



Members of several organisations place bouquets at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman near Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi in the city yesterday to mark his 32nd death anniversary. Bangabandhu was killed along with most of his family members on August 15, 1975.

Local govt needs reforms for dev

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday reiterated the need to bring reforms to the local government to ensure participation of local people in the administrative, economic and welfare activities for overall development.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, president of Shujon, called for an 'umbrella law for local government', saying that the issues like infrastructure, accountability, independent responsibility, finance and authority should be taken into account during the formulation of the law.

Shushashoner Jonney Nagorik (Shujon) and the Hunger Project, Bangladesh jointly organised the roundtable titled, 'Local Government: Views of the stakeholders and international experience' at Cirdap auditorium in the city.

Four papers highlighting the views of civil society, political parties and bureaucrats and the international experience regarding local government reforms were presented at the roundtable.

Illustrating a number of examples of decentralisation across the coun-

try, Junaid Ahmad of World Bank stressed the need to develop interface between the lowest tier of the government and citizens' assemblies, involving civil society as watchdog and linking institutions of voice to fiscal transfers and audits.

Terming bureaucracy an important stakeholder in political dynamics

of decentralisation, Prof Dr Atiur Rahman, department of development studies, University of Dhaka, said, "Most bureaucrats support the ongoing decentralisation plan."

Explaining the views of politicians who are sceptical about the role of bureaucrats, Dr Mirza Hasan said, "Local government reform strategy

must be designed in such a way that all critical policy components (political, administrative and financial autonomy) of it can be implemented simultaneously."

Interviews with over 100 local government leaders, civil society members and NGO workers have revealed that local government lead-

ers fear that two major political parties, MPs and bureaucrats as well as big NGOs would resist decentralisation, said Nilufar Ahamad while presenting the paper of Zarina Rahman Khan, professor, dept of Public Administration, University of Dhaka.

Jatiya Party leader and former lawmaker GM Quader laid emphasis on accountability at all levels of governance.

He also said that if local government representatives get involved in misappropriation of funds, MPs can be assigned to monitor the situation.

Prof Tofail Ahmed and AIBY Siddiqui, former secretary, ministry of local government, insisted on introducing intensive training programme for the local government representatives, while Abul Mal Abdul Muhit asked the stakeholders to carefully consider functions, finance and functionalities for a vibrant local government.

Columnist Syed Abul Maksud, Lt Col (Rtd) Shawkat Ali, Advocate Rahmat Ali and Golam Sarwar Milon also spoke.



Prof Muzaffer Ahmad speaks at a roundtable at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right is Prof Dr Atiur Rahman and on his left are Justice Ebadur Rahman and Columnist Syed Abul Maksud.

'Breastfeeding in an hour of birth can save lives of 52,000 babies a year'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Initiation of breastfeeding within an hour of birth will save the lives of 52,000 babies under-five in the country every year, said the experts at a discussion yesterday.

Of them, 37,000 are newborns while 15,000 are under-five children, they added.

The experts said every year a total of 1.20 lakh newborns die within four weeks.

But if all newborns in the country are breastfed within an hour of birth then it will reduce under-five mortality rate by over 20 percent.

The discussion was organised by Bangladesh Breastfeeding Foundation (BBF) to mark the inaugural ceremony of World Breastfeeding Week at Bangladesh Shishu Academy in the city.

Unicef, Concern Bangladesh, Save the Children UK and USA, Plan Bangladesh, Ibn Sina and Dutch Bangla Bank were the co-sponsors of the programme.

This year the Week is being observed with the slogan 'Breastfeeding: Early initiation in the 1st hour can save more than one million newborn babies'.

Speakers at the discussion said early initiation of breastfeeding protects children from infection, diarrhoea, pneumonia and other respiratory problems.

While delivering his speech Unicef

representative in Bangladesh Louis-Georges Arsenault said half of Bangladesh's under-five mortality is among the newborns.

Early initiation followed by exclusive breastfeeding for six months is critically important for a child's survival and healthy growth, he added.

"It should be known that breast milk provides all the nourishment that infants need to grow and stay healthy for the first six months with its positive impact lasting a lifetime, and additional food or fluid can actually be harmful," said Louis-Georges.

He said new mothers and their

families must receive information, skills and motivation along with ample care and support through this critical period.

While speaking as chief guest Secretary to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Zafar Ullah Khan said complete healthcare services to mothers are yet to be ensured.

But proper breastfeeding could reduce infant mortality that would further lead the country to achieve Millennium Development Goal-4, he added.

In his presidential speech BBF Chairman Prof MQK Talukder said exclusive breastfeeding needs to be

increased, and as such we need to a strategy to motive people in a simple way.

Criticising the current strategies of National Nutrition Programme (NNP), Prof Talukder said, "We should drastically change the NNP to make it successful."

"We do not need lots of money to reach every newborn babies. The important thing is to develop a strategic planning in this regard," he added.

BBF Secretary Dr SK Roy said optimal breastfeeding can ensure child survival and development.

"The mother's breast is the first incubator for her child and breast milk contains preventives for many diseases of the newborns," Director of Institute of Public Health and Nutrition (IPHN) Fatema Parvin said, adding that the maternity leave should be extended further and every organisation should have a unit like day care centre for working mothers to breastfeed their children.

Director General of the Directorate General of Health Services Shahjahan Biswas said 19 percent of child death could be prevented if the children are provided with exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months.

Stressing the need for breastfeeding to the newborns representatives of other supporting organisations also took part in the discussion.



Participants of a discussion held at Bangladesh Shishu Academy in the city yesterday. From left are Louis-Georges Arsenault, Prof MQK Talukder, Zafar Ullah Khan, Md Abdul Mannan Miah and Prof AB Bhuiyan.