

'An opportunity to loot public money'

Eminent citizens on extension of law for purchasing power from rental plants amid overcapacity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At a time when the country is producing surplus electricity, the recent government decision to extend a controversial act would only create opportunities for some quarters to loot public money, said eminent citizens at a webinar yesterday. They also said it will compromise accountability in the energy and power sector.

Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) organised the webinar titled, "The Extension of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision), Changing the BERC Act, Extension of the Period of Agreements with Rental Power Plants and Crisis of Good Governance".

The government has decided to extend the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act 2010 for another five years even though the country has overcapacity in power generation and there is no emergency situation, they said.

The law was enacted in 2010 when the government wanted to produce more electricity within a short period as a matter of national emergency. According to energy ministry, the deadline is being extended to ensure reliable, uninterrupted and affordable electricity throughout the country.

The tenure of the special provision was extended thrice before -- for two, four and three years respectively.

"An emergency situation occurs for a certain period, not for an unlimited time, but that seems to be the case for the country's power and energy sector," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA).

Prof Dr Badrul Imam, professor of Geology at Dhaka University, said, "We have surplus power now. Why, then, will we extend the agreement with rental power plants?"

Terming the act a 'black law', CAB member, Syed Raju, in

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Right in front of Mayor Mohammed Hanif Flyover at Jatrabari's Kazla area, part of a road divider had been removed to temporarily facilitate road crossing for pedestrians, as the area did not have a foot overbridge. However, even after the overbridge was built recently, the divider is yet to be closed, and pedestrians are still crossing the dangerously busy Dhaka-Chattogram highway the same way rather than using the footbridge only a few yards away. These photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAFTUL ISLAM



We're assessing the situation before taking any stance

Says foreign minister on Taliban issue

BSS, New York

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen has said Bangladesh is assessing the situation

in Afghanistan ahead of taking any stance regarding ties with the new Taliban regime, but decided to offer humanitarian assistance to Afghan people under the "UN umbrella".

"We are watching the developments there," he told a media briefing in New York on Monday (New York local time) when asked what was Bangladesh's stance on the Afghan issue as it was likely to dominate the weeklong UN General Assembly debate that started yesterday.

Momen said Dhaka preferred to wait to observe the nature of the new government and see what policies they would take and "on the basis of that

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DESTROYING FOREST IN NAME OF RESEARCH CENTRE

CVASU builds 5-storey dormitory, structure in protected forestland at Cox's Bazar

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Science University (CVASU) has built a dormitory in a protected forest -- which was leased out to them by the land ministry for building an institute for coastal biodiversity, marine fisheries and wildlife research, amid strong opposition from the forest department.

The five acres of forest land, given to CVASU, is in Doria Nagar of Cox's Bazar, an area which has already been experiencing a massive onslaught on its forest land due to Rohingya influx.

The land ministry changed the status of the protected forest in 2015 to facilitate the lease to CVASU. Once in possession of the forest, the university authorities constructed a five-storey dormitory in 2018, violating the lease conditions that prevent them from using the land for any other purpose than building the institute.

They also built a tin-shed structure, which will be used as a hatchery, which is yet to begin its work.

This land is an important habitat of the endangered Asian elephant, which has been in a dire state due to destruction of habitat, grabbing of the forestland and continuous deforestation in the region.

Besides, the forest is home to various species of deer, wild dog, monkeys and badgers.



Establishments propped up in the area so far include the five-storey dormitory -- that CVASU said is for "research" -- and two tin-shed hatcheries, while hills were levelled around a hundred yards to the west.

PHOTO: STAR

country, alleged locals.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found a foundation stone within the boundary of the dormitory, which reads: Nurul Islam Nahid, former education minister, laid the foundation stone of Institute of Coastal Biodiversity, Marine Fisheries and Wildlife Research, dated November 22, 2015.

Inside the dormitory, this correspondent saw there were a total of 44 rooms (including two for VIPs). The correspondent was not allowed to enter any of the rooms.

There were also around a dozen of employees, including cleaners, cooks and security staff, to look after "research

guests". There are also some students of the university who reside there for practical classes.

A hundred yards to the west of the five acres of forest land was a vast field, made by levelling hills, prompting the Department of Environment (DoE) to file a lawsuit against the university authorities in 2018.

An inspection report of DoE in 2018 attributed the death of an elephant due to the steep cutting of hills by CVASU.

Talking to The Daily Star, Kamal Hossen, professor of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University, criticised the move of leasing out a forest and not utilising it for the cause it was given.

"I went to the spot where I found two tin-shed structures. Sometimes in the name of development, we don't hesitate to sacrifice forests," he said.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, executive director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), said the dormitory has to be demolished and the CVASU authorities must be asked for compensatory afforestation.

"The lease must be revoked. They must afford the area three times the forest they damaged," she said.

Contacted over phone, Dr Mohammed Nurul Absar Khan, dean, faculty of fisheries

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'Farmers remain most neglected'

Says Fakhru at meeting with newly-formed partial committee of Krishak Dal

UNB, Dhaka

Stating that farmers are now the most neglected section of people in Bangladesh, BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday urged them to get organised for waging a strong anti-government movement.

"No one is now happy in Bangladesh, and our farmers are the most neglected ones. They don't get fair prices for their produce. They also don't get any help or incentive from the government, even at this horrible time of coronavirus," he said.

The BNP secretary general made the remarks while talking to the members of the newly-formed partial committee of Jatiyatabadi Krishak Dal at BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

"The central committee of the Krishak Dal was announced at a critical juncture of the nation. So, they've bigger responsibilities in organising farmers throughout the country by reaching out to them," Fakhru further said.

"Our responsibility now is to organise ourselves and forge unity. There's no other alternative to that," the BNP leader said.

Krishak Dal president Hasan Jafir Tuhin also spoke at the event.

On Monday, BNP announced a seven-member partial committee of its associate body, five months after its national council. Tuhin has been made president while Shahidul Islam Babul general secretary.



Death toll 59

13 died in Sept so far

34 in Aug, 12 in July

246 more hospitalised yesterday

Total infected 16,222



SOURCE: DGHS

FEMALE TEA GARDEN WORKERS

Workplace sanitation still a far cry for them

MINTU DESHWARA and HASAN MEER,
Back from Sreemangal

For the last 20 years, Chinami Madraji has been working at a tea garden in Moulvibazar. Rain or shine, the 35-year-old mother of five works for eight to 10 hours a day.

However, there is no toilet facility or fresh water supply in the garden sections (working areas) for her to relieve or cleanse herself in between work.

"We are forced to relieve ourselves out in the open and cleanse ourselves with water from nearby waterbodies. Otherwise we have to go to the labour lines (residential areas of workers), which is around four miles away," she told The Daily Star recently.

Not just Chinami, hundreds of tea garden workers, mostly women, have to face this ordeal every day.

According to a survey conducted by this newspaper among 100 female tea garden workers of 10 tea gardens in three districts of Sylhet division, it was found that 80 percent of them work at least eight hours a day; 60 percent urinate at least three times during work out in the open; 80 percent relieve themselves daily during work in the open and 10 percent use soap for cleaning, even though this is crucial amid the pandemic, while 70 percent use sand.



The two toilet facilities for tea garden workers at Mirzapore tea estate in Sreemangal.

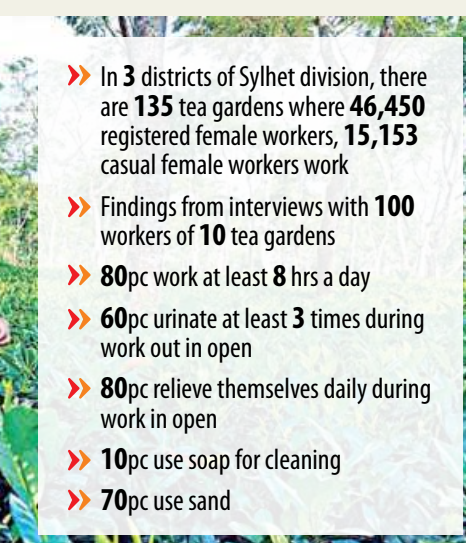
PHOTO: STAR

The survey also found that the workers have no sanitary latrine facilities at work sections and almost all of them are suffering from various chronic illnesses. Fifty percent of them get treatment at dispensaries, 20 percent at home or from quacks and 20 percent at government hospitals.

The survey was conducted in the middle of this year at Kurma, Dalai, Alinagar, Rajghat, Gazipur and Patharia tea gardens

in Moulvibazar; Lalchand and Deondi tea gardens in Habiganj and Khadimnagar and Khan tea gardens in Sylhet.

Sunil Biswas, a private practitioner of Deondi Tea Garden in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj, said, "Most female tea workers who visit my chamber suffer from urinary tract infection (an infection in any part of the urinary system -- kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra) and about 50 percent of them



- » In 3 districts of Sylhet division, there are 135 tea gardens where 46,450 registered female workers, 15,153 casual female workers work
- » Findings from interviews with 100 workers of 10 tea gardens
- » 80pc work at least 8 hrs a day
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- » 80pc relieve themselves daily during work in open
- » 10pc use soap for cleaning
- » 70pc use sand

face uterine (relating to the uterus or womb) problems. They lack proper sanitation facilities at workplaces or even at home to some extent."

"Though they [female tea garden workers] use cloths during menstrual period, it must be changed every six hours, otherwise their reproductive organs may get infected, followed by lower abdominal pain and inability to conceive," stated Dr Chowdhury

Jalal Uddin Murshed, civil surgeon of Moulvibazar.

According to the Statistical Handbook on Bangladesh Tea Industry 2020, there are 166 gardens in the country with a total of 1,40,164 tea workers.

In the three districts of Sylhet division, there are 135 tea gardens where 46,450 registered female workers and 15,153 casual female workers work.

According to experts and activists, because of the hard labour of the workers, the industry has been booming since the first commercial garden was established at Malnichhara in Sylhet district in 1854. During the sector's 166-year history, the industry saw the highest ever production of 9.67 crore kilograms of tea in 2019.

However, the living standard of the workers of this thriving industry, majority of whom are women, is way below standard, with not even proper sanitary latrines in the labour lines and the garden's work sections, they said.

Besides daily wage, the workers are also provided with other benefits such as housing, ration and treatment. But that seems to have little to no impact on improving their present conditions, they added.

Philip Gain, director of Society for

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