003 can be sidelined through corruption and lobbying," notes an official.

"Unless the caretaker government intervenes to have the decision of the 1st Review Panel under PPR 2003 implemented, aggrieved parties will be discouraged to file complaints under PPR 2003."

He pointed out that speedy implementation of the decision of the Review Panel will restore public confidence in the PPR 2003 and help the PDB add 150 MW to the national grid at a time of acute power crisis.

Meantime, the Harbin lobby within the PDB is actively campaigning to have contract for the project awarded to Harbin with the argument of saving project cost and time. "The irony is that the RDPP gives Harbin more money to play with under different heads whose costs have shot up to cover the missing spares from Harbin's flawed proposal," one source noted.



PHOTO: STAR

Recipients of Ekushey Padak 2007 pose with Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed at the award giving ceremony at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city yesterday.

MOBILE COURT

Four jailed for using formalin in fish

STAR REPORT

Five traders in Dhaka were jailed and a factory in Chittagong was fined Tk 4 lakh for trade-related offences.

Our staff correspondent reports: A mobile court in Dhaka sentenced five fish traders to five months' imprisonment for selling fishes with harmful formalin and Jatka fish (young hilsha).

The mobile court led by Metropolitan Magistrate Rokon-ud-Doula conducted a drive in Roy Saheb Bazar at Johnson Road in the city.

For the first time, the mobile court was equipped with instant formalin testing kits.

They tested fishes on the spot and found presence of formalin in most of these fishes.

Appeal to probe allegations of 'misconduct' by chief justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalist Mizanur Rahman Khan yesterday appealed to the President to investigate the allegations of 'gross misconduct' by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassir Husain through the Supreme Judicial Council.

In a letter to President Iajuddin Ahmed, Mizanur Rahman said the Chief Justice flouted Clause 1 and 2 of the code of conduct under the Article 96 (4) of the Constitution by giving an order on November 30 last year with regard to three writ petitions challenging the legality of the president's taking over as the chief adviser.

Even the Supreme Court did not provide the copy of the stay order by the Chief Justice following an application of the then attorney general, the letter said.

It said eminent lawyer Dr Shahdeen Malik sent a legal notice to the Registrar of the Supreme Court on January 9 in this regard. On February 5, the Supreme Court in a letter replied that they did not get any letter as per rules.



No change in temperature

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 28.6 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Chittagong and lowest 09.6 degree Celsius at Srirangal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:57pm today and rises at 6:27am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest 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	26.8	13.2	59	37
Chittagong	28.6	15.3	49	42
Rajshahi	27.0	11.5	70	57
Khulna	27.0	14.4	77	68
Barisal	27.0	12.8	70	67
Sylhet	27.9	12.7	69	47
Cox's Bazar	28.4	17.0	55	--

Hasan Mahmud Khandaker takes over as DG of Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Additional Inspector General of Police Hasan Mahmud Khandaker yesterday joined the Headquarters of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) as its director general (DG), said a press release.

After doing masters in English literature from Dhaka University, Hasan joined Bangladesh Police Service in 1982 and performed his duty in various capacities with integrity and honesty.

He also did his graduation from National Defence College in 2005 and served in UN Peace Keeping Mission in Bosnia for three years.

Hasan received higher training in Australia, the UK and the US.

Before joining the Rab as its DG, he served as Additional Inspector General of Police in Special Branch and as director of legal and media wing of Rab during its inception.

Restoration of Nat'l Women Dev Policy '97 demanded

A team of Samajik Protirodh Committee, a platform of country's women and human rights organisations, yesterday submitted a memorandum to Information Adviser to the Caretaker Government Barrister Moynul Hossain demanding restoration of the National Women Development Policy '97, says a press release.

The memorandum said the National Women Development Policy '97 is a milestone for the development of Bangladesh, as it was adopted in line with Cedaw agreement and Beijing +5.

"But the matter to regret is that the BNP-Jamaat led coalition government brought some basic changes in the Policy that women society cannot cope with," the memo added.

The team comprised of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad General Secretary Ayesha Khanam, Advocate Sultana Kamal of Ain-o-Salish Kendra, Dr Mahmuda Islam of Women for Women, Selina Khalek of Bangladesh Mahila Samity, Shahin Anam of Manusher Jonno, Shahnaz Sumi of Bangladesh Nari Pragati, Gita Das of Nari Pokkho, Khadiza Lina of Brac and Rokeya Rafiq Baby of Karmojibi Nari.

Arrest of Satyabir condemned

A group of civil society members and development activists yesterday expressed deep concern over the arrest of Satyabir Dewan, general secretary of Jonosanghati Samity, says a press release.

In a statement the signatories said Satyabir Dewan is an honest and idealistic political activist and also a founding member of Jonosanghati Samity. Even no complaint or case was filed against him with police.

The arrest of Satyabir would bring the government's ongoing drive to capture the corrupt politicians and godfathers under question, the statement said adding that the information of recovering arms from his house is also surprising.

Prof Mesbah Kamal, HK Arefin, Dalemchandra Barman and Shourav Shikder of Dhaka University, Sanjeeb Drog of Bangladesh Adivashi Forum and development activist Numan Ahmed Khan were among the signatories.

CA urged to release NGO official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trocaire, an Irish Catholic non-governmental organisation, in a letter yesterday urged Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed to release NGO official Shahidul Islam, who was arrested on January 27.

Shahidul is the director of Uttaran, an NGO that is a partner of Trocaire, and he was arrested from Tala Upazila, Sathkira.

Trocaire also sent a copy of the letters to the Irish Embassy in India, the Bangladesh Embassy in Belgium and to the home ministry, urging the government to take all necessary measures.

Trocaire also called on the government to launch an investigation into Shahidul's arrest.

The letter was signed by the head of Trocaire's international department, Mike Williams.

Death anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra



Halim, says a press release.

Relatives and admirers have been requested to attend a milad mahfil at her residence after Asr prayers tomorrow.

Tomorrow is the second death anniversary of Aleya Khatoun, a social worker of Bogra and wife of former police officer M d A b d u l