

Dredge rivers, raise embankment height in haor areas

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Initiatives must be taken to dredge rivers and raise the height of embankments in haor areas to prevent floods, which damage a huge amount of crops every year, speakers at a roundtable said yesterday.

An untimely flood was swept through about 200 haor areas and washed away crops just before harvesting this year. Crops on 61 percent of land in Sunamganj were fully damaged in the flash floods, causing a loss of Tk 1,126 crore, and some 15 lakh families were affected, said M Mukhlesur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Natural Resources Studies, in his keynote speech.

The roundtable on 'Causes of flash floods in Haor areas and measures to minimise loss in the future' was organised by the Centre for Natural Resources Studies in association with eight other national and international development organisations at Cirdap Auditorium in the city.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque said haor areas are most vulnerable to floods.

Soon after any disasters, the affected people will be provided with foods and other assistance until next harvest, he said.

Dredging rivers and raising the height of embankments could be part of permanent measures to protect the areas from floods, he said and called on engineers to work on the design of higher embankments.

The minister also called on the non-government organisations and other bodies not to confine their activities to only seminars and workshops. Rather, they should focus on farmers and agriculture in field level, he added.

The government's first priority is to develop agriculture in haor and costal areas to boost economy in those areas, he said.

The roundtable placed some recommendations including developing high yielding crop varieties, exempting farmers in haor areas from all agricultural credits, providing them with pesticides, fertilisers and seeds and ensuring social security in haor areas. Lawmaker Matiuur Rahman from Sunamganj-4 and Ziaul Haque Mukta of Oxfam GB, also spoke at the programme.



Due to poor drainage system, water remains stagnant on roadside near a footbridge at Uttara Sector No. 3 in the city, serving as a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Call to resettle slum dwellers

Eviction is not the solution, says UN official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting UN Under-Secretary General Dr Anna Tibaijuka yesterday said slum dwellers must be resettled, not evicted from the slum, if the authorities want to use that particular site for other purposes.

"Eviction is not the solution, it is the resettlement," she told reporters during a visit to Korail slum at Mahakhali in the city.

Her remarks came as eviction fear prevails among the slum dwellers following an initiative taken by the science and ICT ministry to establish an IT (Information Technology) village on that site as part of the government efforts to build a 'Digital Bangladesh'.

Slum dwellers have been residing over the last three

decades in the Korail slum on 100 acres of land belonging to the science and ICT ministry, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB), and Public Works Department.

About 1.2 lakh people, mostly victims of river erosion and poverty, have been living in shanties erected by local influential people.

The UN does not support arbitrary eviction as such steps would not solve the problems of the government, because these people will create an informal settlement, said Dr Anna, also the executive director of UN-HABITAT.

"If you are going to use the land, you cannot do it at the expense of the poor, because we are fighting poverty, not the poor. We are fighting slums, not the slum dwellers," she

said.

Anna, who came to Dhaka on a one-day visit, said part of the land could be used for resettling the slum dwellers by constructing high-rises or they could be relocated for their betterment.

She also said the UN wants the government to have dialogues to reach a consensus, which will be a 'win-win' solution for all. The development partners will be there for assistance, she added.

Earlier, the slum dwellers told Anna that how a project 'Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR)' in Korail was helping improve their living conditions.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Department for International Development

(DFID) run the project in Korail slum and 29 others towns.

Expressing her concern over the ramshackle slum, Anna said it could be a disaster if any fire breaks out here.

She also said it is important to reduce population pressure on Dhaka city, but it would be self-delusion to think that sending back people to the countryside would resolve the problem.

She also suggested planned development of other urban points for balanced urbanisation.

Developing pro-poor mortgage mechanism can ensure housing facilities for the poor in the cities, she added.

UN and government officials were present during her visit to the slum.

WASA SUPPLIES ONLY 40 PERCENT OF WATER IN CTG

System loss of Dhaka Wasa 38.78 percent

Minister tells parliament

BSS, Sangsad Bhaban

The Chittagong Wasa has been supplying only 40 percent water out of the total demand, while the system loss of Dhaka Wasa is now 38.78 percent, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam informed the House yesterday.

Replying to separate questions from treasury bench members Apu Ukil and Begum Mahzabeen Morshed, he said efforts for increasing revenue of Dhaka Wasa by bringing down system loss at logical level are going on.

Besides, he said, a taskforce has been constituted to issue the bills of Dhaka Wasa and strengthen the bill realising activities.

"Considering the sufferings of the subscribers, online billing system has been introduced to ensure transparency and bring dynamism in billing system," he said.

Ashrafur said the Dhaka Wasa has undertaken measures to fix the number of subscribers side by side with replacing old pipelines.

To turn Dhaka Wasa into service-oriented organisation, he said, its revenue zones of 3, 4 and 5 have been given on lease on contract basis.

Ashrafur said the Chittagong Wasa has been implementing a number of projects to solve the water crisis in the port city. "The existing water crisis in Chittagong city will be solved to a great extent if the

projects are implemented," he said.

The projects, he said, include the Karnaphuli Water Supply Project (Phase-I) having capacity of 136 Million Litres Per Day (MLD) with the financial assistance of the government and JICA,

Madunghat Water Supply Project having capacity of 90 MLD with the financial assistance of the government and World Bank and Mohra Water Supply Project (Phase-II) having capacity of 90 MLD.

Besides, he said, the Chittagong Wasa has a plan to undertake a project titled "Bhandarjuri Water Supply Project" with 100 MLD on the left bank of the Karnaphuli river.

NU digitises exam system

STAFF Correspondent

The National University (NU) has digitised its examination system to make exam-related activities such as filling in of forms and publication of results easier and faster.

The university will also create a college-wise database of forms with information of students. The college authorities will provide the soft copies of the forms to the university.

Initially the digital system is being used to fill in the forms of the first year honours exams.

To make teachers and employees of colleges familiar with the new system, a two-day workshop began at the computer laboratory of the university at Gazipur yesterday.

Pro-Vice Chancellor of the NU Prof Dr M Abu Sayeed Khan inaugurated the workshop.

Say no to hartal

Hasan Mahmud urges all

BSS, Dhaka

State Minister for Environment and Forest Dr Hasan Mahmud yesterday said, "We want to establish a new culture of politics in the country and that is why all should say no to hartal."

He said the main opposition BNP has started confrontational politics by declaring a hartal at a time when the country is marching forward towards attaining sustainable democracy.

He urged the Awami League leaders and workers to resist the June 27 hartal called by BNP at any cost.

He said the main responsibility of the government is to protect the lives and property of the people by removing

hindrances on way to progress of the country.

Dr Mahmud was speaking at a meeting after launching a photographic exhibition and a website: www.nostrike.org at Jatiya Press Club in the city. The exhibition displayed anti-hartal photographs. Paribartan Foundation, an association of youths, organised the exhibition titled 'Let us say no to hartal'.

Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Children and Women Affairs Meher Afroz Chumki spoke at the function as the special guest.

Director of Janata Bank Balram Poddar, Executive Director of the Foundation Delwar Hossain Faruk and

Managing Editor of the daily Bangladesh Protidin Noyeem Nizam also spoke at the function.

Hasan Mahmud said the Awami League believes in democracy and the just concluded Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) election is a bright example in this regard.

Meher Afroz said the main opposition BNP does not join the Jatiya Sangsad as it wants to create anarchy by resorting to hartal.

Terming the hartal called by opposition BNP illogical, she said the shutdown might hinder the country's progress and economic growth.



PHOTO: PID

Leaders of Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee along with foreign participants of a international conference call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her official residence Gonobhaban in the city yesterday.



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