

Ensure food and nutrition security for the poor

Indeed, women are the main providers of meals, care and nutrition in the household, and they have a fundamental role in assuring improved nutritional status for all. Women play a key role in the socio-economic development of rural areas and in many societies they are also the main producers of food.

PARVEZ BABUL

THE national food policy of Bangladesh says that food is a basic human need and plays a crucial role in the agro-based economy of Bangladesh, where a large proportion of the income of the population is allocated to food. The first and foremost responsibility of the state is to ensure an uninterrupted supply of food to all people at all times. According to Article-15(a) of the Constitution of Bangladesh, it shall be a fundamental responsibility of the state to provide its citizens with food. As per the government's Allocation of Business, it is the duty of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management to establish a dependable food security system for the nation.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, US Secretary of State, wrote an article, "A new approach to global food security and hunger," on World Food Day (October 16). She sets out the five principles guiding US policy on food security. Hillary mentioned in her write-up that for one billion hungry people worldwide, the daily effort to grow, buy, or sell food is the defining struggle of their lives. This matters to all of us. Meeting the challenge of global hunger is at the heart of "food security" -- empowering the world's farmers to sow and harvest plentiful crops, effectively care for livestock and catch fish,

and then ensuring that the food produced reaches those who need it.

She also added that food security represents the convergence of several issues: droughts and floods caused by climate change, swings in the global economy that affect food prices, and spikes in the price of oil -- which increase transportation costs. Food security is not only about food, but also about security.

Chronic hunger threatens individuals, governments and societies. People who are starving or undernourished and cannot care for their families are left with feelings of hopelessness and despair, which can lead to tension, conflict, and even violence. Since 2007, there have been riots over food in more than 60 countries. So, we must keep in mind that "hungry people are angry people."

Indeed, women are the main providers of meals, care and nutrition in the household, and they have a fundamental role in assuring improved nutritional status for all. Women play a key role in the socio-economic development of rural areas and in many societies they are also the main producers of food. Special attention should be given to the nutrition of women during pregnancy and lactation. All forms of discrimination, including detrimental traditional practices against women, must be eliminated in accordance with the 1979 Convention on Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Food security is defined in its most basic form as access by all people at all times to the food needed for a healthy life. Achieving food security has three dimensions. First, it is necessary to ensure a safe and nutritionally adequate food supply both at the national level and at the household level. Second, it is necessary to have a reasonable degree of stability in the supply of food both from one year to the other and during the year. Third, and most critical, is the need to ensure that each household has physical, social and economic access to enough food to meet its needs. Each household must have the knowledge and the ability to produce or procure the food that it needs on a sustainable basis.

In this context, properly balanced diets that supply all necessary nutrients and energy without leading to over-consumption or waste should be encouraged. It is also important to encourage the proper distribution of food among all members in the household without any discrimination towards women and children, especially girls.

Nobel Laureate Dr. Amartya Sen said: "Poverty is caused by the lack of exchange entitlement in a market economy. Gainful employment is the principal challenge for the poor and the main focus for poverty alleviation." Thus, strategies for poverty alleviation broadly encompass the redistribution and creation of assets in favour of the poor and give guarantee of employment at a reasonable wage and adoption of measures having direct benefit for the poor. This is possible when political leaders express their commitment to implement the program without cor-

ruption or discrimination.

Daniel Toole, Regional Director of Unicef for South Asia said: "Due to persistent and deep inequalities, children in South Asia become trapped in an unrelenting cycle of discrimination at several levels -- poor nutrition, health and sanitation and being excluded from education. This puts a child's face to chronic poverty. So, we can now design more strategic policies. 26.5 million of the 63 million children in Bangladesh live in poverty. Children's seven basic needs -- food, education, health, information, shelter, water and sanitation -- must be addressed to end their poverty. Investing in children is both a fundamental responsibility and an opportunity that, if not grabbed now, will tarnish a nation's growth." Breast-feeding is the most secure means of assuring the food security of infants and should be promoted and protected through appropriate policies and programs.

John Aylieff of World Food Program (WFP) said: "First of all, hunger and malnutrition are probably the biggest impediments to economic growth in the world today. The economic cost of hunger is immense. It is estimated that \$20 to \$30 billion a year are lost in the world due to hunger and malnutrition. It means that \$500 billion to \$10 trillion are lost in productivity and income. So, an investment in malnutrition and hunger today is an investment in tomorrow's GDP." Fao's State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008 shows that female-headed households were affected disproportionately by the food price shocks.

Bangladesh is paying a heavy toll for climate change and is facing many big problems, such as increased temperature, salinity, frequent floods, cyclones.



Women's contribution in food production must be recognised.

Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are the three silent killers and climate change has become a severe headache for the nation. Considering those reasons, Bangladesh needs to create and maintain partnership with the rich countries, donors and international communities to feed and save the people of this country.

We should take a holistic approach, and the government and development partners should understand the situation, causes and consequences of food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition, emphasise homestead food production, provide training to more women and offer them financial and technical assistance for poultry rearing and growing vitamin A rich vegetables. The government should distribute quality seeds, fertiliser, and pesticides free of cost among these poor farmers.

As we can never deny our dependabil-

ity on agriculture, so we must use modern technology to cultivate the land instead of using cows and wooden ploughs. Distribute khas lands among landless people, control population growth for planned family of not more than two children, and set up an agricultural university in Manikganj to accommodate more students for agriculture education. These are the demands of the time.

Also, make efforts to emphasise the role of mass media to raise awareness about poverty and hunger eradication, combat climate change and malnutrition, create employment of poor women, ensure sustainable agricultural and national development, and increase food production and sustainable productivity of our limited lands.

Parvez Babul is the Associate Editor of weekly *Manikganj Khabar* and Convener of Bangladesh Climate Change Journalists Forum (BCCJF). Email: parvezbabul@gmail.com

Is a new government in the offing?

It is against this background that Maoists supremo "Prachanda" has thrown a bombshell. He says a new government headed by his Nepal Communist Party (Maoists) will shortly take over the reins of the country. He even went to the extent of saying that this may happen as soon as within a week's time.

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

NEPAL, the picturesque South Asian country, is once again witnessing political agitations and has caught the attention of the outside world. The nation is certainly at a political crossroads at present as the government of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal is failing to provide the much-required stability even though a glorious chapter has embraced the Himalayan land following the abolition of monarchy not long ago.

The multi-party coalition government headed by moderate communist leader Madhav Kumar Nepal is crippled by a series of problems created by the biggest group in parliament -- the Maoists -- as the legislature is unable to transact any meaningful business since the radical leftists are paralysing the parliament by their non-cooperation. Unbelievable as it may seem, the ministers are not getting salaries as the parliament cannot approve the necessary measures in face of hostile opposition by the Maoists.

The government is virtually in tatters as the specter of political instability is haunting the nation.

It is against this background that Maoists supremo "Prachanda" has thrown a bombshell. He says a new government headed by his Nepal Communist Party (Maoists) will shortly take over the reins of the country. He even went to the extent of saying that this may happen as soon as within a



Still in a state of flux?

cal supremacy, while polarisation among the myriad political parties -- mostly small and without much force -- is also taking place, heightening tensions in the country.

It is not long ago that Nepal came out of a long spell of violence and instability centering the existence of the monarchy that had ruled the impoverished country for 240 years. Major political parties like the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), of which the present prime minister is a senior leader, in collusion with the then underground Maoist outfit ousted King Gyanendra from effective power.

The subsequent elections for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution saw a stunning victory for the ultra-left, who came out from their hideouts and joined conventional politics. They won 240 of the 601 seats in the house and formed a government led by Pushpa Kumar Dahal with the support of others, including Madhav Kumar Nepal.

But the tenure of the government was unfortunately cut short because of dif-

ferences among the coalition partners on the issue of dismissal of the army chief by the prime minister and also over the vetoing of this decision by the president of the Republic.

Earlier, immediately after the assembly elections, all parties worked together to abolish the throne and turn Nepal into a secular republic in place of a Hindu kingdom. But the same political parties squabbled, and the government had to resign eventually when some allies, like Madhav Kumar's Communist Party, left the coalition while the Nepal Congress was already in the opposition.

As the heart of the crisis is the sacking of the army chief for what the government said his failure to abide by government instruction on the inclusion of about 19,000 former Maoist guerrillas in the armed forces, a component of the peace deal agreed upon earlier. While Prachanda's government was obviously keen to take them in the army other political parties, including the allies in the cabinet, were somewhat unwilling, fearing that Prachanda's strength would

increase manifold once they were inducted into the army.

Controversy erupted on whether the president could overrule the decision of the prime minister and the cabinet. Prachanda said it was totally unconstitutional while his critics asserted that the president as the supreme commander of the armed forces could take such a decision. This debate continues to rage.

President Ram Baran Yadav, who won the largely ceremonial presidency as the nominee of the Nepali Congress and was supported by most others barring the Maoists, took a position contrary to the prime minister on the issue of the dismissal of the army chief. Consequently, the development that emerged did not come as a surprise since Prachanda's opponents were waiting to avenge their defeat in the polls, and they have certainly seized the opportunity.

The Maoists want president Yadav to "apologise" on the issue of the sacking of the army chief. It may be the height of folly to expect that such a demand will be met by a government which has come to power with a differing view on this crucial issue. At the same time, any government having the support of 22 parties but not of the largest single group in the house is hardly expected to provide a stable government, particularly when the Maoists have vowed to keep the pot boiling -- and that is what is happening now.

The constituent assembly is working as an interim parliament but is crippled by the non-cooperation of the Maoists, who say practically no government now exists in Nepal and this cannot continue. Nepal must complete the framing of the new constitution by June next year, and articles of the constitution must be approved by a two-third majority, which is impossible without the support of the Maoists.

This makes the fate of the new constitution totally uncertain. Prachanda has

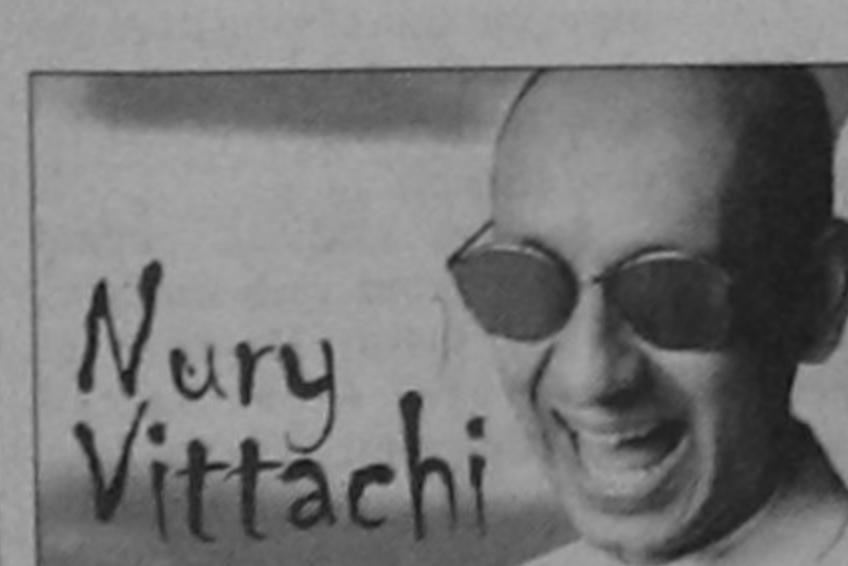
held talks with some political parties, including the Nepali Congress and Madhav Kumar's Communist Party. The partners in the coalition government are also at variance on many matters. The Maoists, when in power, provided some people-oriented programs and undertook several such projects, which the present government is finding it difficult to continue despite their protestations of working for the people. The government is evidently hamstrung by ineffectiveness.

Nepal appears to be on the verge of a change, although it is difficult to say in which form the changes may come. Political circles are agog with speculations like president's rule and dissolution of the parliament (the constituent assembly) and other developments. The claim by Prachanda that a new government headed by his party is in the offing is definitely a possibility, but not a certainty or near-certainty. Analysts are keeping their fingers crossed while the general impression is that the country is stalled and such a pass cannot continue for long. The Maoists are definitely a force, but they also have problems in dictating the terms.

All the parties involved must demonstrate prudence and sagacity at the current juncture so that democracy is not disturbed, and the country which has witnessed so much mayhem and lawlessness in recent times must not revert to the same phase since it badly needs political and economic stability. Nepal can ill afford any further experiments or political instability and must end a spell where the people may slowly become disenchanted with the representative pattern of governance just because of the sheer lust for power or lack of responsible policies by the figures who matter for the nation.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist and analyst of international affairs.

Rub on a little chocolate



WARNING: Do not rub chocolate on your body. Let me do it for you. No, don't do it at all. What I am trying to say is that the stuff is better on the inside of your body than the outside.

How come? Well, your humble narrator courageously did an experiment after getting lots of mail from readers about Axe chocolate-flavoured body spray. The product, called Dark Temptation,

is not available in all countries, but several readers, including Sheila Jade of Hong Kong, wanted to know where to buy it.

Sorry, Sheila, this is serious GUY STUFF. The idea is that since women worship chocolate, logically speaking they should leap on men who smell of it.

Sara Wan told me there's a TV ad in which a guy sprays himself with Dark Temptation and turns into a chocolate man, pursued by women.

The ad was censored in India, reader Vaibhav Chadha told me, because one female bites the chocolate man's bottom and others stick their tongues in his ears. It all sounded rather fun.

A reader who better be unnamed said he had been unable to find Dark Temptation (or a woman) and wanted to know if a guy could just rub ACTUAL chocolate on his body. "Can you try it and

report back?" he asked. "Also, what brand should I use?"

Honestly, the things I do for science! First, I discovered an application problem.

M&Ms are useless; the hard shell doesn't melt.

Ferrero Rocher chocolates are scratchy.

High-class dark chocolate leaves a stain like dried blood on your neck and ruins your shirt collar. Your best bet is Kit Kat. You rub your finger on it until it gets a bit melty, and then smear it behind your ears and under your watch-strap.

Did women leap on me? No more than usual. Or, to put it another way, not at all.

Towards the end of the morning, one female DID sit closer to me than normal, and seemed to be inhaling deeply through her nose.

Was she getting a waft of cocoa bean essence? Possibly. However, she ended the conversation abruptly and walked off in the direction of the nearest convenience store. All I'd managed to do was make her hungry.

At lunchtime, I re-applied "eau de Kit Kat" to my neck and wrists and wandered the streets. No one took any notice. There was a conspicuous lack of bottom-biting in the area. What a dull society I live in.

Later in the afternoon, a colleague told me she had located an uncensored copy of the Dark Temptation TV ad. I was shocked to see that the bottom-biting incident was just part of a general pattern of violence. The ad ends with the chocolate man having his arm torn off by a woman who drives off with it.

Eww. That's when I decided that smelling like a large, two-legged Kit Kat may not be entirely safe. I raced to the



bathroom to wash it off. Back at my desk, I received a message on this web site from reader Thomas Seifert with another idea: "Hang a lamb chop from a string around your neck. At least the dog will play with you."

Visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com