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Disabled denied rights

EMRAN HOSSAIN

About 35 years after adoption of the constitution enshrining equal rights and status for every citizen, around one crore disabled people across the country remain deprived of fundamental rights due mainly to government negligence.

Though a law titled "Bangladesh Disability Welfare Act, 2001" was passed in 2001, it could not be implemented in the last six years in absence of a set of rules.

Legal experts say that the act itself is fundamentally flawed and it calls for some major amendments. It does not even have clear-cut definitions of disability.

The non-government organisations working with disability have already proposed a number of amendments to the law. Their proposals were based on comparisons between the disability laws in different countries.

In the developed countries, the state ensures basic rights and status for the people with disabilities. It provides them with allowance and jobs in both private and public sectors.

"In our country, successive governments had been indifferent

to meeting the needs of people with disabilities. But the present one is working sincerely to secure the rights of the disabled people," said MA Hye Howlader, social welfare secretary and also a vice-president of the national coordination committee for the disabled persons.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, he said, "Though late we are doing the job. Earlier, the government officials won't even bother to attend meetings of the national coordination committee regularly."

"I hope the rules that have already been drafted will be approved by this year."

He added, "We are aware of the proposed amendments. Our country has signed the United Nation's convention on the rights of the persons with disability and the agreement now awaits ratification by the advisory committee."

That the government does not have the exact number of people with disabilities and that no public census has ever been done in this regard bear testimony to government apathy over the years.

The people with disabilities have troubles even getting



CHILDREN OF NEGLECT

- No govt census on the disabled
- NGOs tell number over 80 lakh
- Welfare act not implemented yet
- Disability not well defined in act, let alone rights
- Only 9,000 get education opportunity

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Filing of case questioned reasonably

RU verdict stated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rajshahi court that convicted four university teachers of violating the emergency power rules (EPR) by bringing out a silent procession said in its verdict that questioning the filing of the case against only a few participants is reasonable.

"If the offence is committed for silent procession, then all participants of the procession are guilty of the same crime. So, filing the case against a few of over a hundred

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Govt urged to back farm sector, business climate

BB concerned as economy slows down

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

The economy slowed down in the first quarter of the current fiscal year (FY) and will not rebound unless the government ensures adequate agricultural inputs, and a conducive business and investment environment, says the central bank.

In its quarterly report to be released soon, Bangladesh Bank (BB) states the economy's growth

momentum 'somewhat slowed down' during the first quarter largely due to losses in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors.

The report also said economic growth faces a number of risks, including socio-political instability, natural disasters, fallout from phase-out of textile export restriction on China, and rising oil prices.

Although the BB forecasts the economy would bounce back in the 'near-term', it notes the government must "ensure timely

supply of adequate fertiliser, quality seeds and other agricultural inputs, provide agricultural credit, and marketing support."

It went on, "Similarly, the growth of industry and services sectors would depend on sustaining conducive business and investment environment."

The report admits that economic momentum has lost pace due to a 'lagged effect' of years of the central bank's tight monetary policy.

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Pollution alarming in Dhaka, Ctg

Particles in air now double the recommended level

WASIM BIN HABIB

A serious health hazard looms over the residents of Dhaka and Chittagong metropolises as the particulate pollutants in the air are more than double the level recommended by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The EPA guidelines say presence of particulate matters (PM) 10 and PM2.5 should remain within

150 and 65 microgram per cubic metre (mg/m3) of air within 24 hours.

But the level of pollutants is much higher in the two metropolitan cities and gets worse with the advent of winter.

The monthly average of PM concentration as recorded by the Air Quality Management Project (AQMP) at different locations in the capital shows the level of PM in the

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Saarc nations to share crime info

\$300m regional fund put into operation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saarc foreign ministers yesterday put into operation a \$300 million regional development fund and finalised the draft agreement on a security pact to share information about criminal activities.

They also decided that Sri Lanka will host the 15th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit next year as the Maldives opted out Friday due to pre-occupations with national elections.

Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee disclosed the decisions at the conclusion of the 29th Saarc council of ministers meeting in New Delhi yesterday.

A cell is being established in the Kathmandu-based Saarc Secretariat for implementing the Saarc Development Fund (SDF) projects, he said.

The council identified the social sector and physical connectivity projects as priorities, which include programmes for empowering women, enhancing quality of

education and strengthening regional telemedicine networks.

Pranab also said that the council unanimously approved the security pact draft and directed legal experts from all the eight member states to attend a meeting in Colombo in April 2008 to hammer out the details of the Mutual Legal Assistance agreement.

"All the Saarc states are victims of terrorism and we should have mutual legal assistance to tackle terrorists and criminals in the region," he said.

The draft, which does not include an extradition clause, is based on recommendations made by Saarc home ministers, who met in October this year.

On Friday, the Maldives moved back from holding the next summit as the government of the country would be preoccupied with its first multi-party elections under a new constitution next year.

"Owing to domestic preoccupations in 2008, the Maldives will be hosting the Saarc summit in 2009,"

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Sundarbans' fate hinges on well-being of Sidr survivors

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK, from the Sundarbans

Sidr victims may be compelled to resort to the ravaged Sundarbans left untouched for natural regeneration if they are not provided with adequate support for livelihood, forest officials apprehend.

A visit to the Sundarbans under the hard-hit Bagerhat's Sharankhola Forest Range will reveal a shocking picture of the world's largest single unit of mangrove forest.

The world heritage site appears to be roasted in an inferno as trees are shorn of leaves and branches with large trees uprooted.

If the Sundarbans, which provides livelihood to more than two million people in the region, is not given adequate time to regenerate,

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Once a source of income for about 2 million people, the Sundarbans lies in ruins after Sidr ripped through the country on November 15. Rehabilitation of the affected people is badly needed for the forest to regenerate.

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RU VERDICT PROTEST DU teachers to wear black badges today

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) teachers seeking immediate release of all university teachers and students detained and convicted in connection with August's campus violence will take classes today wearing black badges.

The teachers also decided to bring out a silent procession on the campus tomorrow as part of their ongoing programme protesting against Tuesday's verdict placing four Rajshahi University (RU) teachers to two years' rigorous imprisonment.

At a meeting of the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) on Friday, the teachers issued an ultimatum to the government to release all detained and convicted DU and RU teachers and students by December 12.

This is the second time during the rule of this caretaker government that the DU teachers are wearing black badges. Earlier, they staged a similar protest following

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5 more bodies of Sidr victims recovered

UNB, Bagerhat

Five more decomposed bodies were recovered from cyclone battered Dublarchar in Sharonkhola upazila of Bagerhat district Friday evening, raising the death toll to 798 in the district.

Official sources said the bodies were found under the sand in the worst affected char. Identity of the five Sidr victims could not be known.

With the recovery of the bodies, the official death toll from cyclone in Sharonkhola upazila now stands at 665.

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