

'Cancel four-party govt coal policy'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a dialogue yesterday called on the caretaker government to cancel the coal policy formulated by the previous four-party alliance government and frame a new policy instead, keeping coal resources in 100 percent public ownership.

As the BNP-led four-party government framed the coal policy with a view to handing over the country's mineral resources to foreign companies, promoting the policy would go against the national interests, said Prof Anu Muhammad.

He also expressed concern over the energy adviser's remarks that this coal policy is going to be finalised by March.

The National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Electricity and Port

organised the dialogue on 'Coal policy and national interest' at Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium.

Prof Anu Muhammad, member secretary of the Committee, said that during the four-party rule, the then energy adviser tried to implement Phulbari coal project in line with the same coal policy but failed in the face of strong protest by local people.

The policy suggests encouraging foreign investors and exporting coal on the plea that the domestic market for coal is limited, he said and questioned, "Is there any need to extract a huge amount of coal in a short time when it can cause massive destruction?"

"Extraction of coal in Phulbari under open-pit mining method will turn the total area into a huge pothole, displacing a large number of people," he said, adding that the

policy does not care about the issue of energy security.

The energy security of the country depends on the long-term reserve of coal and its best use instead of exporting coal, he said.

Prof Nurul Islam of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) said, "Energy resources is a strategic commodity. So, we should use it very efficiently."

Committee Convener SK Abdullah, CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim, Justice Golam Rabbani, Prof Abu Ahmed, Prof Dr Akmal Hossain and Liberal Democratic Party leader Maj Gen (ret'd) Anwarul Kabir Talukder also spoke.

Int'l Women's Day today

UNB, Dhaka

International Women's Day will be observed in the country as elsewhere across the world today with the theme 'Ending impunity for violence against women and girls.'

On the occasion, President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed have issued separate messages.

In his message, the President said, "I hope that the theme of the day would play an important role in establishing women's and children's rights, including prevention of violence against women."

He also expressed his belief that the overall national development is possible by involving women in socio-economic activities, allowing them to enjoy their rights and showing respect to them at the family, social and state levels.

The president called upon all to build a gender-equal and prosperous society by removing all forms of discriminations against women.

Describing this year's theme as timely, the Chief Adviser, in his message, said, "The government is determined to take stern legal measures against women and children repressors in line with the theme."

He called upon the people to create an environment in society where women and children will feel safe.

BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia has also issued a message on the occasion, calling upon all to march forward unitedly so that women could be made pioneers of progress instead of domestic and social burdens.

Decentralisation of power must to ensure good governance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Decentralisation of power is a must to ensure good governance, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

The speakers also said interference of the lawmakers should be stopped at any cost to strengthen local government.

Governance Coalition organised the discussion at Cirdap auditorium with the representatives of Union Parishad to bring the problems of local government to light and place some recommendations before the government to take immediate initiatives.

A Local Government Commission should be formed for a more effective local government and to help the government in policy making, the speakers said adding that direct allocation of money is important as well as increasing of manpower.

The Bangladesh Observer Editor Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury said people's participation should be ensured from grass roots to administration legally and if people are not educated, aware and their rights of information are not provided, accountability could not be established in administration.

Former Adviser to the Caretaker Government (CG) and Executive Director of Ain O Salish Kendra Sultana Kamal said good governance could be established only when the terrorists are curbed and patriots are patronised.

Dr Akhter Hossain presented the keynote paper.

Coordinator of Governance Coalition Mohsin Ali delivered the welcome speech while Taleyah Rahman of Democracy Watch, President of Women Policy Group Nargis Akhter, Secretary of Supra Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Ranjan Karmakar of Steps Towards Development, Ali Sabri of Action Aid Bangladesh and Farjana Niem of Manusher Jonno Foundation also spoke.



PHOTO: PID

PKSF award winners pose with Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Fakhruddin Ahmed at the award giving ceremony at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city yesterday.

Expand activities to agri sector CA asks micro-credit providers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday called on micro-credit providers to expand their activities to bring the farmers and the urban poor under their network.

He also asked them to help Monga-affected people in the northern districts.

"According to statistics, it appears that micro-credit is largely used in non-farm activities. But we know that farmers badly need short-term loans to grow crops. Providing more loans for farmers is a challenge before the micro-credit providers," Fakhruddin said at an award giving ceremony of Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) in the city.

The chief adviser said micro-credit activities are mainly operating in rural areas. That's why the urban poor are being left out of the micro-credit network.

"You have to initiate steps for the poor and distressed, specially those living in slums," he said.

Fakhruddin Ahmed also asked the PKSF loan providers to put in more efforts to reduce poverty in Monga-affected northern regions, especially in Rangpur.

Renowned economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud chaired the session. Acting Managing Director of PKSF Mosharruf Hossain Khan also spoke.

Prof Wahiduddin called on micro-credit providers to reduce the interest rate. "PKSF is trying to reduce the

interest rate", he added.

PKSF awarded Fazole Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of Brac, for his lifetime achievement in poverty alleviation and social development.

Three non-government organisations were also awarded the best associate organisations of PKSF 2006. They are Access toward Livelihood and Welfare Organisation (ALWO), Shariatpur Development Society (SDS) and Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF).

The Daily Star, Channel i and The Ittefaq were the media partners of the Micro-credit Fair 2006.

INDO-BANGLADESH DIALOGUE ON MEDIA AND CULTURE

'Start exchange programme for young journalists'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Discussions from both Bangladesh and India yesterday expressed their disappointment over the lack of cooperation between the media agencies in the two countries.

Big media houses should consider appointing resident correspondents or starting an exchange programme for young journalists to increase understanding, they said at 'Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue on Media and Culture'.

Yesterday was the second day of the three-day Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and India International Centre (IIC) at the Brac Inn Centre in the city.

Briefing reporters on the day's discussions, CPD Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya said that hardly any progress has been made with regard to recommendations made in the last year's Indo-Bangladesh dialogue in Delhi.

Three sessions were held yesterday that reviewed the progress in implementing the last year's recommendations and the situation in the print and electronic media of both the countries.

Editor of The News Today Reazuddin Ahmed, Editor of The Independent Mahbul Alam and Editor of the World Report Saeed Naqvi of India presided over the three sessions.

The discussants identified political instability in Bangladesh as a factor that held back Bangladeshi initiatives to improve cooperation between the media agencies, Debapriya said.

The discussants from the Bangladesh side hoped that the Indian media, while doing report on Bangladesh, should report objectively and not with a 'big brother attitude' or with a sympathetic tone.

They also observed that the news stories published from both sides of the border lack substance because of sustained fear and suspicion.

The fear and suspicion are stemming from the visa restrictions

imposed on journalists from both the countries, to the detriment of bilateral relations, they pointed out.

They also hoped that journalists should initiate a move to lobby both the governments to ease visa restrictions.

The discussants emphasised the need for joint investigative reporting on border issues and for launching a South Asian editors' guild.

They also urged Bangladeshi and Indian think-tanks to help any efforts by Bangladeshi private satellite television channels to broadcast their programmes in India.

International President of Commonwealth Journalists Association Hasan Shahriar, President of National Press Club

Shaukat Mahmud and Executive of Asiatic Marketing and Communications Aly Zaker presented keynote papers.

Former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Deb Mukharjee, Premola Ghosh of IIC, OP Jain, founder of Sanskriti Pratishthan of India, UNB Editor Enayeturrah Khan, BSS Chief Editor and Managing Director Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury, Nandini Mehta from Outlook magazine, journalist Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul and filmmaker Tarek Masud took part in the discussion.

WEATHER TODAY

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

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

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

Highest temperature 31.2 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Cox's Bazar and lowest 10.5 degree Celsius at Srirangal.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:04pm today and rises at 6:15am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature		Humidity in	
	In Celsius	percentage	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	28.7	15.5	32	31
Chittagong	30.4	17.3	49	43
Rajshahi	28.4	12.9	57	36
Khulna	29.0	15.0	62	51
Barisal	29.4	13.5	53	48
Sylhet	29.7	14.3	59	29
Cox's Bazar	31.2	18.4	52	40



PHOTO: STAR

Shore protection pilings of an under-construction building of Grameenphone in Bashundhara Residential Area in the city collapse yesterday.

UNDER-CONSTRUCTION BLDG Road caves in as pilings collapse in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A portion of a road in Bashundhara Residential Area in the city caved in when shore protection pilings of an under-construction building of Grameenphone collapsed yesterday.

Walls of two adjacent buildings developed cracks during the incident. However, no-one was injured.

Panic-stricken residents were evacuated from the two buildings and the gas supply to the area has been stopped as the underground gas pipeline got snapped.

Witnesses said 43 pilings of the under-construction building and a portion of the road collapsed with a big bang in the morning.

"It was 5:00 in the morning and I was sleeping. Suddenly a big bang woke me up and the building shook.

I hurriedly came out of the building, fearing an earthquake," said Akbar Hossain Arif, a security guard of one of the buildings.

The police and fire brigade authorities asked the residents of the two buildings over the loud-speaker to leave the buildings.

The entry road to Bashundhara Residential Area has been closed temporarily.

"We are moving to our relatives' house as living here is no more safe," said Farida Yeasmin, a resident of one of the buildings.

According to the police, piling work was going on for the construction of the corporate branch of Grameenphone adjacent to the main gate of Bashundhara Housing at Block-A on five bighas of land. Suddenly a portion of road in front of

the under-construction building caved in, causing cracks to nearby buildings and gas pipeline.

In a statement yesterday, the Grameenphone expressed regrets for this untoward incident and the inconvenience it has caused to people in the area.

The building project is being constructed by Associated Building Corporation Limited with Vistaara and Icon Architects as the consultant, the statement said.

As a precaution, the Grameenphone has also offered to temporarily relocate the residents of nearby six-storey building.

UNB reports: Titas gas authorities cut off the gas supply to the area to halt emission of gas leakage through cracks in the gas pipeline.

DHAKA TODAY

Discussion

Prothom Alo will hold a discussion titled 'Future of women leadership in the political arena of Bangladesh in the years to come'. Venue: Liberation War Museum. Time: 4:00pm.

World Kidney Day

The inaugural ceremony of World Kidney Day will be held. Venue: Institute of Diploma Engineers. Time: 8:30am.

Discussion

Karmojibi Nari will hold a discussion to mark the International Women's Day. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 10:30am.

Reception

Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation will accord a reception to Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus. Venue: Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre. Time: 6:00pm.

Seminar

Independent University Bangladesh organises a seminar on 'Global climate change and implications for Bangladesh'. Venue: Library Building. Time: 10:30am.

Dialogue

The closing ceremony of Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue on Media and Culture will be held. Venue: Brac Centre Inn auditorium. Time: 4:00pm.

Discussion

Population Services and Training Centre (PSTC) will hold a discussion on women health marking International Women's Day. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 10:30am.

Roundtable

Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) organises a roundtable on 'Sensitising violence against women through primary education'. Venue: PIB seminar room. Time: 2:30pm.

Discussion

Jatiya Garment Sramik Federation will hold a discussion on 'International Women's Day '07: Women workers of RMG sector'. Venue: Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium. Time: 4:00pm.

Experience sharing

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) will hold an experience sharing session for women entrepreneurs celebrating the International Women's Day. Venue: DCCI auditorium. Time: 3:00pm.

Discussion

Development Organisation of the Rural Poor will hold a discussion titled 'Women rights and social awareness'. Venue: WVA auditorium. Time: 10:00am.

Deaths of women at child birth still high

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While the government officials point out lack of awareness about maternal and reproductive health in addition to lack of education and skilled manpower in the society, the experts draw attention to another dimension related to the picture.

Noted economist Prof Abul Barakat of the Dhaka University holds responsible the meagre allocation for women's health in the national budget as the main obstacle for ensuring maternal health, adding that the Safe Delivery Services make up for only 9.5 percent of the health budget.

Terming the rate of maternal mortality due to pregnancy related causes as 'alarming', Barakat said that in 2004-2005 total health budget was Tk 31,203 million, of which just Tk 2,964.30 million was spent for Safe Delivery Services.

"To meet the demand, two to three time increase in budget is required for delivery care components," he said adding that the number of service providers in EOC, especially doctors and nurses, should be increased with a three-shift working hours in the places providing comprehensive EOC.

Anwarul Islam, Deputy Programme Manager of government's Reproductive Health Programme, said that only 80 upazila health complexes among 402 in the country are brought under the system of comprehensive maternal health care since 1998. He stressed the need for

human resources development to ensure maternal health.

A study conducted by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad in May 2005 revealed that social awareness is very low when it comes to maternal health while around 70 percent of the expecting mothers' families do not allot any funds in the family budget for dealing with emergencies arising from pregnancy related complexities.

"Though it is found that in district towns near the capital, like Manikganj, women are seeking health services more and more, the society lacks responsibility towards women's health, especially maternal health," Dr Laila Anjum Banu, secretary of Health and Environment of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said.

Budget allocation for maternal health should be increased in public and private sectors and at the same time men should be made aware of it and their involvement is also important, she said.

Major causes of maternal death include haemorrhage, abortion, eclampsia (involves high blood pressure and convulsions), puerperal sepsis (blood poisoning following childbirth, caused by infection of the placental site) and obstructed labour.

Though maternal and child health is one of the government's priority sectors in recent years, while the health care services flourished much in the urban areas, it could not attain the same standard in case of rural and remote

areas of the country, the experts said.

Even though a total of 56 percent women come to the hospitals and clinics for antenatal care, the rate is only 18 percent for postnatal care, that might cause bleeding problem, infection and malnutrition, they added.

Besides lack of awareness among people, it is to be noticed that only six percent of the total national budget is provided for health sector, which is quite negligible comparing to that of the people's necessity, they said.

Per capita health expenditure in the country is Tk 314 and only one percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is spent in the health sector.

The economists said the health sector could be taken into a better position if 20 percent of the GDP is allocated persistently for ten years.

A study carried out by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in cooperation with the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) of UK styled 'The State of the Poorest 2005-2006--Chronic Poverty in Bangladesh: Tales of Ascent, Descent, Marginality and Persistence' said overall Bangladesh is well on its way to achieve most of the MDGs except income poverty reduction (goal 1/target 1), reduction in maternal mortality rate, and perhaps reduction in under-five mortality rate.

Fake cosmetics worth Tk 1 cr seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mobile courts in the city yesterday seized fake cosmetics worth over Tk one crore, jailed two people, and fined five clinics and medical centres and two restaurants for irregularities.

The mobile court led by Metropolitan Magistrate Rokon Ud-Doula raided a warehouse owned by a fake cosmetics factory Shaheed and Brother at Khan Market in Chalkbazar area in the city.

The manufacturer was manufacturing and marketing fake cosmetics of almost all the local and foreign brands. The mobile court sealed the warehouse with fake cosmetics worth at least Tk 1.5 crore.

Joint forces arrested two employees Shaheed and Hanif and the mobile court sentenced them one-month imprisonment and fined Tk 4 lakh each.

The court also issued a warrant against the owner of manufacturer of fake cosmetics Hajji Mofijuddin.

The mobile court also raided 11 more warehouses and found fake cosmetics and sealed all of them. The owners fled the scene sensing the raid of the mobile court.

The court ordered the concerned police station to collect details of the owners of these warehouses and to produce them to court.

In another drive, the mobile court led by Towfiqul Alam fined three medical centre and two restaurants in the city for various irregularities.

The court raided two clinics Doctors Clinic and Rezia Clinic both in the Midfort road and found a number of irregularities. None of these clinics have any technicians for pathological test or permission from Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

These clinics had more beds than it is approved for and also lack adequate number of nurses.

The court fined each of the clinics with Tk 60 thousand.

Earlier the court sealed Labcom Diagnostic & Nursing Point at Babubazar area as all the stuff and involved persons fled sensing the presence of mobile court.

The court also fined Tk 40 thousand to Alfa Clinic when the manager was produced to the court yesterday. The court in a drive had sealed Alfa Clinic two days back.

The mobile court also fined two restaurants in the Midfort road.

Hotel Monsur and restaurant and Al-Monsur Hotel and Chinese were fined Tk 30 thousand each for shabby and unhygienic environment inside the kitchen and for selling substandard food and rotten food.

Meanwhile, a mobile court led by Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Abdur Rauf Khan fined BDM Hospital and Diagnostic Centre at Humayun Road in Mohammadpur area for operating 55 beds while it has approval for 30.

Besides, the court found they have only one doctor and the inadequate number of nurses. The court also found date expired Uric Acid in the hospital and fined administrative officer Abdur Rashid and two other employees each with Tk 30 thousand.

The mobile court fined BIKRampur Maternity Tk 10 thousand for unhygienic and shabby environment, date-expired DCC trade license and storing date-expired medicine.

Confce on 'Dev dilemmas in S Asia' held

ANSAR AHMED ULLAH, London

Delegations from six South Asian countries joined a conference in London to discuss better ways of ensuring development in conflict-affected countries.

The two-day conference on 'Development dilemmas: Challenges of working in conflict and post-conflict situations in South Asia' was organised by the UK government's Department for International Development on March 5 and 6.

The objective of the conference was to share best practices in putting an end to the causes of conflict in South Asian countries by delivering development through civil society organisations and governments.

Development actors of all political persuasions flew in from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan to share lessons, experiences and the best practices.

In his opening address, Permanent Undersecretary of State for International Development Gareth Thomas said, "When conflict ends it is a time of great vulnerability, but also a time of great opportunity. Take Nepal. A decade of war, with entrenched sides, holding entrenched views. Today Nepal is standing on the edge of peace, moving forward to negotiate a new constitution and create a new government, that will represent the interests of everyone."

"This conference will give us the opportunity to look at crucial issues, apply them to our own contexts, and take back what we learn so we can better move towards lasting peace in Nepal, in Sri Lanka, in Afghanistan, and elsewhere."

Various topics such as balancing short-term compromise and long-term conflict transformation, transitional justice and reconciliation, and re-establishing governance and services were discussed in the conference.