

Expand safety net to help ultra poor cross poverty line

Experts tell int'l workshop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted economists and development experts at an international workshop yesterday suggested expansion of social safety-net programmes and creation of short-term employment opportunities to help ultra-poor people cross poverty line.

They also expressed concern over the second round of flooding in various parts of the country, saying that it might have adverse impacts on the food production and therefore both the government and the donors should come up with more food assistance followed by cash incentives and employment opportunities for the affected.

The workshop on 'Dynamics of Food and Cash Transfers: Policy Discussion on the Results of Food and Cash Efficacy Study' was organised by Economic Relations Division (ERD) and World Food Programme (WFP) in cooperation with UK's Department for International

Development (DFID) at a city hotel.

The discussion at the workshop was based on the findings from the study titled 'Relative efficacy of food and cash in enhancing livelihood of the extreme poor' conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and commissioned by WFP.

"Food poverty still remains in the country at an alarming level," said renowned economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmood, former adviser to a caretaker government.

Referring to a Household Expenditures Survey (HES) of 2004-2005, he said it showed that poverty in the country declined much rapidly, but in terms of calorie intake, it has not declined that way.

The expenditure level of people might have increased in non-food sectors, Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud said, adding that more food transfer under the safety-net programmes therefore is a preferable option other than the cash.

Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, execu-

tive director of Power and Participation Research Centre, strongly recommended introduction of innovative ways of addressing the poverty reduction issues.

The safety-net programmes may also include food for social forestry, earthwork in making homesteads or public works depending on the ecosystem of various regions, and incorporate effectively the training programme for changing food habits, he noted.

The economist said the pockets of poverty like munga-hit areas in North Bengal could be identified before initiating any programme, while nutrition issue of the pre-school children should be incorporated in the poverty reduction strategies.

Dr Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, former member of Bangladesh Planning Commission, suggested transferring of resources of the dysfunctional safety-net programmes to the effective ones to boost the social protection system.

He suggested for combination of

food and cash in the social safety-net programmes saying that cash is the best form in certain circumstances and food is the best option in some other circumstances.

"Leakages in such programmes and lack of coordination among various ministries need to be addressed effectively," said Dr Mesbahuddin, who chaired three sessions at the workshop.

WFP Senior Adviser Usha Mishra Joshi stressed the need for more attention of the government and the donors on the expansion of the safety-net programmes in a comprehensive way and creation of more productive employment.

Speaking as chief guest at the inaugural session, ERD Secretary Aminul Islam Bhuiyan said the major challenge for food security of Bangladesh is 56 million people of the country who are still below the calorie-intake-based poverty line.

"Of them, 27 millions are living in extreme poverty, and they are also severely undernourished. This means our success in the availability of food coexists with very high prevalence of under-nourishment and malnutrition," he added.

Presenting a study Dr Akhter Ahmed and Dr Marie Ruel of IFPRI said Income-Generating Vulnerable Group Development (IGVGD) and Food Security Vulnerable Group Development (FSVGD) are the most effective programmes in terms of increasing household income, while Food for Asset Creation (FFA) is the best targeted programme and Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP) has the largest effect on savings.

They recommended more efficient and timely cash distributions and concluded that fortified atta (flour) is more effective than rice in safety-net programmes because of its nutrition values.

Economist Dr Atiur Rahman, WFP Representative Douglas Broderick, DFID Extreme Poverty Coordinator Penny Davies and its Environment and Livelihood Adviser Yolande Wright, and Planning Division Secretary Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury also spoke at the workshop.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad General Secretary Ayesha Khanam addresses a view exchange meeting at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday.

'Women workers still face discrimination'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women continue to face discrimination in every aspect of life, especially at work, although they have immense contribution to the country's economy, speakers at a view exchange meeting said yesterday.

The meeting titled 'The status of women workers in Bangladesh: Responsibilities of women movement' brought together women workers, trade union leaders, employers and NGO leaders. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad organised the meeting at Cirdap auditorium in the city.

The workers and NGO leaders pointed out many problems women workers are facing at work, while the employers said the situation is far better than in the past and they need more time to provide all the facilities to the workers.

The speakers also underscored the need for workers and employers to create a culture of working together in order to boost the economy as well as improve the life of workers.

The workers said women account for 85 percent of garment workers, but they do not get equal facilities regarding promotion, bonus and training.

Women are also deprived of equal rights and are not treated with dignity, they added.

Dr Protima Pal Majumder, senior research fellow of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said women are the worst victim of gender discrimination as they do not get the same facilities enjoyed by the male workers.

Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA),

said 85 percent of about 24 lakh workers in the garment sector are women and it was made possible due to the commitment of the factory owners.

He also said that 95.3 percent of factories have already implemented the agreement on minimum wage.

Fazlul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said women workers have contributed immensely to bring the garment sector to such a good position. The workers also feel that this sector provides more secure jobs than other sectors, he added.

He also said the position of this sector and its workers is now far better than what was five years ago.

Workers' leader Nazma Akter said if the employers properly implement the labour law, many problems facing this sector will disappear.

She also said women workers mainly suffer from health-related problems at workplaces.

Nurul Islam, president of Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra, said the workers should have the rights to trade union and the owners should take an initiative to form responsible trade unions.

The speakers also suggested taking tough measures to stop sexual harassment at work, implementing gender policy in the factories and building a network of women organisations to expedite the women's movement.

Selima Ahmed, president of Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ayesha Khanam, general secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Bela Nabi, vice-president of the Parishad, and Samsunnahar Begum, general secretary of Jatiya Sramik League, also spoke.

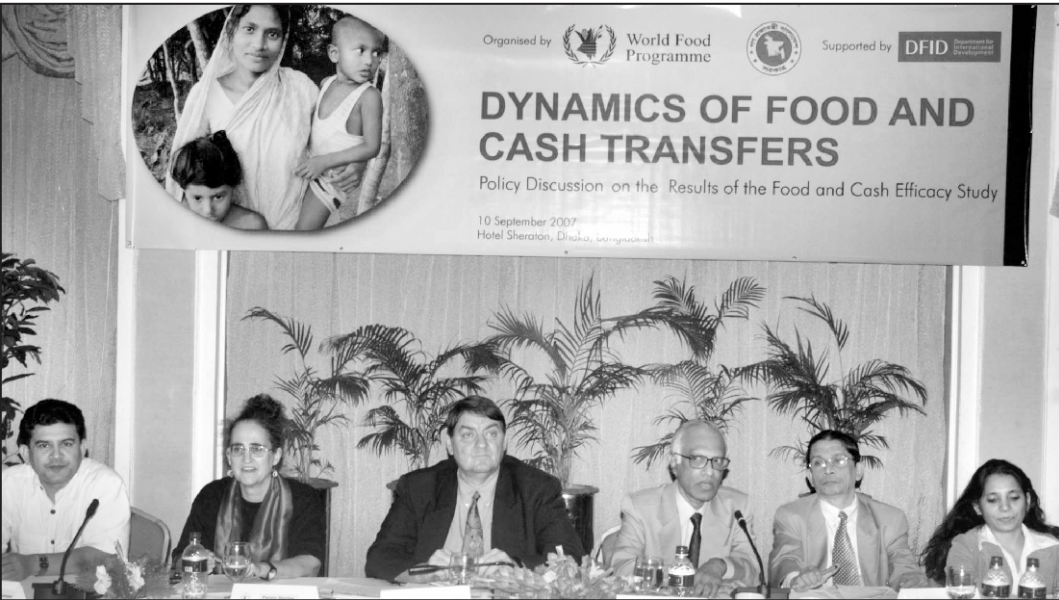


PHOTO: STAR

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmood speaks at an international workshop at a city hotel yesterday. On his right are WFP Representative Douglas Broderick, DFID Extreme Poverty Coordinator Penny Davies and Power and Participation Research Centre Executive Director Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman and on his left are Planning Division Secretary Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury and WFP Senior Adviser Usha Mishra Joshi.

Formulate new law to protect archaeological treasures

Experts say at seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a seminar yesterday expressed concern over the government decision to send archaeological masterpieces to Guimet Museum in Paris for an exhibition, which is scheduled to kick off in October.

They also called for formulating a new law to protect the price-less national treasures.

Paribesh Bachao Andolon

(Save the Environment Movement) organised the seminar at the Liberation War Museum in the city.

Speakers at the seminar said that 189 pieces of antiquities, including 128 life-size statues, terracotta and copper plaques, Prajna Paramita scriptures and coins from Pala, Sen, Gupta and Maurya dynasties, have been selected for the exhibition by French archaeologists.

The rarest collections include a number of unique artifacts, including Vajrasatva, Avalokitesvar, Ardhanarisver, Monjusee, Buddha's torso and many more, which are not even exhibited in the capital, they said.

No local experts were consulted during the agreement, they said, adding that some non-professional executives dealt with the whole affair.

Delivering the keynote speech, Sufi Mustafizur

Rahman, chairman, department of archaeology, Jahangirnagar University, discussed the issue from legal perspective, "The Antiquity Act of 1968 suggests that there should be an advisory committee comprising the director of archaeological department, two members of parliament and three archaeology experts to look into archaeological matters. But we could not find any while examining the whole thing."

Replicas of the antiquities could be sent for the exhibition, he said, adding that "Back in 1987, France organised a painting exhibition and displayed the replicas."

Mahbubul Alam, director general of Sonargaon museum, Prof Saifuddin Chowdhury, Prof Nishat Amin and Prof Mokammel Hossain Bhuiyan also spoke at the seminar presided over by Prof AKM Shah Newaz.

HC stays midway proceedings of graft case against Nasim

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday stayed the midway the current proceedings of a graft case against detained former telecommunications minister Mohammad Nasim involving the WorldTel scam.

A division bench comprising Justice M Mozammel Hossain and Justice Syed AB Mahmudul Huq passed the interim order of stay for two weeks following a petition.

It also issued a rule upon government to explain why the special judge's court order rejecting Nasim's petition for recalling a prosecution witness for cross-examination "shouldn't be set aside".

"The rule is made returnable in a week," said the court order.

Advocate M Enayetur Rahim, assisted by Obaidul Hassan Shaheen, appeared for Nasim, also a front-ranking Awami League leader.

On June 26, the trial of former telecommunications minister in the WorldTel-scam case began in the anti-graft court set up at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban with the testimony of prosecution witnesses.

Abdul Hye, an officer of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption, filed the case against Nasim and another person on January 8, 2002.

According to the prosecution story, Nasim, by abusing power, allowed WorldTel Holdings Ltd to install 3 lakh digital telephones in the city without floating tender.

Nasim's associate, AHS Rahman, director of Consociates Ltd, was also implicated in the case as he was illegally appointed as a consultant by the then telecommunications minister to supervise the project that "harmd the country's interests".

The co-accused, Rahman, had been tried in absentia, as he holed up abroad after securing bail from the court.

Trader shot

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Extortionists shot and injured a businessman at Kafrul in the city yesterday apparently for his refusal to give them Tk 1 lakh in toll.

The victim, Azad Ali, 45, is the owner of an electronics shop at Siraj Market in Kachukhet.

Police said two unknown extortionists shot Azad in the chest in front of his shop at around 8:30am.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and later shifted to Chest Diseases Hospital at Mohakhali in a critical condition.

Sub-Inspector Shahab Uddin of Kafrul Police Station told The Daily Star that "Shaheen-Shikder Group", a gang of local criminals, demanded Tk 1 lakh from Azad about a week ago. The gang members attacked Azad as he failed to meet their demand.

No decision taken to suspend teachers: RU

UNB, Dhaka

Rajshahi University (RU) authorities yesterday said the report on suspension of six teachers of the university was not correct.

"No decision has been taken yet to either temporarily or permanently suspend any teacher or officer of the university following the August 21-22 incidents on the RU campus," said a RU press release.

One murdered in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A sub-contractor of a construction firm was allegedly killed by unknown assailants at Uttara in the city on Sunday night.

The victim was identified as Noni Gopal, 38.

Police recovered his body hanging from the ceiling of a bathroom at the third floor of a six-storied under-construction building at around 10:00pm.

Police said the body bore a deep mark of wounds in the head while both of his legs were fractured.

Police suspect someone might have hanged the body after killing him.

Bidhan Bepari, brother of Noni, yesterday told reporters at Dhaka Medical College Morgue that his brother was killed.

He, however, could not name anyone who could have killed his brother.

WEATHER TODAY

Moderate rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at most places over Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and at many places over Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions in next 12 hours until 6:00pm today. Moderately heavy to heavy rainfalls are also likely at places over Khulna, Barisal, Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions, Met Office said in a forecast.

Under the influence of active monsoon over the country, heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely at places over Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions during the next 12 hours commencing at 3:00pm yesterday, the forecast added.

Highest temperature 34.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 23.6 degree Celsius at Sylhet.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:07pm today and rises at 5:44am tomorrow.

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

City/Town	Temperature in celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	31.4	26.8	83	98
Chittagong	26.0	24.5	97	94
Rajshahi	31.3	25.9	83	88
Khulna	32.2	26.5	92	96
Barisal	30.5	25.0	98	98
Sylhet	28.8	23.6	97	93
Cox's Bazar	30.6	23.9	94	94

2 Ctg journos assaulted

CU CORRESPONDENT

Teachers and examinees of two Ayurvedic (herbal medicine) colleges assaulted two journalists for photographing unfair means at Chittagong Law College yesterday.

Abir Chakrabarti, reporter and Saidul Azad, photographer, of the Bir Chattagang Mancha, came under attack when they went to the spot to cover the news of the ongoing examination of Mojaher Ayurvedic College and Tibbia Ayurvedic College, at the Law College Centre at around 11:00am.

As Saidul took snaps of free-style copying, both the examiners and examinees swooped on the journalists and beat them up, leaving them seriously injured.

They also damaged and took away two cameras and other belongings, including cash and other important documents from the journalists.

Teachers Motaher Ali and Gouranga Kanunga of Mojaher College and Mohammad Nurul Alam, Osman Sarwar and Rashid Ahmed of Tibbia College took part in the attack with the students, sources said.

Local people rescued the journalists and rushed them to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Chittagong Press Club (CPC) and Chittagong Union of Journalists' (CUJ) in a joint statement condemned the attack and demanded exemplary punishment to the culprits.

The signatories include CPC President Ali Abbas, General Secretary Ezaz Yusufi, CUJ President Shahid Ul Alam and General Secretary Reaz Haider Chowdhury.

Obituary

CU CORRESPONDENT

Md Yusuf Chowdhury, chairman and founder of the daily Purbokone, passed away at a hospital in Saudi Arabia early yesterday at the age of 85.

He went to Mecca on Friday to perform Omrah. But he fell sick at night and was admitted to a hospital on Saturday morning. He died at around 12:30am yesterday.

Yusuf Chowdhury, also the president of Greater Chittagong Unnayan Sangram Committee and Chittagong Dairy and Poultry Association, made a significant contribution to the newspaper industry and expansion of education in Chittagong.

He left behind his wife, three sons, a number of grandchildren and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

He will be laid to rest at Mecca, family sources said.

LIST OF 220 GRAFT SUSPECTS

ACC not involved: Secy

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday said it was not involved in preparing the list of 220 corruption suspects as mentioned by the chief adviser in his Sunday's address to the nation, but the list would be published by the commission.

"The ACC was not involved in the preparation of the list," said ACC Secretary Mokhesur Rahman when asked if the commission was involved in preparing the list as mentioned by the CA during its regular briefing.

"But if the list is corruption-related, it'll be published by the commission," he added.

Asked if the ACC would publish anymore list as the CA said that the anti-corruption task force would not publish anymore lists following that of 220, the ACC secretary referred to the earlier statement of the ACC chairman saying that the tasks of the commission would be easier if the lists are provided.

Referring to the CA's remarks, he made in his address that different organisations would keep on working against corruption, the ACC secretary said, "The commission is such an organisation. As inquiry and investigation are a continuous process, the ACC will keep on working."

Asked why cases were not filed against former ministers Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Motiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan M Mujahid despite being in the same purchase committee while a case was filed against former prime minister Khaleda Zia, Mokhes said investigation is going on and their names would appear if it comes out in the investigation.

Asked whether the ACC would seek wealth statements from Arafat Rahman Koko as sought from Khaleda and Tarique Rahman, he said as of now there has been no need of seeking Koko's wealth statement.

"His wealth statement will be sought if the investigation officer of the case feels necessary," he added.

Mokhes also said four daughters of former minister Anwar Hossain Manju might be asked to submit their wealth statements.

He said the ACC wrote to the Election Commission on Sunday to take departmental action after an inquiry against its former secretary, as there are allegations of irregularities in appointing upazila election officers.

The ACC secretary said the commission also wrote to the chairman of Civil Aviation Authority on Sunday to take departmental actions against the manager of Sylhet Osmani International Airport and other officials for their alleged corruption.

He said the application of ACC deputy director Hasibur Rahman for voluntary retirement has been accepted and he has been relieved of his service.

Mokhes said the commission initiated an inquiry into corruption allegation against Hasibur who was stationed in Mymensingh.

Replying to a question, the ACC secretary said the inquiry has been completed.

Asked whether he was relieved as a result of the inquiry, Mokhes said, "No, he sought voluntary retirement and we've granted it."

Asked if corruption was proved against Hasibur, he said he would not say corruption has been proved, but there was doubt about him.

"The ACC employees are not angels. They may make mistakes. There may be more allegations like this," he added.

Mokhes said Mofazzal Hossain Raju, a deputy director of Bangladesh Bank, was served with a notice yesterday to submit his wealth statement within seven working days.

He said Raju has lands, plots and houses along with a status of second home in Malaysia.

His wife has a fixed-deposit of Tk 2.5 crore and there were transactions of crores of taka in one of his bank accounts.

2 outlaws killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Two leaders of banned outfit Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) were killed in a gun battle between outlaws and Rab members at Ataikula in Pabna yesterday.

The dead are PBCP 'Janajuddha' faction district commander Abdul Matin (40), son of Amir Pramanik of village Charadangi and Md Abdul Ohab (48), son of Shukur Pramanik of Tebaria village.

Rab recovered firearms and ammunition from the spot.

Acting on a tip-off, Rab-12 members led by Maj Amjad Hossain and ASP Tanvir Arafat raided the Charadangi High School area at Ataikula where the outlaws were holding a meeting at about 5:25 am.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the outlaws opened fire on the Rab members prompting them to retaliate.

Matin and Ohab were killed on the spot while three Rab members were wounded during the gun battle.

The injured -- Si Sultanur Reza, Md Humayun Kabir and constable Md Belal Hossain - were admitted to Pabna General Hospital, said a Rab press release.

Three pipe guns, three revolvers, two lighter guns (LG) and 122 rounds of bullet were recovered from the spot.

Rab said Abdul Matin was accused in 18 cases while Abdul Ohab in 13 cases on different charges including murder.

EPR to be amended to relax bail provision

UNB, Dhaka

An amendment to the Emergency Power Rules 2007 is likely to be brought to relax a provision that denies bail to a detainee facing a corruption case, law ministry sources said.

The proposed amendment says, "In case of any co-accused like wife, child under 18 years, unmarried daughter, mother, mother-in-law and sister of the principal accused, is eligible for seeking bail before the trial court."

In that case, the sources said, the court or tribunal concerned while considering such an application can exercise its power to grant bail to the co-accused explaining appropriate reasons in writing.

Patal sued again for extortion

UNB, Natore

Former state minister Fazlur Rahman Patal and 15 others have been sued on charges of extortion.

Badaruddin of Chitholia village in Bagatipara upazila filed the case with the cognisance court here yesterday. The magistrate passed an order, asking the Bagatipara Police Station to investigate the case and report.

In the first information report (FIR), Badaruddin stated that Patal's musclemen, on his order, picked him up at gunpoint from his house on October 26, 2001, as he supported Patal's opponent in the parliamentary election.

The complainant further said he secured release on payment of ransom.

Patal, who faces a number of criminal cases, was arrested on May 29 and detained under the Special Powers Act.

OMS of rice starts

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday started selling rice under Open Market Sale (OMS) programme across the country through 15,440 dealers.

Adviser for Food and Disaster Management Tapan Chowdhury inaugurated the programme at Plassey Market in the capital.

Each person will be allowed to buy 3-kg rice at a time at the rate of Tk 19 per kg from the dealers, who will sell rice under the OMS every alternate day, ministry sources said.

The government has allocated 1.18 lakh tonnes of rice for open market sale, which will continue up to Eid.

In the capital, rice will be sold through 350 dealers appointed by the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management.

Besides, members of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) will sell rice under OMS programme at 100 other places.

Geetara leaves for Seoul

Adviser for Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Geetara Safiya Choudhury left Dhaka yesterday for South Korea to attend a ministerial meeting on 'Women of the 1st World Women's Forum' to be held on September 12-14 in Seoul, says a press release.

Through the discussions of global women ministers concerning **Good Governance for Women's Empowerment**, it is hoped that the meeting will find a feasible solution to ensure future progress and establish precedents for ongoing substantial dialogue and continued efforts toward establishing gender balanced communities.

DHAKA TODAY

UNDP Workshop

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in cooperation with Power Division, Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources (MoPEMR) will organise a workshop on 'Energy for millennium development goals (MDGs)'. Venue: LGED-REDC Bhaban. Time: 9:00am.

Card launch

The launching ceremony of 'My Aarong Rewards' card will be held. Venue: Grassroots cafe, Gulshan outlet of Aarong. Time: 3:00pm.

Reunion

BCS Computer City organises a reunion to observe its 8th founding anniversary. Venue: BCS Computer City. Time: 3:30pm.

Memorial meeting

Global Campaign Against Terrorism (GCAT) and National Heritage Foundation Bangladesh will jointly organise a memorial meeting to pay tribute to the people who were killed in the terrorist attack on September 11. Venue: Hotel Razmonil Isha Kha. Time: 10:30am.

Reception

Geetali Lalitakala Academy will accord a reception to a number of eminent citizens on the occasion of its 10th founding anniversary. Venue: Public Library auditorium. Time: 5:01pm.

Award giving

ceremony

Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haq Gobeshona Parishad will give away Sher-e-Bangla Gold Medal 2007. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 4:30pm.

Inauguration

The inauguration of ECS Computer City will be held. Venue: Multiplan Centre, level 4, New Elephant Road. Time: 6:00pm.

Discussion

America Bangladesh Friendship Forum will hold a discussion in memory of the victims of 9/11. Venue: Alam Bhaban, 1/1 Paribagh. Time: 11:00am.

ADB Workshop

Asian Development Bank (ADB) organises a workshop on urban transport in Dhaka. Venue: Sheraton Hotel. Time: 9:00am.

Launching ceremony

The launching ceremony of an 'Education support programme' of Prime Bank Foundation will be held. Venue: Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre. Time: 12:00noon.

Rotary Club of Dhaka

The regular meeting of Rotary Club of Dhaka will be held. Venue: Sonargon Hotel. Time: 5:30pm.