

Call for integrated efforts to attain food security

BSS, Dhaka

Speakers at a national seminar yesterday underscored the need for integrated efforts to attain food security for the increasing population, as the country is facing new challenges in food production for its additional 22 lakh people every year.

The seminar on 'united against hunger', marking the World Food Day, was organised at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (Barc) here.

As every year, a number of 22 lakh newborns are being added to the population and that's why the country needs to produce 4 lakh tonnes of additional food every year to feed these increasing population, they told the seminar.

They said country's population is being increased at the rate of 1.41 per cent a year and at the same time, the cultivable land is being depleted with the rate of one per cent from the total land.

Quazi Akhter Hossain, acting agriculture secretary, attended the seminar as the chief guest, while Dr Wais Kabir, Barc's

executive chairman, was in the chair.

Dr Nazmul Hossain, additional secretary and chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), and director-general of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) Dr Sayeed Ali were special guests.

The cultivable land of the country was around 92 lakh hectares in 1972, while now it has decreased to 82 lakh hectares and it has been identified as a big threat to maintaining food security, they noted.

Anwar Faruque, additional agriculture secretary, gave the welcome address, while M Asaduzzaman, director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) presented a keynote paper.

Asaduzzaman in his paper said hunger is a common phenomenon of different developed countries including the Near East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and the Pacific.

According to the estimate of the FAO, he said, there are more or less a billion people who go to sleep with empty or partially empty stomach every night.

The seminar observed that the real budgetary allocations for research and technology generation, extension and marketing services are still low and more attention should be paid to this.

About the government initiative for food production, Quazi Akhter said the present government is working with a target to achieve self-sufficiency in food production within 2013.

Earlier, he inaugurated a two-day agricultural commodity fair on the premises of Krishibid Institution here.

There are 20 stalls at the fair. Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations set up their stalls with their latest technology in food production.



A woman checks rice at a stall of a two-day agricultural commodity fair on the premises of Krishibid Institution in Dhaka yesterday. The fair was organised on the sidelines of a seminar on "united against hunger" marking the World Food Day.



A stall attendant of Allied Solar Energy Ltd briefs a customer about a solar lighting system at Third Power Bangladesh 2010 International Expo at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka on the event's inaugural day on Thursday. The fair ended yesterday.

Asian Packaging Federation gets new chief



STAR BUSINESS DESK

Asian Packaging Federation (APF) has elected Safiullah Chowdhury as its president, says a statement.

The election was recently held at its 34th general meeting at Tokyo, Japan. Chowdhury led a team of Bangladesh Corrugated Carton and Accessories Manufacturers and Exporters Association to the event.

The first Bangladeshi to head the organisation in its history of 50 years, Chowdhury is a former director of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

He is also a member of the executive committee of Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The APF, a non-profit organisation, established in Tokyo in 1967, unites the packaging interests of all trade and industries in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond under one cooperative umbrella.

The objective of the federation is to enhance cross-country cooperation among all packaging-related bodies, covering a gamut of subjects like training and education, package development, environmental aspects, law and regulations.

ACCA Asia director due tomorrow



STAR BUSINESS DESK

Lucia Real Martin, director for emerging markets of Asia for the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka tomorrow on a three-day visit to Bangladesh, says a statement.

She will meet students and members of ACCA along with government and bank representatives during her stay here.

Martin has been serving ACCA since May, 2010.

She is responsible for implementing the organisation's emerging market strategy as well as identifying new markets and business development opportunities in countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, India and Nepal.

REB counts losses on political interference: WB

BSS, Dhaka

The Rural Electrification Board (REB) is incurring a Tk 370 crore loss a year as its Palli Bidyut Samities (PBS) have lost 'cooperative attitude' and are being governed by political directives, according to a World Bank-sponsored study.

The disparity in access to electricity between the urban and rural areas also increased; the rural people did not get any additional electricity from the national grid in the last four years.

There are 70 PBSs, of which, only three are making profits, the study found. The ratio of access to electricity between the rural and urban people now stands at 8:20.

The study on REB's financial and

engineering capability and scope for expansion was conducted by Power Cell, the government think tank in the power sector, in collaboration with International Consultancy Company Infrastructure Services Management.

"REB needs to be restructured as it's a huge challenge for the country to reach electricity to the poor," Country Director of National Rural Electric Cooperative Association of the United States (NRECA) Jems Foard told the news agency.

NRECA is a partner of REB both in financial and technical matters.

The study said due to political interference, the rural people got poles, not electricity, in past years.

"Electricity is a political agenda here. The demand for electricity was ignored by the REB because of political interference," it said.

Once REB was a replica of Bangladesh in the world. It portrayed its golden achievement in rural electrification, introducing the cooperative system of USA in electrifying rural areas in the late 70s.

Admitting to the financial crunch of this organisation, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Enamul Haque said the REB needs to be restructured.

"The PBSs should be pro-people and the expansion of REB should be determined by the demand curve, not by local influence," he said.

Singer's new PCs hit market



STAR BUSINESS DESK

Singer has introduced its high-tech personal computer brand SINGTECH in Bangladesh recently, says a statement.

The computer is available in two models, such as SINGTECH Standard and SINGTECH Pro. Customers can buy the computers both in the forms of cash and instalment from Singer Plus shops across the country.

The Standard PC will cost Tk 34,000, which could also be bought with a

monthly instalment of Tk 2,835. The PRO PC has a price tag of Tk 28,100. The monthly instalment amount is Tk 2,310 for the latter one.

Both the computers have a warranty of one year for parts.

A SINGTECH speaker and a four-gigabyte pen drive will be given to buyers with every purchase of the PCs that are powered by Intel processors and packaged with Samsung LCD monitor.

Starting from today, the offer ends November 27.



Economist Prof Mozaffar Ahmad speaks at a press meet on "Corruption in accessing industrial credit: Improving transparency of state-owned commercial bank", organised by International Business Forum of Bangladesh (IBFB), at National Press Club in Dhaka yesterday. From his left, IBFB President Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury, Bangladesh Krishi Bank Chairman Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled and Agrani Bank Chairman Prof Khondkar Bazlul Haque are also seen. (Story on B1)

Indian MFIs come under scanner

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's micro-finance institutions (MFIs) are now under scanner for using strong-arm tactics to recover loans and charging high interest rates from borrowers in rural areas.

The Reserve Bank of India has set up a committee to examine the functioning of the institutions.

The high lending rate and strong-arm tactics used by some micro-finance companies have put the rural borrowers in a debt trap, resulting in suicide by more than 100 people to commit suicide in the last one year.

"We have constituted a sub-committee to look into the functioning

of MFIs sector and what bearing they have on RBI policy to take further action," Reserve Bank of India Governor Dudduri Subbarao said on Friday after a meeting of the central bank's board in Chandigarh.

The RBI intervention came a day after the government of southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, which has the country's highest number of microfinance institutions in rural areas, approved an ordinance yesterday, envisaging a three-year sentence and Rs 1 lakh for MFIs harassing borrowers for loan recovery.

Rao said a few finance companies come under RBI regulations but a large number of them are outside its purview

of the central bank.

The MFIs get concessional funds from banks under the priority sector lending programme and so the benefits need to be passed on borrowers, Rao added.

Recently, the government had asked the public sector banks not to finance MFIs which are charging exorbitant rates of interests from their

borrowers and RBI had accordingly asked the banks to ensure that loans they give to MFIs are in turn lent at rates prescribed by the regulatory bank.

The MFIs in Andhra Pradesh have come in for sharp criticism for charging very high interest rates, at times as high as 50 per cent, and using musclemen as loan recovery agents.



Mohd Mostafa, chairman of Mostafa & Company; and AKM Zan-E-Alam, managing director, receive the "Weichai Power Service Centre" award from Jiang Kui, deputy general manager of Weichai Group, at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka recently.



AB Bank President and Managing Director Kaiser A Chowdhury opens an ATM booth of the bank at its principal branch in Dhaka recently. The bank also pressed 50 ATMs in service, under its alternate delivery channel expansion programme countrywide.