



Speakers at a roundtable, titled "Strengthening Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health in Southern Bangladesh", jointly organised by Concern Worldwide and The Daily Star at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka.

Maternal health at risk amid staff, fund crisis

Speakers tell Concern Worldwide-Star roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Institutional deliveries across Bangladesh have dropped by around 20,000 compared to last year, indicating that more women are giving birth at home rather than in clinics or hospitals, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

They also warned that this trend increases risks for both mothers and newborns.

At the roundtable, titled "Strengthening Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health in Southern Bangladesh", speakers urged the government to increase and better utilise the health budget to sustain Bangladesh's progress in maternal, neonatal, and child health.

They also called for strengthening union level family welfare centres and community clinics, recruiting more midwives and FWVs, ensuring emergency funds at local levels, and prioritising

climate-vulnerable areas through evidence-based interventions.

The roundtable was jointly organised by Concern Worldwide and The Daily Star at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka.

- » Increase recruitment of skilled professionals
- » Allocate, utilise full health budget
- » Strengthen family welfare centres
- » Improve logistics, supply chain management
- » Prioritise recruitment, training of midwives

Dr Nasir Ahmed, deputy director and programme manager (neonatal and child health) at DGFP, said manpower shortages are severe in southern regions, making facility readiness difficult.

"Since June 2024, there has been no Operational Plan

(OP) or Development Project Proposal (DPP). Family Welfare Visitors (FWVs) are continuing services voluntarily, but essential support, logistics, and vehicles for patient transport are lacking," he said.

"Nearly half of FWV posts are vacant. Those remaining are skilled but many are on pre-retirement leave, while recruitment has stalled. Our digital MIS system is also offline, and we lack registers and other basic materials," he added.

"Our unique satellite clinic programme has also had no allocation for the past two years," he continued. "These clinics provide crucial maternal and counselling services at the community level. Without funds, staff cannot conduct regular visits."

Dr Abu Sayed Md Hasan, SRHR Specialist at UNFPA Bangladesh, said deliveries in public facilities have fallen by 20 percent in the past six months

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Resolve ongoing political crisis thru dialogue

Several political parties urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several political parties yesterday urged the government to resolve the ongoing political crisis through discussions; otherwise, they feared the government would face trouble implementing the July National Charter.

"If discussions remain where they are now, I can say in writing that after the [consensus] commission's term ends on the 31st [October], the current government will fail to carry out its responsibilities," said Mahmudur Rahman Manna, president of Nagarik Oikya, at a discussion.

"Most members [of the government] already face allegations and calls for resignation. Some have even suggested forming a national government," he added.

Nagarik Oikya organised the discussion titled "Current and Future Roadmap of Politics" at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosambhati Andolon, said the timing of the referendum – before or after the election – holds little political significance. He hoped the government would remain neutral and not favour any party.

Saki also said the consensus commission's recommendations for implementing the July National Charter are creating confusion, as some contradict earlier discussions and democratic norms, putting the Charter's implementation at risk.

Nasiruddin Patwari, chief coordinator of the National Citizen Party (NCP), termed the debate

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AB Party Chairman

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The debate over the referendum's timing is a "pointless argument" between BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. They should work to strengthen the Election Commission instead.

NASIRUDDIN PATWARI
NCP Chief Coordinator

over the referendum's timing a "pointless argument" between BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. The NCP would not get involved

in such arguments, he said, adding, BNP and Jamaat should work to strengthen the Election Commission instead, he said.

Saiful Haque, general secretary of the Biplobi Workers Party, said even after 14 months, the government has not built the capacity to hold elections. "For reforms and justice to take root, political parties must trust each other, the Election Commission, and the voters," he said.

Tasnim Jara, senior joint member secretary of NCP, said the claim that "people do not understand reform" is unrealistic. "When we speak to people at the grassroots, they clearly express their desire for justice and change," she said.

Hasan Al Mamun, senior joint secretary general of Gano Adhikar Parishad, called for unity among all groups involved in the July uprising to ensure a fair election that restores people's voting rights and ensures a peaceful transfer of power.

Khaled Saifullah, joint convener of NCP, added that any party opposing reform will fall behind, as "people want change".

Meanwhile, in a press conference yesterday, AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Manju urged all parties to set aside differences and agree on implementing the July charter.

"Failure to reach consensus could make the upcoming election uncertain, and Professor Yunus might have to resign. The overall situation could then become completely complex," he warned.

Must hold referendum by November

Jamaat, 7 other parties urge EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight political parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, yesterday urged the Election Commission to hold a referendum by November to give legal basis to the July charter.

They also demanded that preferred election symbols be retained in alliance-based polls and that a level playing field be ensured in the upcoming national election.

The parties submitted a memorandum to Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin in this regard.

Speaking to reporters afterwards, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Abdul Halim said, "On behalf of eight parties, we have demanded that the CEC hold the referendum within November to ensure a sustainable legal foundation for the Charter. The national election may then be held in February."

He also demanded that the amended RPO, as approved by the Council of Advisers, be retained without any modification.

The other parties are Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Khelafat Majlish, Bangladesh Nezam-e-Islami, Khelafat Andolon, Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (JAGPA), and Bangladesh Development Party.

'Hasina fled, why are you still shooting?'

Survivor recounts police brutality during July uprising at ICT-2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Walking with a limp, 29-year-old Sani Mridha entered the International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday to recount the day that changed his life forever.

Unable to stand, he was allowed to testify sitting, as both his legs still bear the scars of bullets that tore through his thighs during the July uprising last year.

Testifying as the 21st prosecution witness in a crimes against humanity case over the killing and burning of six people, Sani said on the afternoon of August 5, 2024, he joined a victory procession in Ashulia after hearing of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's fall.

"We told the police, 'Hasina has fled, why are you still shooting?' But they opened fire indiscriminately," he said.

A bullet pierced both his thighs, and shotgun pellets struck his arms and body. "Seventeen pellets were removed, but one remains in my right elbow," he added, showing his wounds. "I fell to the ground, and so did my friend Sajal," he said. "I still cannot walk normally and need an AFO support device and regular physiotherapy."

While hospitalised, Sani said he saw a video on Facebook showing police loading Sajal onto a van in front of Ashulia Police Station and burning him alive along with others.

During cross-examination, the defence alleged that protesters attacked police quarters and that Sani was shot by unidentified people. He rejected the claim, saying firmly, "It is not true."

While hospitalised, Sani said he saw a video on Facebook showing police loading Sajal onto a van in front of Ashulia Police Station and burning him alive along with others.

Empowering rural women key to climate resilience

Speakers tell MJF seminar marking International Day of Rural Women 2025

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tackling gender inequality, improving women's access to land, and empowering women farmers are key to building climate resilience and sustainable rural economies, said speakers at a seminar yesterday.

They also called for greater recognition of rural women's contributions to the economy, land rights reform, and stronger efforts to end child marriage.

The seminar, titled "Rural Women in Climate Adaptation", was organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) at Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation in the capital to mark International Day of Rural Women 2025.

Speaking as chief guest, Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Farida Akhter praised the growing recognition of women's roles but said policies and data still underestimate

their contributions. "Rural women manage cows, goats, and poultry – work that sustains families and strengthens national food security," she said. "What earlier appeared as a 36-43 percent



contribution is now closer to 58 percent. Without their labour, Bangladesh's self-sufficiency in food would be impossible."

"We cannot move toward economic development without involving rural women," she added. "Women are often

sidelined in such a way that even search engines cannot trace their contributions. It's not that women do not exist, but we fail to bring them to the forefront."

She linked women's empowerment to property

rights and the fight against child marriage. "If a woman brings land from her father's household, it should be in her name," she said, stressing that equal land ownership is key to gender equality and family stability.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Once, the familiar call of 'Lace fita' echoed through every street, as hawkers peddled lace, bangles, and trinkets. Now, that voice is a rare memory. Mansur Ali, one of the last of the 'lace fita' sellers, walks down a forgotten road, hoping to find customers in Sylhet's Khaminnagar union. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR