

Malnutrition rate high due to ignorance

Experts tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Country's poverty has shrunken but malnutrition is ever present among the people of the country, even in high-income groups, due to lack of knowledge, experts at a roundtable said yesterday.

They also said that lack of employment is the main factor behind poverty and suggested setting up agro-based industries to eradicate poverty from the society.

People's Forum on MDGs (PFM) in cooperation with Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) organised the roundtable on 'Independent Civil Society Report (draft) on the progress of MDGs in Bangladesh' at LGED auditorium in the city.

"Government should pay more

attention to the education sector because poverty would not be eliminated without removing ignorance. At present the enrolment rate of girl students is higher than boy students because government has introduced different programmes encouraging female education while many boy students are getting involved in different odd jobs for helping the family," said Dr M Asaduzzaman, research director Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

"Poverty rate has decreased but rate of malnutrition is high because people of low-income group don't eat different food items while the rich do not have sufficient knowledge," he said while presenting the keynote paper at the roundtable.

Mohammad Qamar Munir, joint

secretary of environment and forest ministry, said necessary scientific steps especially dairy development, poultry farming, meat production and livestock and food production should be highlighted for eradicating poverty and hunger from the society.

Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of Centre for Global Change (CGC), said country's wetlands, a source for many people to maintain their family, are in a precarious state and the situation is degrading rapidly.

CAMPE Director Rasheda K Choudhury presided over the roundtable while CAMPE Programme Manager Sayed-Ul-Alam Kajal also participated.

16 aggan party members arrested in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective Branch (DB) of police yesterday arrested 16 members of *aggan* party (a gang of criminals who rob people after drugging them) from different parts of the city and recovered tablets and powder that are used to make people unconscious.

The arrested are Rakib, 25, Hanif, 45, Shipon, 23, Wasim, 20, Sohrab, 22, Rashid, 22, Faruque, 19, Dalik, 10, Babul, 32, Mizan, 27, Lokman, 26, Azhar, 45, Al Amin, 20, Nuruzzaman, 28, Bellal, 19, and Ishaq.

In the wake of increase in the ill-activities by this racket, DB police has identified four main groups of *aggan* party, who have long been robbing people by making people unconscious.



A mobile court led by Metropolitan Magistrate Rokan Ud-Doula fining Aston Impex Ltd Tk six lakh and arrests two for manufacturing fake televisions at Haji Osman Gani Road in the city yesterday.

Fake TV factory unearthed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court yesterday seized fake television sets and parts worth Tk 1 crore and arrested two people in the city.

The court led by Magistrate Rokan-ud-Doula unearthed the factory which used to produce fake television sets using different brand names including National, LG, Sony and Panasonic after raiding the office of Aston Impex (Pvt) Ltd at Alu Bazar at 12:40pm.

The court accompanied by the members of Rapid Action Battalion also arrested Shahjahan Ali, owner of the factory, and its employee Milan who were fined Tk 3 lakh each.

The court also sentenced Shahjahan to one year rigorous imprisonment and sealed off the factory.

SECOND SOUTH ASIAN PARLIAMENT CONFERENCE CONCLUDES South Asian MPs call for creation of Intra-Parliamentary Union

BSS, Shimla

The Second South Asian Parliament Conference concluded here yesterday with the adoption of the Shimla Declaration, agreeing to form a South Asian Parliamentary Forum.

The two-day conference, organised by the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA), was participated by parliamentarians representing all major parties from the Saarc countries.

The conference proposed creation of an Intra-Parliamentary Union in South Asia, appointment of an expert group for preparing a comprehensive report and a timeframe to establish South Asian Parliament, activating the Saarc Speakers' Forum and holding an annual meeting of parliamentarians to discuss issues of common regional concern.

To implement this, the conference proposed constitution of a commission consisting of MPs from all eight member countries and two experts under the patronage of Indian Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterji.

For regional cooperation to transform the region's economic and social conditions, the conference called for evolving a new paradigm of equitable partnership to reshape all-sided relations.

A total of 163 delegates, including 83 members of parliament, from the region attended the conference.

Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukharjee in his speech as the chief guest on the concluding day called for working together to emerge as a major powerhouse of economic creativity and enterprise.

He said it is time for a new vision, a new commitment and a new sense of purpose in South Asia and a collective responsibility of all mem-

ber states to move towards purposeful cooperation.

Mukharjee said India, as the current chair of Saarc, will focus on improving regional connectivity through upgrading trade, transport and telecommunication links.

SAFMA General Secretary Imtiaz Alam and SAFMA General Secretary, India Vinod Sharma also spoke.

The Bangladesh delegation included former education minister Dr M Osman Farruk, former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, former MPs Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan, Musharraf Hossain, Abdus Shahid, Faruque Khan, GM Quader and Principal Ruhul Qddus and SAFMA Bangladesh chapter President

Reazuddin Ahmed and General Secretary Zahiduzzaman Faruk.

On the issue of conflict resolution mechanism, the conference said the dialogue between India and Pakistan should be irreversible and must be time-bound and the two countries should begin demilitarisation of Kashmir and redeployment of troops in Siachen.

The border conflicts between Bangladesh and India and over water for 36 years should be resolved, it proposed.

The declaration called for establishing a Saarc Security Forum on the lines of ASEAN Regional Forum.



Team members of Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School receive the championship trophy of a debate competition from Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz in the city recently.

DEBATE COMPETITION ENDS 'Mass awareness to play vital role in disaster preparedness'

A two-day debate competition on disaster management awareness ended at Public Library auditorium on Thursday, says a press release.

The competition, organised by Debate for Democracy and Disaster Management Bureau with the slogan 'Let the activities for reducing the risk of disasters start from the school', aimed at acquainting school level students about the various tactics for reducing the risks of natural disasters.

Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School clinched the title while Shahid Bir Uttam Lieutenant Anwar Girls' School became runners up while Newazul Kabir of the winning team was adjudicated as the best speaker.

Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz attended the programme as the chief guest and distributed the prize among the winners.

In his speech, Prof Faiz said mass awareness programmes can play a vital role in preventing natural disasters.

Chairman of Debate for Democracy Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiran said that fishermen living on the coastal areas do not follow the weather alert signals that causes huge casualties.

"If we can educate their children by making them aware of the weather alert signals, they can persuade their parents to stay safe during the time of a cyclone".

Acting Secretary General of Disaster Management Bureau AHM Abdullah chaired the programme while its Director Mohammad Abu Sadeq acted as the moderator.

Enact right to information law TI South Asian chapter urges govts

The 7th meeting of South Asian Chapters of Transparency International has called upon all stakeholders to work with topmost priority to prevent corruption in judicial system and establish integrity and honesty of this vital institution of democracy, says a press release.

The meeting also urged South Asian governments who have not yet enacted the Right to Information Law, to do so without any further delay.

Held in Sri Lankan capital Colombo from May 31 to June 2, the annual meeting was attended by participants from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and officials of the TI Secretariat.

The meeting called upon all South Asian governments who have not yet ratified the UN Convention

against Corruption (UNCAC) to do so without any further delay.

Recognising the importance of the role and integrity of media in fighting corruption, the TI Chapters also called upon the governments concerned to create conditions in which media can function independently and objectively without fear or favour.

The participants agreed that problems of integrity in both public and private sector transactions related to defence in developed countries should also be addressed.

The Chapters urged the governments concerned to adopt specific result-oriented and time-bound measures of cooperation to make South Asia as a corruption-free zone.

The Bangladesh team at the meeting was headed by Advocate Sultana Kamal, former adviser to

the caretaker government and a Trustee of TIB.

Other participants from Bangladesh were Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB, and Prof Mustafijur Rahman and Shipra Goshwami of Committee of Concerned Citizens of Jessore and Faridpur respectively.

The participants shared with each other the experiences, good practices and challenges faced by the TI Chapters in 2006, and reviewed their plan of work for 2007-08.

The meeting noted that in spite of many challenges, the Chapters continued their efforts relentlessly, and with considerable success in many cases.

'Cancer curable in 90pc cases if detected early'

National Professor MR Khan in a seminar yesterday underscored the need of cancer awareness programmes to resist cancer since it is curable in 90 percent cases if detected early, says a press release.

Ahsania Mission Cancer Hospital (AMCH) organised the seminar at Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) auditorium in the city yesterday on the eve of the World Cancer Survivors Day today.

The seminar was chaired by Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) President Kazi Rafiqul Alam while

cancer specialist Prof Dr Fazle Elahi presented the keynote paper.

Dr Md Abdul Bari, cancer specialist of IPGMR and Dr Happy Hossain, breast and uterus cancer specialist of Holy Family Hospital took part in the discussion while Brigadier General (Retd) Dr Fazle Rahim delivered the welcome address.

Two cancer survivors also shared their experience in the seminar who said that they are now happy and living well.

Kazi Rafiqul Alam told the seminar that 1200 women were screened recently at the camps organized by AMCH, Mirpur where 15 cases of cancer had been detected.



Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) President Kazi Rafiqul Alam speaks at a seminar at DAM auditorium in the city yesterday on the eve of the World Cancer Survivors' Day.

Draft coal policy draws sharp criticism

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Most stakeholders now agree that the existing royalty of six percent is too low in the present context of global energy price trend. The previous draft increased it to 16 percent, which was found acceptable by majority stakeholders. Asia Energy had however expressed its reservations.

Discouraging coal exports and awkwardly promoting coal-based power plants, the draft suggested that a mine developer would have to set up power plants at the mine site. Again, the developer would be allowed to export only that much of coal which is consumed by the power plant.

"The idea is to encourage setting up bigger power plant, so that developers can export bigger chunks. But there are two basic flaws in this idea. Firstly, the coal

developers are not well-known for efficient power plant building--and therefore, even if a developer agrees to the idea, nobody guarantees a cost effective and efficient power plant. Mine development is entirely different from developing a plant. This is a basic hindrance to getting a good developer in our country," says a power sector expert.

"Secondly, this encourages inefficient power generation. If someone sets up an inefficient plant that consumes more coal to produce 100megawatt power than required by an advanced plant--he gets the benefit of higher export, though he's inefficient. At the same time, the efficient builder gets less coal to export," he adds.

The fifth draft accommodated export of coal in a different way. In the first 10 years of the policy imple-

mentation, the country may export double the coal it consumes. From then on, the export-local consumption ratio would be 1:1.

Sources said the coal policy committee has accommodated these ideas under tremendous pressure from a group of people who oppose Asia Energy's Phulbari deal.

"Following the Phulbari incident, talking in favour of open pit mining or coal exports has almost become a taboo for officials and experts. But such restrictive thoughts are not practical if you really want to do some good things with coal," said an official.

"The fact is open pit or underground mining are both hazardous for the environment to some degree. We have to measure the best method on the basis of returns that could compensate the damage plus

give us more," he said.

A top official of the ministry noted, "Whether a mine should be open cut or underground, it should be determined by the unique geological feature of the coal zone. If coal deposit is located 100 meters underground, you cannot do underground mining--because the land will cave in. If the deposit is below 400 meters, you cannot go for open pit--because it would be an enormous cavity. We have seen in Australia that two mines are located side by side and use different methods because of their geological features."

A senior teacher of Buet however recommended to the committee that there should be a 10-year ban on open cut mining. During this phase, he suggested, the government may take an initiative to run an open-pit pilot mining project to determine environmental hazards. The committee, however, rejected the idea, but this influenced it to move out from the previous draft that accommodated the idea of open pit mining.

The draft proposes a new formula to calculate royalty rate. The floor royalty rate would be 10 percent, assuming the basic price of coal at \$25 per ton. Then it adds 1 percent additional royalty over each 2.5 dollar hike above 25 dollars. Presently the per ton price of coal is above 60 dollars, and the Power Development Board (PDB) is importing Indian coal for 70 to 80 dollars per ton to run the Barapukuria power plant. This implies a royalty of 24 percent to 32 percent.

"We do not know what is the basis for such a calculation. But this is not going to work for even a government run company like the Barapukuria Coal Mine Company," notes an official.

A top official of the ministry says, "Bangladesh has coal, but we need huge capital and heavy equipment to make the best use of the resources. That's why we need an investment friendly policy."

Some features of the draft which apparently discourage investors include: Section 2 that says the government sector will get priority,

while joint ventures between public and private companies will be encouraged.

Section 2.2 asks private investors to off-load minimum 20 percent of shares from the starting date of coal production.

Section 3.2 says voids will not be allowed in mined area.

Section 7.1 says the lessee is to complete the land reclamation works at the same time with mining. Hundred percent of mined land has to be reclaimed and there will be no depression of mound.

Section 7.4.1 says the lessee is to pay three times in damages for land in the mine area.

Section 8.4 says the highest and best bidder for payment of royalty and the company who agrees with the coal policy will be selected, while the company that discovered the coal will get preference provided its bid document is considered as highest and best bid document.

Section 9.2 says the investor should start commercial operation of coal-fired power plant within one year from the beginning of coal production. But the company who is able to commercially operate mandatory power plant from the date of coal production will get preference for obtaining mining lease.

Section 9.2 says Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission will fix power tariff in taka. Price of coal for power project and private power will be determined in taka.

Section 10.6 says licensee will be given tax and duty exemption during exploration. During development and mine operation, the lessee will have to follow the Industrial Policy.

Besides, the sections dealing with export, royalty and ratio are viewed as discouraging.

The process to frame the coal policy was initiated by the energy ministry with help from IIFC and Petrobangla from August 2005.

