

Bring corrupt people in energy sector to book

Bapa seminar urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Economists and energy experts at a seminar yesterday called upon the government to establish people's ownership on the country's natural resources as these are facing aggression from foreign companies.

They said the government should bring to book the politicians and bureaucrats who were involved in corruption in energy sector while signing Production Sharing Contracts (PSC) that went against national interest.

The seminar on 'Energy strategy for Bangladesh: A brief survey with recommendation' was organised by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) at the National Press Club in the city.

The speakers recommended strengthening of national institutions with enough skilled manpower and formulation of an integrated national energy policy to ensure energy security and interest of the common people and environment instead of profits of foreign companies and their national collaborators.



Bapa President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad speaks at a seminar at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his right is Zakir Hossain and on his left are Prof Anu Muhammad and Prof Nurul Islam.

"Energy and water will be the centre of all future crises in the world and the developing countries with natural resources will be at great risk. Therefore, we must formulate an integrated energy policy considering the interest of the poor and environment," said Bapa

President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad. It is high time for Bangladesh to seriously consider other options for energy, including hydro-electricity, biogas, wind-power, solar energy and even nuclear energy, he said, adding that the signing of energy-related contracts in the past were not transparent which was a hurdle for taking concrete decision in this respect.

Bangladesh failed to develop expertise in energy sector, which is why it does not have strong negotiating capacity, said Prof Ahmad.

"We should also consider the options for regional cooperation as well," he suggested.

Prof Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University said the foreign companies are increasingly taking the control of Bangladesh's natural resources due to successive government's apathy to develop efficiency in this sector.

The governments did not formulate any policy at their own initiatives, rather they did it with the

consultancies of financial organisations like World Bank and Asian Development Bank which are interested in the export of the resources, he noted.

"As the resources are limited, we must plan for making its best use and establish 100 percent people's ownership on it," said Prof Anu Muhammad.

"Bangladesh was supposed to have 70 percent of gas under the PSCs signed in the last two decades, but unfortunately the companies showed the production cost so high that its share was much less than that," he noted.

The national institutions like Bapex (Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Ltd) and Petrobangla have also been made handicapped, while the foreign companies are taking away the national resources in the name of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), he observed.

White papers on all who were involved in corruptions in the energy sector should be published, the professor demanded.

Petrobangla former chairman SKM Abdullah, who read out a paper prepared by Bangladesh Environmental Network (BEN), recommended establishing a national energy commission with technological experts, policy planners and decision makers to prepare a comprehensive energy strategy for the country.

Prof Nurul Islam of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said there are already two energy policies but none of them considered energy security.

Dhaka University teachers Badrul Imam and Mohtasham, Bangladesh Water Partnership President Quamrul Islam Siddique and Saiful Haque of Workers' Party also spoke on this occasion.

Proceedings of 2 graft cases against Ershad adjourned

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned the proceedings of two graft cases filed against former president and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad until March 27 following a time petition by the prosecution lawyers.

Judge Malik Abdullah Al Amin of the Special Court for Dhaka Division set the date after the prosecution filed a time petition saying that they could not produce any prosecution witnesses before the court yesterday.

However, Ershad was present in the court and his lawyers were ready for hearing.

Meanwhile, court sources said the prosecution could not produce witnesses except one since the charges were framed on April 3, 1995 and on April 18, 2003.

In the first case filed with Tejgaon Police Station, it was alleged that Ershad, while in power, directed the authorities concerned to purchase electronic news-gathering equipment worth about Tk 2.93 crore to be used by Ershad and his wife though all broadcasting facilities were available in his secretariat.

The former president also directed the authorities to create eight new posts for the purpose, the prosecution said.

An official of the now defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed the case against Ershad on February 29, 1992 and the investigation officer (IO) pressed charges against him on September 15, 1994.

In the second case field with the same police station, it was alleged that the former president, defying the authorities' decision, directed to accept donation from France instead of Finland for setting up 'microwave telephone lines' in 49 upazilas.

Due to Ershad's unilateral decision, the government had to pay Tk 28 crore to France in interest, as the plan was not implemented finally, sources said.

A Bac official Upendra Chandra Das filed the case against Ershad and two others in this connection on September 5, 1992. The IO pressed charges against Ershad and six others on July 31, 1995.

Earlier, Ershad was discharged and acquitted of four graft cases in August and September last year following his announcement to join the four-party alliance.

Another Dhaka court on January 17 this year freed Ershad from serving out the sentence given by the High Court on December 14 last year in connection with a Japanese boat purchase case.

Properties worth over Tk15 lakh gutted in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Properties worth over Tk 15 lakh were gutted in two separate fire incidents in Barisal yesterday.

Sources said a fire originated from the gas burner of Bhai Bhai

Stores, a bakery cum confectionary, gutted two confectionaries, a hotel, a pharmacy and four residential houses at about 6:00am yesterday in Bandh Road in the city.

The victims claimed the damaged properties worth Tk 15 lakh, Md Dulal

Hossain, manager of Barisal Fire Service Station, assumed the damages worth Tk 6 lakh.

In another incident, a fire originated from a short circuit in the rotor machine section of Khan Sons Textile Mills at Kawnia BSIC.



Norwegian Ambassador to Bangladesh Ingebjorg Stofring calls on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence in the city yesterday.