

29m people exposed to arsenic

Speakers tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 29 million people of the country are exposed to arsenic and 60 percent of the exposed population are yet to have access to safe water, speakers at a seminar said yesterday.

Though people of 61 districts across the country have been drinking highly arsenic contaminated water and arsenicosis is found in almost 40,000 people, pace of mitigation is too slow compared to the magnitude of the problem in the country, observed the speakers.

Mailman School of Public Health and Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University, USA and Department of Geology of Dhaka University, Bangladesh jointly organised the seminar at a city hotel titled 'Concerning the health effects and geochemistry of arsenic' to disseminate the findings of a research.

The new findings include pregnant women pass arsenic to the fetus during pregnancy and babies are born with the same blood arsenic levels as their mothers, deficiency in dietary Folate and A vitamin is extremely common in



UNICEF Country Representative Louis Georges Arsenault speaks at a seminar at Hotel Sheraton in the city yesterday.

Bangladesh that causes a diminished ability to eliminate arsenic.

The study also revealed that folate acid supplementation to deficient adults actually facilitates the metabolism and elimination of arsenic and leads to a significant lowering of blood arsenic concentrations.

The concentrations of Arsenic and Manganese are higher in shallow aquifers than in deep aquifers, speakers said adding that significant progress has been made but bringing the arsenic agenda to the forefront is a must as it is clearly impacting the health of adults and children alike.

Addressing the seminar as the chief guest, Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof SMA Faiz said both the geologists and officials of health department should work together to solve the arsenic-related problems in the country.

Associate Dean of Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University Professor Joseph H Graziano and Country Representative of UNICEF Louis Georges Arsenault also spoke at the inaugural session.

Later, papers on 'Sources and health impacts of arsenic exposure and mitigation strategies were presented by Prof Kazi Matin Ahmed of Dhaka University, Dr Habibul Ahsan, Dr Joseph H Graziano, Dr Alexander van Geen, Dr Mahfuzur Rahman and Dr Martin Stute of Columbia University, Dr Feroze Ahmed of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and Dr Salamat Khandaker of World Health Organisation (WHO) from different perspectives.

Prof AKM Nurul Anwar, Prof Ainun Nishat, Prof AMR Mushtaque Chowdhury and SM Ihtisamul Haque moderated different sessions.



A garbage truck crosses Bijoy Sarani in the city yesterday although movement of such garbage containers during daytime is strictly prohibited.

PHOTO: STAR

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Use quake-resistant tech in constructing buildings

Says UNDP country director

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

UNDP Country Director Manoj Basnyat has called for using earthquake-resistant technologies in constructing buildings as a disaster preparedness tool to save lives in the event of any earthquake.

"If this technology, which is available in the region, is applied, thousands of lives can be saved from earthquake in Bangladesh that is located in the earthquake zone," he said at a workshop on 'Gender in urbanisation and community-based disaster management and shake table demonstration'.

The workshop was organised by Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC) in collaboration with United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) and National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET)-Nepal at the National Press Club in the capital.

Appreciating Bangladesh's institutional capacity in regard to disaster management, Manoj said UNDP is committed to help Bangladesh in its efforts for disaster preparedness in association with the government and the NGOs.

He called for ensuring women involvement in any disaster preparedness activities, saying that they are more vulnerable to disasters.

Ram Chandra Kandel of NSET-Nepal staged a shake table demonstration at the workshop where he practically showed how a building without earthquake-resistance technology easily collapses and the other with earthquake resistance remains safe.

Ram said most of the buildings in Dhaka are not built with earthquake resistance, though the engineering institutes teach the simple technologies that do not require any extra expenditure for their application.

"The students are taught in the engineering schools, but they do not implement those while constructing buildings," he said, adding such practices are not only true for Bangladesh, but also for many other countries of the world.

Amod Mani Dixit of NSET-Nepal said earthquakes in India and Pakistan had killed hundreds of people, but there are countries where people do not die.

"Earthquakes do not kill people,

unsafe buildings do it," he added.

He identified soft stories, short columns, irregular configuration and pounding of buildings for the collapse of buildings causing loss of huge lives.

"We can make 90 percent buildings stronger if we want, and it is not very expensive," he noted.

Emphasising the need for sharing of knowledge and experience and motivating people for using the technology, he said knowledge for constructing earthquake safe building exists for over thirty years.

"We can eliminate all risks by using this technology," he said.

In her presentation, Yoko Saito of UNCRD said 56 percent women and 44 percent men were killed in the Gujarat earthquake proving that women are more vulnerable to earthquakes.

Gender perspectives therefore should be considered in the disaster preparedness process, she added.

BDPC Director Muhammad Saidur Rahman and Ian Stanford, Rector of Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme, also spoke at the workshop.

Govt waits for SC order for demolition of Rangs Bhaban Says Geeteara

UNB, Dhaka

The government is waiting for clearance from the Supreme Court to demolish the much-talked about multistoried Rangs Bhaban in the city.

"The demolition of Rangs Bhaban is waiting for a court order. After getting the order we'll start other procedures to demolish the Bhaban," said Industries Adviser Geeteara Safiya Choudhury yesterday.

She was speaking at a seminar on 'National Budget for 2007-08: What's in the basket for SMEs' as the chief guest.

On April 21, Council of Advisers gave unanimous opinion in favour of demolishing the building on Bijoy Sarani crossing.

A case on the disputed building was pending with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

Geeteara blamed the previous governments for haphazard condition of the residential areas of the capital city where so many commercial institutions are located.

"Initially there was lack of coordination among the offices concerned," she said.

Mainul Hosein

Our staff correspondent adds: Law and Information Adviser Barrister Mainul Hosein also said the government could not demolish the Rangs Bhaban due to legal complications.

The 22-storey Bhaban would be demolished after the disposal of two writs pending before the court in this regard, he told reporters at his secretariat office yesterday.

FAKE ADMISSION

Duta demands punishment to those involved

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) has demanded exemplary punishment to those responsible for admission of students by fraudulent means.

Duta also demanded arrest of those people who have been temporarily suspended for their alleged involvement in fake admission process, said a press release.

Duta made the demand at a meeting of its executive committee on May 20 with Prof Sadruul Amin, president of the Association, in the chair.

The meeting expressed concern over the government's proposed 'umbrella law' for 28 public universities of the country saying that it will hamper their autonomy and uniqueness if the law is implemented.

"As every public university has its own uniqueness, one umbrella law for all public universities is not desirable. Every university should be allowed to run in an environment free from government control," the press release added.

On government's proposed 'search committee' to appoint vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors and treasurers at public universities except four where '73 is effective, Duta said this should be left over for an elected government to decide.

Besides, any final decision of the search committee without discussion with the teachers will be considered as 'government interference', the press release added.

About the Dhaka University Ordinance '73, the meeting opined that any one-sided decision to revise the ordinance will not be acceptable.



Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, presents the 'Education Watch Report-2006' at a press briefing at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left are Kazi Fazlur Rahman and Rasheda K Choudhury and on his right is Dr Kazi Saleh Ahmed.

SHORTAGE OF GOVT FUNDS HOLDS BACK QUALITY EDN

Students forced to depend on private coaching

Says Education Watch Report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students at the primary and secondary education levels are forced to depend on private coaching as the schools could not provide quality education due to shortage of government funds, according to a survey report released yesterday.

Some 88 percent of students at government high schools and 78 percent of students at non-government high schools arrange private coaching while 31 to 83 percent students at the primary level have to manage private coaching to continue their study, said the 'Education Watch Report-2006'.

The Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) conducted the survey.

The report said that around half of the primary students drop out before completing class five and 80 percent of students at secondary level drop out before completing the SSC because of poverty.

"Only 2.2 percent of the national income is allocated for education in the country while India allocates 3.3 percent and Nepal 3.4 percent for their education sectors. However, it should increase to six percent according to

Dakar Framework of Action," said Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, while presenting the key findings of the report at a press briefing in the city.

He also said that the government funds for schools are not properly distributed, which is one of the major reasons behind the fall in the quality of education.

"At the primary level, the government spends annually Tk 1766 on a student of government primary school, Tk 957 on a student of madrasa, Tk 706 on a student of registered non-government primary school, Tk 574 on a student of community primary school and Tk 55 on a student of non-registered primary school. On the other hand, the government spends Tk 5445 on a student of government high school, Tk 3943 on a student of madrasa and Tk 2,788 on a student of non-government high school," he said.

He also said that guardians have to bear 59 percent education expenditure in government primary school, 65 percent in madrasa, 70 percent in community primary school, 76 percent in registered non-government primary school and 83 percent in non-

registered primary schools although the government declared that the primary education is free for all.

"In secondary education, guardians have to bear 71 percent education expenditure in non-government high school, 67 percent in government high school and 56 percent in madrasa," he added.

Kazi Fazlur Rahman, chairman of 'Education Watch-2006', said the quality of education is not the same at all educational institutions as the government funds are too little and the allocated funds are not distributed properly.

He also said the dropout rates at primary and secondary education levels are very alarming because poor guardians cannot bear the education expenditure for their children.

Dr Kazi Saleh Ahmed, former vice-chancellor of Jahangirnagar University, urged the government to ban private coaching and provide quality education for all students.

Rasheda K Choudhury, director of CAMPE, also spoke at the press briefing.

HC orders BSS authorities to reinstate 18 dismissed journos, staffs

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday declared illegal the order dismissing 18 journalists, employees and workers of the state-run news agency BSS and directed the authorities to reinstate them within two months.

A total of 34 journalists, employees and workers of BSS were dismissed from their services reportedly at the behest of immediate-past BNP-led alliance government that came to power in October 2001.

Later, the BSS authorities appointed some 76 journalists, employees and workers without following the prescribed rules.

A group of aggrieved journalists after losing their jobs filed writ petitions challenging the legality of the termination orders issued by the BSS authorities before the High Court in 2002.

A division bench comprising Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Syed M Ziaul Karim while delivering the judgment on the writ petitions observed that the BSS authorities had terminated the journalists, employees and workers by abusing powers.

Describing the termination orders as constructive dismissal, the court verdict said, "They had been terminated without any allegation."

Dr Kamal Hossain, Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru, Barrister Tanjibul Alam and other lawyers appeared for the BSS journalists and staff.

Killing of RMG worker condemned

Different women rights organisations and garment workers' bodies yesterday condemned the atrocities of law enforcing agencies that claimed the life of a woman worker and injured of at least 50 workers during a clash at Gazipur on Sunday.

The organisations demanded proper investigation into the incident, punishment to the people responsible and immediate payment of salary and overtime allowances of the workers.

Karmojibi Nari (KN) President Shirin Akhter and General Secretary Sharmin Kabir in a joint statement expressed grave concern over the death of Asma Akter, 20, a worker of Fortuna Apparels in Gazipur during a clash between the factory workers and Rab, army and police members.

The statement also said that the incident is disappointing in the wake of a new wage law.

Bangladesh Sramajibi Nari Moitree Convenor Bonnishikha Jamali in a statement said that the oppression on workers by the law enforcing agencies in support of garment owners still continues, even in the regime of a non-partisan caretaker government which is shameful.

She demanded arrest and punishment of the responsible persons, arrangement of treatment for the injured workers and compensation for the family of the murdered and injured.

Bangladesh Garment Sramik Mukti Andolon, Garment Sramik Sangram Parishad, Sramik Nirapatta Forum and Sramik Karmachari Sangram Parishad also condemned the incident in separate statements.



Leaders of Dhaka district Swachhchasebak League present Awami League President Sheikh Hasina with a bouquet at her Sudha Sadan residence in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Police sue 2500 Gazipur RMG workers

Did not mention death of female worker in the case

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Police filed a case yesterday against 2500 unnamed workers of Fortuna Apparels Ltd in Gazipur accusing them of vandalising factories and vehicles on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway and hindering the law enforcers in carrying out their duties.

Sub Inspector Naba Gopal of Gazipur Police Station filed the case in the early hours of yesterday. However, police did not mention anything regarding the death of the garment worker in the case.

A sewing section operator named Haider Ali was also arrested after filing of the case.

The factory looked deserted yesterday as neither the factory authorities nor the law enforcers went to the factory following the incident on Sunday that left one Asma Akter, 20, a sewing operator of Fortuna Apparels Ltd, dead after police opened fire on agitating workers who demanded outstanding salary and arrears.

The three-member probe

committee formed after the incident started investigating into the incident yesterday and visited the factory.

Security has been beefed up in the industrial area following the incident while Around 10 to 15 garment factories were announced closed yesterday fearing probable workers' unrest.

Most of the garment factories in the area, however, remained closed, as it was weekly holiday for them.

A three-member team of Gazipur Sadar Hospital led by Dr Abdul Halim Molla conducted autopsy of the body of Asma in the early morning yesterday. The committee members said that a bullet was found in the back of the deceased and she was shot dead.

The autopsy committee also added that the report would be submitted within three days. Earlier, another team led by Additional District Magistrate Mirza Tarique Hekmat made an inquest report of the body at 5:00am.

The body was handed over to Abdus Sattar, father of Asma, after the autopsy was conducted at 6:00am. Her body was sent to her village home in Patuakhali under police guard.

"The family of the victim will receive Tk one lakh as compensation and the money will be realised from the factory owners," said Assistant Superintendent of Police of Gazipur Saiful Al Mamun.

Meanwhile, several hundred workers of Winter Garment at Mouchak in Kaliakoir observed work abstention and staged hunger-strike in front of the factory demanding unpaid salaries of the month of April. They were agitating till filing of the report at 6:00pm.

Besides, Anupam Sweaters in Gazipur, which was closed in the wake of workers' demonstration for outstanding arrears a month ago, started disbursing salaries to the workers under police guard.