

Energy sector victim of wrong policies, corruption

Speakers tell BAPA-BEN Conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's energy sector must come out of the shadows of wrong policies and corruption, speakers said at the Bapa-BEN (Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon and Bangladesh Environment Network) conference yesterday.

The speakers also criticised the government for its policymaking blunders, such as the decision to base much of the energy sector on coal, at a time when the rest of the world is moving away from it.

The two-day annual conference kicked off at Stanford University campus at the capital's Siddheshwari, with the theme "Energy, Climate Change and Sustainable Development".

It was attended by representatives from various political parties, including ruling Awami League, BNP, Ganasamhati Andolon and Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB).

During his speech, Junaid Saki, chief coordinator of Gansamhati Anodolon, said the whole world is looking for ways to divert their energy sector from coal, whereas Bangladesh adopted a policy where 70 percent of energy is based on coal-fired power production.

He also said the government is trying to hang on to power by allowing environmentally harmful coal power-plants in Rampal, neglecting the needs of the region and the Sundarbans. Ruhin Hossain Prince, presidium member of CPB, emphasised on ensuring 100 percent ownership of the country's resources.

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No, this dustbin didn't grow out of the ground. While the city authorities undertook road development work at this spot in front of Khulna city's KDA Bhaban recently, they laid down cement without disposing of the bin. It now sticks out like a sore thumb, causing inconvenience to pedestrians who walk down this footpath. This photo was taken on Thursday from Shib Bari Roundabout.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

It's not pro-migrant workers

Expatriates' welfare ministry to consider revising migration cost list

JAMIL MAHMUD

Expatriates' welfare ministry has taken up an initiative to revise the costs for international migration, with the aim to make it more "realistic" for the labour force.

The issue came up during a meeting at the ministry's employment wing in November last year.

As per the meeting minutes, it focused on pressing issues such as the rising plane fare for workers amid the pandemic. The additional cost that workers have to bear to comply with institutional quarantine upon arrival at certain foreign countries was also discussed.

Currently, the government lists migration costs for 16 labour-receiving countries at a maximum of Tk 1.66 lakh and minimum of Tk 97,780.

However, there is growing concern among migrant rights groups that migrant workers often have to pay hefty amounts to intermediaries to secure jobs overseas.

After the current fees were set by

the government, they voiced concerns over the additional cost-burden and exploitation of workers.

In light of this, an official of the expatriates' welfare ministry recently said they want to revise and re-fix the migration costs based on suggestions from stakeholders.

"We want to make it [migration costs] more realistic," said the official, preferring anonymity.

Besides, setting migration costs for some newer labour-receiving countries – including Mauritius and Seychelles, which were left off the current list – has become a necessity, said another official.

The 16 countries listed by the government are Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Malaysia, Libya, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Russia, Maldives, Brunei, and Lebanon.

For 14 of these countries, excluding Saudi Arabia and Singapore, the fees were set in 2017 through an office order, while another order in the same year set the costs for Singapore at Tk 1.4 lakh.

For Saudi Arabia, the government in

2016 fixed the rate at Tk 1.65 lakh for each male worker, while the country currently recruits Bangladeshi female domestic workers under a "zero cost" agreement.

However, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' "Cost of Migration Survey-2020" says the estimated average recruitment cost for Bangladeshi migrants was Tk 4.17 lakh between 2015 and 2018.

This includes agencies' service charge, airfare, and passport, medical, and visa fees.

The report says the cost for migrating to Singapore was Tk 5.74 lakh, Saudi Arabia Tk 4.36 lakh, Malaysia Tk 4.04 lakh, Qatar Tk 4.02 lakh, and Oman Tk 3.08 lakh.

Speaking on the issue, secretary of the ministry Ahmed Munirur Saleheen pointed to the lack of formal complaints filed by workers on the issue.

Talking to reporters at an event at Prabashi Kalyan Bhaban in December, he urged workers to file complaints, along with necessary proof, stressing that the ministry will take stern action

based on their complaints.

Meanwhile, migrant rights groups have been voicing their concerns over the issue.

Shakirul Islam, chairperson of Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program, said if the government's revised fees result in an increase in existing costs, then this will be a "terrible step".

He added that as part of ethical recruitment practices, many countries now focus on an "employer pay model", which ensures employers bear various additional costs for migration.

He said Bangladesh should accommodate such models.

M Tipu Sultan, president of Recruiting Agencies Oikya Parishad, however, said they were unable to maintain the newly-set government-fixed migration costs due to increase in airfare.

Earlier, airfare for workers heading to the Middle East was between Tk 20,000 and Tk 25,000, which has now increased to over Tk 1 lakh, Tipu said. He urged the government to introduce a special "labour fare" for workers.

War criminal Syed Mohammad Qaisar dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

War criminal and former Jatiya Party leader Syed Mohammad Qaisar died yesterday.

The death-row convict breathed his last while receiving treatment at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University in the morning, his lawyer SM Shahjahan told The Daily Star.

He said Qaisar died naturally, as he was around 85 years old.

The lawyer said a review petition, filed by Qaisar against his death penalty in a war crimes case, is pending with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

"Now the Appellate Division will declare his review petition abated and will exempt him from the case," he said.

Advocate Shahjahan said the apex court will pass necessary order after he will inform the court about Qaisar's death.

Qaisar filed the petition with the Appellate Division on October 29, 2020, seeking review of its verdict that upheld his death sentence for committing crimes against humanity and war crimes during the country's Liberation War in 1971.



Farmers of the Kawadighi haor said fields in Akhailkura and Ekatuna unions are laying barren for years due to the lack of irrigation.

PHOTO: STAR

1,000 acres of cultivable land lies barren

Lack of irrigation facilities, authorities' indifference key reasons, say farmers

MINTU DESHWARA

About 1,000 acres of land is lying uncultivated due to lack of irrigation facilities in Kawadighi haor of Moulvibazar Sadar upazila.

Farmers of the area said if a water pump was set up in the area, they will be able to use the water from the haor for irrigation. Although they've been making this demand for almost a decade, the authorities aren't paying any heed.

These uncultivated lands are in Akhailkura and Ekatuna unions of Sadar upazila.

A canal flows downstream towards the lands, joined by the Kawadighi haor.

Farmers Saddam Hosain and Bidhan Malakar said some are setting up irrigation pumps while others

are installing 200-300ft long plastic pipe. However, these are quite expensive and not all farmers can afford those.

Bijoy Das of Rasulpur village in Akhailkura union said even 30-40 years ago, these lands could produce Katari (bona aman) paddy.

According to local voluntary organisation, Islamic Social Welfare, since 2012, they've applied to the executive engineer of Water Development Board more than once for a water pump. The last application was made on January 30, 2019. If there's a water pump in the area, an additional 15,000 tonnes of paddy will be produced, they said.

Meanwhile, rainfall has been comparatively less this year. With fields suffering from drought, farmers

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Two killed in road accidents

Youth dies after train runs him over

STAR REPORT

Three people were killed in road and train accidents yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Panchagarh, a biker was killed and his co-rider injured, as a pickup truck hit them on Panchagarh-Banglabandha highway at Dariapara village in Sadar upazila.

The deceased was identified as Firoz Hossain (26) from Panchbibi upazila of Joypurhat.

After the accident, firefighters took the injured to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital, where on-duty doctors declared Firoz dead.

In Dinajpur, a biker was killed after a three-wheeler ran him over on Dinajpur-Rangpur highway at Gopalganj village in Sadar upazila.

Doyal Chandra Roy (25) from the upazila's Basherhat village died on the spot. The accident occurred after he fell off the motorbike, said police.

In Chattogram, an 18-year-old youth died after being crushed under the wheels of a train in Sitakunda upazila of Chattogram.

The incident took place at Sitakunda's Sheikh Para in the morning, after the unidentified youth fell off the Sagorika Express train, said Sub-inspector Khorshed Alam, in-charge of Sitakunda Railway Police Outpost.

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