



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A pedestrian crosses a dug-up road at No. 1 Commercial Plot Road at Shaymoli in the city yesterday. Slow pace of drainage improvement work causes suffering to road users, but the authorities remain indifferent.

Agreement with UNDP to strengthen parliamentary democracy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for implementation of a project to strengthen the functions of parliament through reforms.

M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, secretary to the economic relations division, and UNDP Resident Representative Stefan Priesner signed the agreement at the National Economic Council Bhaban in the city yesterday.

Funded by UNDP and the Netherlands, the Tk 83 crore project titled 'Improving democracy through parliamentary development' will start on July 1 and continue till January 2014.

The project is based on the key concept that a strong parliament is essential to maintaining the rule of law, protecting human rights, overseeing transparent governance processes, improving the state of the extremely poor and meeting MDG commitments, says a press release issued by UNDP.

The project is designed to support reform initiatives led by parliament, which will, over time, impact on all people in Bangladesh through improved law making, efficient and accountable governance,

improved service delivery and policy making and more effective representation and community engagement.

The project will strengthen parliament in the areas of research, information support and ICT resources and it will build mechanisms which allow parliament to engage more effectively with the public and other stakeholders.

"The presence of an effective parliament in Bangladesh is strongly correlated with the existence of a viable democracy because it has the capacity to empower ordinary people to participate in the policies that shape their lives," said AJAJMG Hennekens, ambassador of the Netherlands.

UNDP Resident Representative Stefan Priesner recognised the importance of the project and its bipartisan support, noting that both the parties campaigned to strengthen parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh.

As a result, he said, the people of Bangladesh have very high hopes and expectations of the ninth parliament to improve the delivery of essential services to all communities, ensure economic growth and security, job creation and rural development. "We also recognise what a huge challenge the government and parliament face in meeting public expectations."

PROJECT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE LAUNCHED 'Protect children from abuse'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a view to involving local government authorities in early childhood development programme, Plan Bangladesh launched a project titled 'Early childhood care and development in disaster-prone areas' at a function at the LGED auditorium in the city yesterday.

The 36-month project will be implemented in 10 unions and one pourasava of Barguna Sadar upazila.

The project that started on February 1 will cover 18,000 children and 30,000 mothers or caregivers involving 33 upazila standing committees.

The project will contribute towards the capacity enhancement of non-government organisations, local community and local authorities in effective delivery of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD).

It will also promote cognitive, socio-emotional and linguistic development of the disadvantaged children of pre-primary school age (0-6 years) and parental awareness on childcare and development in disasters, said Probak Karim, Learning Adviser of Plan Bangladesh.

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Dr Shirin Sharmin Choudhury in her speech as the chief guest underscored the need for assistance on

priority basis to the children during the disaster. "Effective community planning is crucial in this regard. Children must be protected from abuse and money should be allocated for school feeding," she said. There is no alternative to eradicating poverty, she added.

The example of Barguna could be replicated in other disaster-prone areas to save the children and ensure a better life for them, she said.

Speakers at the programme said as children of the coastal belt area are more vulnerable to frequent disasters, they are more traumatised which should be addressed through psychological support along with their food, nutrition and treatment facilities.

The ECCD coverage in the country is only 15 percent, which should be increased further for better development of the children. Every registered primary school should be attached with a pre-school programme, they said.

Country Director of Plan Bangladesh Edward Thomas Espey chaired the programme while among others Nurul Alam, executive director of South Asia Partnership, Mohammad Mohsin of UNICEF, Mahmuda Akhter of Brac University, MA Khaled, chairman of Barguna Sadar Upazilla also spoke.

BCL workers force JCD men out of Madhur Canteen

DU CORRESPONDENT

Tension ran high on the Dhaka University campus yesterday after a group of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) workers drove away Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) men from Madhur Canteen.

Around 30 BCL men, mainly from the Surya Sen Hall, forced around 10 JCD activists out of the canteen at about 11:00am, as the JCD did not withdraw a case filed against some BCL leaders.

The JCD filed the case against BCL leaders, including presidents and general secretaries of several hall units, on charges of beating top JCD leaders on January 18.

The BCL men also threatened the JCD activists not to enter the canteen until the case is withdrawn.

"Our leaders and activists were sitting at a table in the canteen, but the Chhatra League men forced them to leave the canteen," said Mahfuzur Rahman, a joint convener of a DU JCD unit.

Later, the JCD activists gathered at Hakim Chatter while junior BCL activists staged a showdown until noon.

JCD leaders expressed concern over the incident. JCD men had stayed out of the campus since the January 18 clash, but they started coming to the campus regularly in the last week.

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PHOTO: STAR

Handcuffed border guards accused of mutiny appear in a special court at Pilkhana BDR headquarters in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 16)

15,000 to perform Hajj under govt quota

State minister tells JS

UNB, Sangsad Bhaban

Some 15,000 pilgrims would get the opportunity of performing Hajj this year under the government quota, State Minister for Religious Affairs Adv Shajahan Mia told Parliament yesterday.

Replying to ABM Golam Mostafa (AL), he said three-four star hotels and houses have been rented in Makkah and Medina in advance for the pilgrims who intend to perform hajj under the government management.

The state minister said a decision has been taken to depute one doctor from the Hajj medical team for each one thousand pilgrims.

The schedules for departure and return flights for pilgrims have been finalised through Biman Bangladesh.

Besides, Shajahan said many experienced and trained Hajj volunteers and guides have been appointed to provide service for the pilgrims.

The officials concerned will be sent to Makkah and Medina well in advance of the Hajj to ensure the services, he told the House.

Hannan made envoy to Switzerland

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government has appointed Md Abdul Hannan, currently serving as Bangladesh Ambassador and Permanent Representative (PR) to the UN Office in Geneva, as the new Ambassador of Bangladesh to Switzerland with residence in Geneva, says a foreign ministry announcement yesterday.

A career diplomat, Hannan belongs to the 1984 batch of FCS (Foreign Affairs) Cadre and joined the service in 1986. During his diplomatic career, he has served in Bangladesh missions in Muscat, Moscow, Kolkata, Ottawa and Karachi before taking up his assignment in the Bangladesh Permanent Mission in Geneva.

Hannan obtained his BA (Honors) and Masters degrees in Economics from Chittagong University. He also completed his masters in Diplomacy from the University of Lancaster in the United Kingdom in 1989.

Earlier, Hannan was appointed ambassador and Permanent Representative at Bangladesh Mission to the UN offices in Geneva in June 2009. Before Geneva, he was ambassador in Oman.

Switzerland and Bangladesh always have had excellent relations based on mutual understanding and trust. Switzerland has provided development assistance in key sectors of rural development in Bangladesh.

Switzerland contributed to the reconstruction of Bangladesh after its independence in 1971.

Switzerland has investments in Bangladesh in the chemicals, pharmaceuticals, technical services, cement, IT and food sectors. Large multinational companies such as Nestlé, Novartis and Holcim have productions in Bangladesh. Swiss share of total investment in Bangladesh remains small but focused on specific sectors. Total Swiss investment so far is 62 trillion US dollar.

Trade between Bangladesh and Switzerland has been increasing over the years. In 2006, Bangladesh export to Switzerland was 118 million dollar and Swiss export to Bangladesh 107 million dollar, according to official Swiss figures.

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