

Concerted efforts a must for regional food security

PM tells Saarc Seed Congress and Exhibition inaugural ceremony

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for concerted efforts to tackle the challenges in the agriculture field in South Asian region.

The prime minister made the call when she was addressing as the chief guest the inaugural ceremony of a three-day Saarc Seed Congress and Exhibition 2011 at the city's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Agriculture scientists, representatives of various national and international research institutions and high government officials from the Saarc member countries are participating in the congress and exhibition which will continue till April 12.

The slogan of the Saarc congress is "Good seed, good crop".

"As it is not possible for one single country to face all the agricultural challenges, I had

proposed to establish Saarc Seed Bank at the last Saarc Summit," she said.

Hasina said if the Seed Bank is established, the member countries would be able to exchange quality seeds easily which will ultimately increase food production in the region.

"Balance will also come in the laws on seeds in the countries which will make exchange of seeds and germ plasm much easier," she added.

Hasina hoped that the proposed Seed Bank would be established soon and will make significant contribution to attain regional food security.

She said Bangladesh has to attain food security as it is not possible to remove food crisis only through importing.

She laid emphasis on using hybrid seeds, modern technology and effective strategy to attain food security for all.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday visits different stalls at Saarc Seed Congress and Exhibition at the city's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

"At the same time we have to be highly careful so that our environment and ecology are not harmed by any means," she cautioned.

The prime minister further asked the scientists to invent such crop varieties that will achieve maximum production on limited land.

She said when Bangladesh attained independence in 1971 its population was some seven and half crore while population has become more than double now.

"But agricultural lands had decreased gradually. So we have to produce maximum crops at limited lands," she asserted.

She said every year some 1 lakh hectares land is being out of agriculture sector due to industrialisation, housing and river erosion.

The prime minister asked all authorities concerned to keep in mind the interests of all mar-

ginal farmers so that no modern technology becomes threat to their livelihoods.

"We have to keep it in mind that most of our farmers are small and marginal," she said.

Referring to local varieties of rice, Hasina said many of the local varieties are now almost abolished just because these are not highly productive.

"But we have to invent the methods how to turn these local varieties into hybrid," she said.

At the same time, gene of the local crop varieties have to be preserved so that these do not get vanished, she said.

"It has to be ensured that the intellectual property of the crops does not go to others' hand," she said.

The PM also issued strong warning against cheating the farmers with low quality seeds.

"Due to modern technology, the control of seeds does not

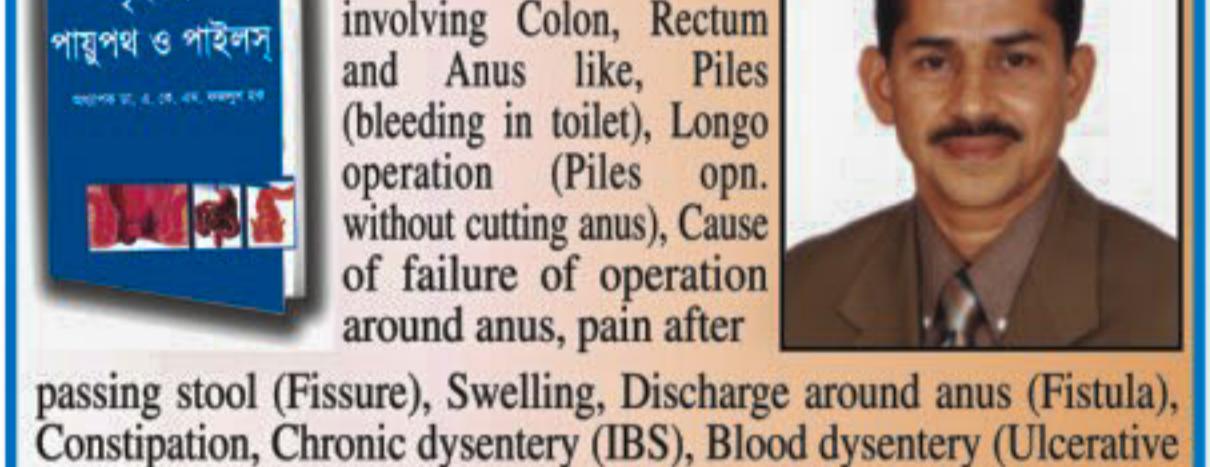
remain in the hands of farmers, rather they have to depend on the seeds produced by various companies. In many cases, the farmers have to suffer a lot," she said.

Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni, Regional Business Line Leader of IFC, South Asia William Trant Beloe, Joint Director, Research of Indian Agriculture Institute and member of Saarc Seed Forum Dr Malavika Dadlani, convenor of Bangladesh Seed Association Mahbub Anam also spoke at the function.

Director General of Seed wing of Agriculture Ministry Anwar Faruque presented keynote paper at the function presided over by Secretary to the Agriculture Ministry C Q K Mustak Ahmed.

The Prime Minister later visited the stalls of the exhibition.

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Human rights at alarming state, says Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP's acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam yesterday said the country's human rights is at an alarming state and it is deteriorating day by day due to "undemocratic attitude" of the ruling Awami League government.

He told reporters after placing floral wreath at the grave of the party founder late president Ziaur Rahman at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city.

Senior BNP leaders, including Moudud Ahmed, MK Anwar, Nazrul Islam Khan, Rafiqul Islam Mia, Mirza Abbas, among others, were present. Hundreds of leaders and workers were also accompanied Fakhrul during the event.

The BNP standing committee on

Wednesday night nominated Fakhrul as acting secretary general of the party as the post was vacant due to the death of Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

Referring to the human rights report released by US State Department on Friday, which expressed deep concern over extra-judicial killings in Bangladesh, the BNP leader said the report proved that their concern is valid.

He said now restoration of democracy is a great challenge for them as the government destroyed everything through politicisation.

Standing committee member Moudud Ahmed said the way of "ousting" Khaleda Zia from her house and "harassment" of Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus proved that the human rights situation is really worrying and under threat.



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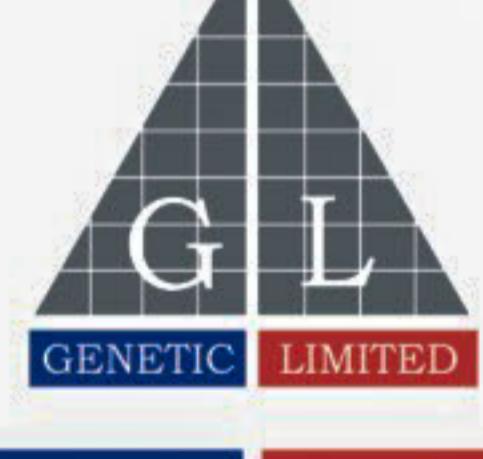
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