

Donors keen on insignificant projects: Matia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign donors are interested in the projects that matter little for the country's sake rather than supporting initiatives the country really needs to take, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said yesterday.

"You will find projects that seek to find the number of stray dogs in the country, and there are foreign aid for that," she said.

"But you would not find any foreign aid for projects that aim to give the country the ability to learn the space technology and to use them".

"The government of Bangladesh needs to pay for these initiatives," she added.

The minister was addressing the opening ceremony of the national seminar on "Space technology application for monitoring earth resources, disasters, and climate change impacts for ensuring human security and sustainable development".

Bangladesh Space Research And Remote Sensing Organisations (Sparro) organised the two-day seminar at its conference room in the city.

Speakers at the seminar stressed the need for more funds for space and meteorological research activities, saying better researches and technologies would allow the country to get early and accurate predictions of natural disasters including cyclones and hurricanes.

State Minister for Environment and Forests Dr Hasan Mahmud said the country has many successes with regard to combating natural disasters through early predictions.

Dr Hasan said the casualty from the recent cyclone, which he did not specify, was of around 300 people while the same kind of disaster in Myanmar caused a casualty of around 74,000.

Sparro Chairman Muzibur Rahman Howlader chaired the programme with the presence of top government officials and reputed scientists of the country.



PHOTO: STAR

Commuters suffer a lot at Purana Paltan in the city, as waterlogging occurs even after a light rain. The photo was taken yesterday.

PROPOSED INTERIM GOVT

Suranjit for code of conduct

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seasoned lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta has said a code of conduct could be enacted for an interim government, which will remain in office during the parliamentary elections.

Suranjit, also chief of the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry, came up with the proposal on Monday, participating in the proposed budget for the next fiscal.

He also proposed further strengthening of the Election Commission (EC) by enacting new laws and said the commission could even be provided with the authority to control the ministries of home and defence during the poll period when the interim government will just discharge some routine works.

According to the proposed changes to the constitution, the parliamentary elections will be held within 90 days into the dissolution of a parliament. Suranjit said the elected government will be turned into an interim government during the election period. He termed the interim government a "built-in system" in the original constitution of 1972.

"But we discarded the system and had accepted the caretaker government provision due to confrontational culture of politics," he said.

The Awami League leader said introduction of non-elected and non-political caretaker government system took away people's right and increased mistrust among the political parties.

He said that after all the three parliamentary elections held under caretaker government, the defeated political party rejected the election results, raising allegation of rigging. "And every parliament was made ineffective due to boycott by the defeated party".

Referring to the regime of the last caretaker government, Suranjit expressed fear that military usurpation may happen if a non-elected and non-political government again resumes power. "But we can't allow this to take place".

Suranjit, who was co-chair of the parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment, said that in this sub-continent, all the national elections since 1935 have been held under the interim governments.

Introduction of the caretaker government in Bangladesh in 1996 made a deviation to the long history of holding the general elections, he added.

Urging the main opposition BNP to sit in talks, Suranjit said, "Let's sit together to discuss how to strengthen the Election Commission more for holding free and fair elections."

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION

Govt firm to protect rights of ethnic minorities: Shafique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said the government will protect the rights of "ethnic minorities" and "tribal people", and will take necessary steps to develop their cultures, traditions, and languages.

A new provision will be included in the constitution to this effect, he said while talking to reporters after a meeting with some leaders of indigenous communities and researchers on these communities at his secretariat office yesterday afternoon.

The law minister said the "ethnic minorities" will not be recognised as "Adivasi people" in the constitution, as the ethnic leaders have "backtracked" on their demand.

Shafique Ahmed said the ethnic leaders told him that they have no objections if they are recognised as

"people of different ethnicities and cultures".

The ethnic leaders and researchers demanded the law minister take steps to include a provision in the constitution recognising the ethnic people as Adivasi (indigenous).

Barrister Raja Devasish Roy, chief of Chakma Circle, and Prof Mesbah Kamal, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Adhikar Andolon, told The Daily Star that it was their personal opinion in the meeting with the law minister that the indigenous people can be recognised as "people of different ethnicities and cultures" in the constitution, as the government did not accept their demand at all.

"The law minister told us that discussion can take place in the parliament on recognition of the indigenous people, if any of its members raises the issue," Raja Devasish said, adding that they have not backtracked on their demand.

Prof Mesbah said that if the indigenous people are recognised even as "people of different ethnicities and cultures", a step of their struggle will be achieved.

Recognising Adivasis as indigenous will require the state to ensure some rights of them including the rights on their lands as per International Labour Organisation convention, he said, adding that their struggle for constitutional recognition of indigenous people will continue.

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum; Advocate Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladeshi Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad; and Dr HKS Arefin, an anthropologist; also attended the meeting.

Mita released from hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nurunnahar Mita, one of the two sisters who had been admitted to Bangladesh Medical College and Hospital for relapse into their mental illness, was released from the hospital yesterday.

Dr Mahmood Hasan, head of psychiatry department of BMCH, stated her to be recovered but said she needs to continue medication on regular basis.

Mita is currently staying with her elder sister Kamrun Nahar Hena and her husband. "She is doing well", said Hena. "She is adjusting and talking a bit more."

Dr Aninur Nahar Rita and Nurunnahar Mita were admitted to BMCH on June 18, as they relapsed for the second time. The sisters have been suffering from Schizophrenia.

Rita and Mita starved themselves for about a month before they relapsed and were taken to BMCH. They were under treatment of Dr Mahmood Hasan.

Mita's condition was better as they were admitted to the hospital. Due to starvation Rita fell seriously ill and was admitted to ICU while Mita was suffering from urine infection.

Rita is out of danger and she has been removed from ICU, Dr Mahmood said, but added that she is still too weak to be released from the hospital.

Rita is a medical graduate and Mita studied Engineering in the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).



PHOTO: STAR

TIB Trustee Board Member Prof Muzaffar Ahmad speaks at a briefing at Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday. On his right are TIB Trustee Board Chairman Sultana Kamal and Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman. (Story on Page 1)

BLRI scientist develops DNA extraction kit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute (BLRI) has developed a kit that can be produced locally for reducing cost and time in extracting DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) from blood.

Masud Rana Moufti, a scientific officer at the BLRI, has developed this kit named "BLMR kit" in June this year after a year of research.

According to Wikipedia, DNA is a nucleic acid that contains the genetic instructions used in the development and functioning of all known living organisms (with the exception of RNA viruses).

DNA extraction kits are used to isolate DNA from blood and diagnose many critical diseases.

Bangladesh now spends around \$30 million every year to import DNA extraction kits. Each of the kits costs around Tk 30,000 to 35,000 for every 100 blood-samples, Masud Rana told The Daily Star.

With the new kit, it would be possible to

produce a kit within the country spending only Tk 10,000, he claimed.

"It would reduce the cost of importing the DNA kits by two-thirds," said Masud Rana.

Dr Khan Shahidul Huque, director general of BLRI, said the institute will distribute the kits among the scientific laboratories of different institutions, university laboratories and genetic diagnostic labs across the country free of cost.

Dr Shahidul Huque said this at the BLRI Annual Research Workshop and Technology Show at BLRI headquarters in Savar yesterday.

Speaking as the chief guest, Fisheries and Livestock Secretary Ujjal Bikash Dutta said, "Our aim is to make Bangladesh a middle-income country by 2021."

The local scientists need to look for newer technologies to help agriculture, fisheries and domestic sectors, he added.

Dr Kazi Touhid Ali, director (production) of Department of Livestock Services and Dr Wais Kabir, executive chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, also spoke.

Law needs amendment for DCC polls: CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The existing city corporation law needs to be amended to hold Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) polls because the poll issue has come to a very complex and a peculiar stage, said Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda.

Election Commission (EC) now depends on the government for the decision of DCC polls because the existing law does not specify what to do after expiring date. But the government has obtained dilly-dallying tactics. That is why the law should be amended to overcome the crisis, he said.

Huda was speaking at a dialogue with Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon at the commission's secretariat in the city yesterday as part of its ongoing dialogue to be held with the registered political parties.

In response to an allegation that EC does not take any step despite violation of registration condition by the two major political parties, said the CEC adding, "We can not take stern action against them because of reality."

Talking about electronic voting machine (EVM), he said, if the new system is introduced, the commission will be able to save around Tk 1,087 crore from poll costs to be held within every five-year cycle.

Participating in separate dialogues, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon gave nod for introduction of the system in local government first experimentally before general election, while Bangladesh Tariqat Federation demanded incorporating finger prints in the technology.

An 11-member delegation led by Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon Chief Shah Ahmadullah Ashraf

attend the dialogue, while Tariqat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Boshor led a 9-member delegation.

Khelafat Andolon recommended abolishing system of reserved seats for women in the parliament, making mandatory for conducting electoral campaign in a common poster and political stage and keeping 450 constituencies in the parliament.

Tariqat Federation suggested appointment of two female commissioners in the EC and formation of interim government headed by the president.

The EC on June 7 launched dialogues with the political parties for their opinion on some key issues like RPO, laws on demarcation of constituencies, appointment of election commissioners, and use of EVMs.

However, main opposition BNP and its alliance partner Jamaat-e-Islami did not join the dialogue.

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