

SOCIAL SAFETY NET More budgetary funds on cards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the government contemplating more budgetary outlay for expansion of social safety net programmes (SSNP), a research initiative was formally launched yesterday to find out the best modality to transfer assistance under such projects.

State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs Dr Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury launched the joint research initiative of UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the Washington-based think tank International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) at a hotel in the capital.

According to government statistics, Bangladesh provided 2.3 percent of its GDP and over 12 percent of its annual national budget to implement as many as 90 SSNPs, reaching the assistance in the form of cash, food, training and nutrition to six million ultra-poor families last year.

With the government's support, the one-year-long IFPRI-WFP joint study would assess the impacts of five different safety net transfer modalities on household income, food security and child nutrition. Commencing this May, the research will continue till mid-2013.

The research will try to identify which of the five transfer modalities, under which some 4,000 ultra-poor women receive a monthly assistance of Tk 1,500, best serve the purposes. The transfer modalities are cash-only, food-only, cash and food combined, cash and nutrition training, and food and nutrition training.

Dr Shirin said a move was underway to bring all SSNPs under one umbrella mechanism, create a central data bank and remove incidents of overlapping among the programmes.

Warning against feminisation of poverty in Bangladesh, she said, "Cash assistance might not be effective all the time particularly when the recipient women didn't have the right to take decision on how best they can spend the cash."

Dr Akhter Ahmed, chief of the party of IFPRI's USAID-funded Policy Research and Strategy Support Programme (PRSSP), said there were many safety net programmes in operation in Bangladesh but yet the total coverage of beneficiaries was not that large. "There are incidents of leakage, errors in targeting the right group of people as beneficiaries. There are poor left out of SSNPs while there are cases of inclusion of non-poor in the beneficiary lists of different SSNPs," he said.

WFP representative to Bangladesh Christa Rader and Disaster Management and Relief Division's Joint Secretary Fazlur Haque also spoke at the programme with Relief Division's Secretary Dr M Aslam Alam in the chair.

State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs Dr Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury launches research initiative



Participants at a roundtable discussion, 'Safe Motherhood: Achievements and Challenges,' held at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. (Story on Page 20)

PHOTO: STAR

RAPE, MURDER OF SANTAL WOMAN

3 get death, one life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A Rajshahi court yesterday sentenced three people to death and another person to life imprisonment and fined each Tk 1 lakh for raping and murdering a Santal woman in the district last year.

The body of Moriam Murmu, 48, wife of late Hopna Mardi, was found stripped of clothing, hanging by the neck from a tree some 100 yards off her Shimla Dighipara village residence in the district's Godagari upazila on July 10, 2011.

There were numerous bloody wounds on the body, indicating that she was tortured before being murdered. Her son, Wilson Mardi, filed a murder case with Godagari Police Station that day.

One of the death convicts, Andrias Murmu, (28) who is also Moriam's cousin, had an enmity with the indigenous woman, who was a teacher of a local school for adults, over a piece of land.

He hired the remaining three convicts, who are all locals, to steal from Moriam's house to financially cripple her.

Shawkat Iqbal (30) and Johan Marandi (30), sentenced to death, and Amar Kisku (19), sentenced to life, accepted Tk 10,000 each to carry out the crime.

But instead of only stealing, the four gang-raped and then strangled the 48-year-old and hung the body from the tree to make it look like a suicide. They left after looting valuables and cash worth Tk 20,000 from the house.

For committing the robbery, the court jailed all four men for life and individually fined Andrias Tk 50,000, Shawkat Tk 20,000, Johan Tk 10,000 and Amar Tk 5,000.

Judge AKM Enamul Haque announced the verdict of the case held under the Woman and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000, said Public Prosecutor Sayeda Morjina Parveen.

I will resign if there is guarantee of no accident

Says Shajahan Khan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan yesterday threw out a challenge to his critics, saying that he would quit if it was guaranteed that no accident would happen after his resignation.

"I urge those who demand my resignation because of my speech for drivers, please give me the guarantee that no further accident will take place, and I will resign", he said.

Speaking at a reception ceremony, the minister also requested the critics not to use the words "ghatak" or "khan sena", both used to refer to killers, for drivers involved in an accident. No driver deliberately makes any accident, he asserted.

Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation accorded the reception to the representatives of different local government bodies, who are also transport workers.

The programme was held at Bangladesh Shishu Academy in the capital.

Describing himself as a member of the transport workers' federation, Shajahan Khan said this was his real identity beyond his identity as a minister.

The shipping minister urged the transport workers not to appoint unskilled drivers or helpers without valid licence and urged drivers to be more careful while driving.

Talking about problems in the transport sector, Shajahan Khan said the labourers might have different political views, but they were all equal and they must be united for their own interests.

Mohammad Osman Ali, general secretary of the federation, slated the speech of lawmaker Tarana Halim in parliament for her demand of severe punishment to the drivers and the comment of historian Prof Muntasir Mamun describing them as "khan sena".

He also slammed the role of some journalists who had been termed yellow journalists for their criticism only against the drivers for occurrence of any accident.

He alleged that a section of journalists and intellectuals were hatching plot against the shipping minister, which in actuality was against the leaders and activists of the federation.

Wajeuddin Khan, president of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, chaired the programme, while many leaders and activists of the federation were present.

Shipping minister urges the transport owners not to appoint unskilled drivers or helpers without valid licence

Under-five child mortality now lower

Says Prof Talukder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Now 12 more children in every 1,000 live births are able to celebrate their fifth birthday while nine more infants per 1,000 live births make it to their first year, said noted child health expert Prof MQK Talukder yesterday.

The under-five infant mortality per 1,000 live births went down from 65 to 53 between 2008 and 2010 while the rate for newborns in their first year reduced from 52 to 43 during the period, he said, referring to government statistics.

Meanwhile, the rate of underweight under-fives reduced from 41 to 36 percent while the rate for exclusive breast feeding up to six months of age rose from 44 to 64 percent, he added.

Prof Talukder, chairman of Centre for Woman and Child Health, was addressing the second session, "Hunger, health equity and sustainable development", of a two-day international conference at a city hotel.

The conference, "Global meet on determinants of sustainable development: Road to Rio+20", was organised by Eminence, a non-government organisation,



Centre for Women and Child Health Chairman Dr MQK Talukder addresses a conference, 'Global meet on determinants of sustainable development: Road to Rio +20,' at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital yesterday. Sitting from right are Institute of Public Health Nutrition Bangladesh Director Prof M Akhlaasur Rahman, Dr Amenul Haque, Nijera Kori Executive Director Khushi Kabir and Health Ministry Additional Secretary Dr Makhduma Nargis.

PHOTO: STAR

and over a dozen similar organisations.

The conference aimed at creating awareness among key global actors into including the importance of health in the agendas of the Rio+20 summit, scheduled to be held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from June 20 to 22.

Presenting a keynote, social activist Khushi Kabir said poverty is the main cause behind hunger and malnutrition in Bangladesh.

Over 9.5 million pre-school children are stunted

while more than 50 percent of women suffer from chronic energy deficiency, she said.

Health ministry's Additional Secretary Dr Makhduma Nargis and Institute of Public Health Nutrition Bangladesh Director Prof M Akhlaasur Rahman also spoke at the session.

Addressing the inaugural session as chief guest, Food Minister Abdur Razzaque stressed the need for improving the disaster management

system in Bangladesh to ensure sustainable socio-economic development, whose three components are society, economy and environment.

An initiative to automate the country's hospitals was taken to attain sustainable development, said Prof Dr Abul Kalam Azad, additional director general of Directorate General of Health Services.

Addressing the third session, "ICT, Health and Sustainable Development",

chaired by UNDP Bangladesh Assistant Country Director KAM Morshed, he said the automation process will begin from this fiscal.

The government will also create a database for patients, enabling doctors to easily and quickly get an overview of the patient's history. The data collection might take two to three years and will start off with rural people, he added.