

## Women Policy '97 to be restored with revisions

Says Shirin Sharmin Chy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury yesterday said the government is going to reinstate the National Women Development Policy of 1997 maintaining its original spirit with necessary revisions.

Although the main spirit of 1997's policy would be upheld, it would need necessary revisions as 13 years have passed by and many new issues have emerged, she added.

The state minister said this at a view exchange meeting on the policy organised by women and children affairs ministry at Biam auditorium in the city.

Speakers at the meeting demanded inclusion of women's equal rights to property inheritance and its strict implementation brushing aside disapproval from the groups that exploit religion.

They also called for an urgent discussion in parliament regarding the policy, saying that it would be difficult to implement the policy unless it is formally enacted.

Sharmin pointed out that emerging issues, including women's struggle caused by climate change, natural disasters, globalisation and financial recession, need to be addressed in the policy.

Besides, many new areas, including issues of women with disabilities, women from indigenous community and minority women, were brought into the limelight by development work-

ers, would be considered. The speakers said very important aspects like women's equal rights to property inheritance and resources were omitted from the policy formulated in 1997 by the BNP-led four-party alliance government in 2004, which was a major blow for the women's rights movement aiming to remove gender disparity.

In 2008, the caretaker government announced another policy with revisions. Radical Islamist groups took to the streets every time the policy was brought into the limelight.

Salma Khan, former chairperson of Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Cedaw), called for ensuring equal representation of women in all government and private offices.

They (women) must have the power of decision-making, she added.

Ayesha Khanam, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said the policy must be formulated in the light of Cedaw and Beijing Declaration.

Meher Afroz Chumki MP, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on women and children affairs, lawmaker Rasheda Begum Hira, Nasim Firdaus, executive director of Bangladesh Alliance for Women Leadership, Prof Sadeka Halim, Shirin Akhter, general secretary of Karmojibi Nari, Ranjan Karmakar, executive director of Steps Towards Development, and Razia Begum, acting secretary of ministry of women affairs, also spoke.



Refurbishment of Kadam Fountain in front of the foreign ministry in progress. Many such fountains are being renovated in the city ahead of SAF Games 2010 scheduled to begin on Friday. PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## PUBLIC HEALTH THREAT

# 5.50 lakh children suffer from rickets

Reveals survey

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rickets is emerging as a 'public health threat' in the country with 5.50 lakh children, aged between one and 15, suffering from the disease, which is completely preventable, reveals National Rickets Survey 2008 yesterday.

The findings of the study showed that the current trend of the disease mainly due to deficiency of vitamin D, produced when skin is exposed to sunlight, is rising and, if cannot be stopped, can take an alarming turn.

Though vitamin D deficiency was assumed as the main reason for rickets which can stop bones forming properly, scientists found that lack of calcium also responsible for the ailment.

"It was found that the rate of rickets due to vitamin D deficiency is 80 percent while it is 50 percent due to calcium deficiency," said Dr SK Roy, convener of Rickets Interest Group (RIG), which conducted the survey in 32 districts among 20,000 children.

The highest prevalence of

the disease was found in Chittagong, which was 76.6 percent. "There are patients with rickets at almost every house at Maheshkhali in Cox's Bazar," he said while presenting the survey in the city.

Dhaka is the second highest division with 7.1 percent rickets patients. Despite sufficient sunlight near the sea areas children are most vulnerable to the disease.

Dr Roy said cultural as well as genetic factors play a vital role in the disease.

Breastfed infants, whose mothers are not exposed to sunlight, and breastfed infants, who are not exposed to sunlight, are at higher risk for developing rickets.

Children aged between six months and 24 months are at highest risk, because their bones are rapidly growing, he added.

"Sunlight or vitamin D is crucial for the absorption of calcium, which is key in the formation of healthy bones and deficiencies can lead to rickets," said the scientist Dr SK Roy.

Addressing the seminar as

the chief guest, DGHS Director General Prof Shah Monir Hossain said rickets remains neglected like many other issues in the health sector.

Shahidul Haque, chief executive of Social Assistance and Rehabilitation of the Physically Vulnerable (SARPV) that published rickets-related information first in the country after the 1991 cyclone, focused on early identification of the disease as "early detection can reverse the condition".

Correcting calcium deficiency by one gram (two finger-tips) of lime per kilogram of rice helped SARPV in preventing rickets due to calcium deficiency in Cox's Bazar area, he said.

He suggested consuming leafy vegetables, small fish and dairy products to check rickets. Besides, food diversification and prolonged breastfeeding are also important.

Fatima Parveen Chowdhury, director of the Institute of Public Health and Nutrition, and Dr Thierry Craviari, orthopaedic surgeon of France, also spoke at the dissemination programme.

## Ultimatum to solve gas crisis in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Jubo Union laid siege to the Narayanganj office of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd at Chasara yesterday demanding solution to gas crisis in the town immediately.

Later, a rally was also held on the spot.

Speakers at the rally gave an ultimatum to take effective steps to solve the gas crisis by January 31. Otherwise, they threatened to announce a tougher movement programme from the first week of February.

Advocate Sharat Chandra Mandal, president of Jubo Union district unit, chaired the rally which was addressed by district unit CPB leader Dulal Saha, Jubo Union leader Dilip Das and trade union leader Bimal Das.

The speakers said severe gas crisis has been prevailing in Narayanganj for long.

Public life has been disrupted, production in the industries have been hampered due to gas crisis. But, they alleged, the Titas Gas authorities are not taking any effective step in this regard.

Later, they submitted a memorandum to Amir Hossain, deputy general manager of the office.

# Fanaticism, military intervention threat to democracy

Says Kuldip Nayar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Growing fundamentalism and military intervention are two real fatal dangers facing the emerging democracies in South Asia, said internationally acclaimed journalist Kuldip Nayar yesterday.

"Pakistan has been taken over by both, while India faces a danger from the forces acting in the name of Hindutva. However, the people in Bangladesh, which once went through blows of hot wind, have indicated their revulsion to religion-based parties in the last election," he said.

The Indian journalist said this while delivering a speech on the 'Role of the Media in Emerging Democracy' at Jahur Hossain Chowdhury Memorial Lecture 2010, organised by the Bhorer Kagoj at Sonargaon Hotel in the capital.

Addressing the event as the chief guest, President Zillur Rahman asked the media to be careful so that none can abuse the media and journalists with dishonest intentions.

Kuldip Nayar said, "In the name of strong rule or quick results, the men in khaki come to occupy the position, which belongs to the elected representatives. Unfortunately, the media, either because of timidity or because of greed, tends to cave in."

Such a situation developed in India some 35 years ago because of authoritarianism, which he then ruler came to flaunt, said Nayar, also a former diplomat and politician.

"Therefore, the danger is not only from those who live in the barracks, but also from those who come to believe that they alone have the rights to rule and in the manner they like," he added.

He also said the opposition couldn't throw challenge that it will return to the streets. "This is the policy of desperation, not strength... Its consequences are fatal to the democratic system."

Nayar also underscored the need for the media to shed its partisan and pro-chial stance in order to create a climate of consensus in the country.

President Zillur Rahman said the media plays the key role in establishing the rights of people, freedom and sovereignty, but it is not possible to do so by ignoring greater public interests.

"Journalists like Jahur Hossain, who was inspired by patriotism, are of great importance for the development of objective journalism today," he said.

Jahur Hossain was an editor of the daily Sangbad and played a significant role in promoting progressive thoughts in the '40s.

The president also named several renowned journalists and writers such as Maulana Akram Khan, Tofazzal Hossain Manik Miah, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin and Abdus Salam who played an important role in enriching Bangla language, literature and culture.

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta and Jahur Hossain Chowdhury's niece Prof Tazeen Chowdhury also spoke.

## 61st Republic Day of India celebrated

METRO DESK

The 61st Republic Day of India was celebrated with traditional pomp and gaiety in Bangladesh by the High Commission of India yesterday, says a press release.

On the occasion, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Rajeev Mitter unfurled the national flag and read out president of India's address to the nation at a function at Baridhara in the city yesterday.

Rajeev Mitter in his message said "I extend my warm greetings to the friendly people of Bangladesh and to my fellow countrymen living here."

Rajeev said, "For six decades India has been a democratic Republic and has been guided by the principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The 60th milestone is marked with the many successes that we have achieved in different fields. We can look at our achievements with justifiable pride. Our constitution, ethos of secularism, regular holding of free and fair elections, fundamental rights, apolitical armed forces, all have been sustained in the world's largest democracy. Today, the world looks at us as an engine of economic growth in addressing the challenges posed by global economic downturn."



Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote forms a human chain in front of the Matsya Bhaban in the city yesterday demanding steps to ensure safe road. PHOTO: STAR

# Bill to curb road accidents to be placed on Jan 31

Says Tarana

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League lawmaker Advocate Tarana Halim yesterday said she would place a bill in the Parliament on January 31 seeking to curb road accidents.

Tarana, also general secretary of Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote, said this while she was presiding over a rally titled 'Nirapad Sarak Chai (We want safe road)'. Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote organised the rally at Ramna gate in the city.

Communist Party of Bangladesh President Manjurul Ahsan Khan, Chairman of Nirapad Sarak Chai film star Elias Kanchan, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon member Quamrul Ahsan Khan, FEJB Chairman Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, Asma Zabin Jumu MP and Fuzia Islam Khan also spoke at the programme.

Tarana urged the media to create mass awareness to

help enact accident protection law as well as create social movement against such mishaps.

Manjurul urged the authorities concerned to issue driving licences properly and ban all defective vehicles from the road.

Mentioning that the death rate due to the road accidents in Bangladesh is 45 percent, which is 3-4 percent in other countries, Elias said the accidents occur as the drivers can easily go unpunished due to loopholes in laws.

Quamrul demanded enactment of firm laws as well as enforcement to protect common people from the road accidents which is on the rise.

The rally was attended who lost their near and dear ones at different road accidents. It was ended on the National Press Club premises. The participants of the rally also formed a human chain in front of the National Press Club.

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