

Hasina for concerted efforts to fight poverty in South Asia

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the South Asian nations have to fight against poverty jointly alongside maintaining good and harmonious relations for their overall development.

"We have to make concerted efforts with our resources to fight poverty as it is the main enemy of the Asian region," she said while talking to reporters on board an air flight on her way back home from Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan.

Hasina went to Bhutan on November 6 on a four-day state visit at the invitation of her Bhutanese counterpart Lyonchen Jigmi Y Thinley.

Describing her visit as fruitful, she said it would play an important role in further strengthening bilateral relations with Bhutan, which recognised Bangladesh as an independent state immediately after the War of Liberation.

Hasina said, "Bhutan is the founding member of Saarc and we have the scope to learn many things from each other."

In this context, she referred to the transformation of Bhutan into a democratic and forward-looking state.

During her visit, Hasina had extensive talks with her Bhutanese counterpart. Entire gamut of bilateral relations, including expansion of bilateral trade and business and the climate change issues, were discussed, she said.

Stressing the need for people-to-people contact to further strengthening the existing friendly relations

between the two countries, Hasina said, "We have already talked to India to establish road links with Bhutan and India responded positively."

With the establishment of road connectivity with Bhutan, the two countries would benefit in terms of expansion of trade and business and increasing people-to-people contact, she added.

When asked about joint efforts of generating hydro-electricity, Hasina said the matter came up during the bilateral talks with her Bhutanese

counterpart.

"We have to take environmental consequences into consideration while taking any projects," she said, adding that there was a prospect of buying electricity from Bhutan.

Referring to the importance of launching package programmes by Bangladesh and Bhutan for tourists, she said both the countries could be economically benefited as Bhutan has a slivery Himalayas and Bangladesh has golden sandy sea beach, the two most popular tourist attractions.

'Build memorial to allied force'

DU CORRESPONDENT

Citizens' Rights Movement and Bangladesh Society for the Defence of Civil Liberty yesterday appealed to the prime minister and the president to build an 'Allied Force Memorial Complex' in the city to commemorate the sacrifices and support of the allied force during the liberation war in 1971.

The organisations made the appeal at a press conference at the National Press Club in the city.

Other demands of the organisation include enrolment of a chapter on the role of allied force in textbook in

lower secondary level, conferring posthumous state honour to Gen JS Arora and great warriors of the allied force, naming a city road after late Indian premier Indira Gandhi and reinstalling Indira Mancha in Shishu Park area.

Citizens' Rights Secretary General Tushar Rehman said the role of allied force during the liberation war is an unforgettable incident for Bangladesh.

Around 11,000 allied force members died in the war and 4,086 members received injuries. But no government paid much concentration on the matter in the last 38 years, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Participants at a roundtable titled 'Involvement of men in successful prevention of HIV' jointly organised by the Prothom Alo and UNFPA at the Prothom Alo office at Karwan Bazar in the city yesterday.

Increase in participation of men a must to prevent HIV

Speakers tell Prothom Alo roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday emphasised the need for participation of men to prevent the deadly disease HIV/AIDS in order to ensure gender equality and reproductive health rights.

They were speaking at the roundtable titled 'Involvement of men in successful prevention of HIV' jointly organised by the Prothom Alo and UNFPA at the newspaper's office at Karwan Bazar in the city.

Abdul Qayyum, joint editor of the daily, moderated the roundtable.

Dr Khandaker Ezazul Haque, HIV focal point of UNFPA Bangladesh, recommended increase of the male participation for safer sex

which will prevent HIV/AIDS and also work to stop the disease spreading.

Director HIV/AIDS sector and South Asia Programme Adviser of Save the Children-USA Nizamuddin Ahmed appreciated some measures of the government to fight HIV, especially the step to include a chapter on HIV/AIDS, from class six to twelve to inform the young generation about the disease.

Project Coordinator of CARE Bangladesh Kalpana Rani said women rights activists call for male participation in ensuring their rights, adding that it is now time for males to ensure safer sex to prevent HIV/AIDS also.

"As the males have more access to get involved in more

females at a time, that might be risky to get infectious of sexuality transmitted infection, including HIV, and they can spread it to each of his partner and that could spread among vast number of people," she added.

She also called on the sex sellers to be more responsible for stopping spread of any infectious diseases.

Executive Director of Bandhu Social Welfare Society Saleh Ahmed discussed the availability of condom and its promotion to stop sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.

Executive Director of Ashar Alo Society Habiba Akter explained the situation of the expatriated workers and several cases among the women HIV positives who are mainly

infected by their expatriated husbands or male sex partners for ignorance.

Describing the situation of sex workers and number of their clients, HIV/AIDS Adviser of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Mozammel Haque said "If the male as well as the sex seller does not practise safe sex, they might be infected with HIV and they will also spread it to others."

Line Director of National AIDS and STD Programme (NASP) Dr Mohammad Ali Belal gave a detailed picture of the role of NASP which has been working on HIV/AIDS along with safe blood transfusion across the country.

Assistant Country Director of UNFPA Hasina Begum, Associate Prof of Anthropology department at Jahangirnagar University Dr Manas Choudhury, Operations Manager of UNFPA Afsana Taher, Nafisa Huq of Independent University Bangladesh, Mohuya Leya of Manusher Jonno Foundation, Executive Director of Mukta Akash Bangladesh MS Mukti, Director General of Mass Communication Department Tasir Ahmed, Deputy Secretary to Home Affairs Ministry Abdul Hannan Sheikh and Samir Kumar Hawlader also addressed the roundtable.



PHOTO: STAR

Sultana Kamal, former adviser to the caretaker government, speaks at a dialogue on the rights of domestic workers at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On her right is Shirin Akhter and on her left is Abdul Matin Master. Domestic Workers' Rights Network organised the event.

Bring domestic workers under labour law

Rights activists urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights activists yesterday called on the government to bring domestic workers under the protection of Labour Law 2006, which is currently being revised.

They also demanded quick progress in the code of conduct for employers, currently being drafted by the labour ministry to promote the rights of domestic workers and curb violence against them.

The rights activists made the call at a dialogue organised by the Domestic Workers' Rights Network (DWRN) in association with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) at CIRDAP auditorium in the city.

They said domestic workers are considered informal labourers and there are no rules that can be applied to their employers. So, the employers can easily exploit domestic workers without facing legal actions.

They suggested that the government should fix a minimum wage, working hours and other benefits for domestic

workers.

They also demanded action against employers responsible for physical or mental torture and sexual harassment of domestic workers.

There are no national data on domestic workers in Bangladesh. Different NGOs working with the issue often put the number in between 20 and 30 lakh. Of them, about 80 percent are women and girls.

Sultana Kamal, former adviser to the caretaker government and executive director of Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), said majority of the domestic workers, being young female, are more prone to exploitation. So the situation is directly linked to gender-based violence.

She said most domestic workers are deprived of basic rights. They often live an isolated life.

Shaheen Anam, executive director, Manusher Jonno Foundation, said domestic workers remain outside the protection of the labour law, as they are not recognised as formal labourers. The state is clearly not playing its role to

protect them.

Stressing the need for tough punishment to employers abusing the workers, she said most incidents of violence against domestic workers are settled with meagre amount of money and the perpetrators go unpunished.

Md Israfil Alam MP, chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Labour and Employment, said domestic workers are treated as modern-day slaves.

He said the standing committee made suggestions to bring them under the law. However, it is hard to establish standard rules in this regard.

Shirin Akhter, chairperson of Karmojibi Nari, Advocate ZI Khan Panna, chairman of Human Rights Committee, Bangladesh Bar Council, Kazi Saifuddin Ahmed, Labour Adviser to Bangladesh Employers Federation, Md Zafrul Hasan, joint secretary general of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), and Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, coordinator of DWRN, also spoke.

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