

angladesh: Problems and Prospects" held at Rangpur chamber auditorium on September 12 demanded declaration of northern region as "National Coal Zone" and formulation and implementation of coal and natural resources based development of the north and western Bangladesh, according to a Press release issued by greater Rangpur Association.

The seminar was jointly organised by Rangpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry and greater Rangpur Welfare Association, Dhaka. RCCI president Mostafa Azad Chowdhury presided over the seminar while Deputy Commissioner, Rangpur Khondoker Atiar Rahman inaugurated the seminar as chief guest. Greater Rangpur Welfare Association resident Md. Nazrul Islam, moderated the seminar. The seminar was attended by business leaders, educationists, bankers, civil society members, NGO and human right groups.

RCCI Vice president Mostafa Ahmed, former BCIC Chairman and former Chief Engineer, LGED Md. Monowar Hassan Chowdhury, BUET Assistant Professor Mohammed Sohrab Hossain, former Chief Engineer Facilities Department Engineer Abdul Kader presented key note papers on development of the north, expectations and achievements, development of the north and energy perspective, the main energy source gas and the north and role of electricity in the development of greater Rangpur, Dinajpur and the north and problems and prospects thereof respectively. Former Chairman Bangladesh Power Development Board and REB Brig Gen (Rtd.) M A Malek addressed the seminar as resource persons while a good number of distinguished persons took part in the discussion.

Lack of Communication utility infrastructures

In the seminar it was revealed that a reserve of more than two billion tons of quality coal has been discovered in five locations in northern districts. But extraction of the reserve is nagging for long. The speakers opined that the traditional development strategy failed to deliver well-proportioned development of the country creating regional disparity. Development of Business and industrialization has been greatly impeded due to lack of communication and utility infrastructure in the region. In a precarious situation of dependence on primitive agriculture and absence of economic activities people of north particularly of Greater Rangpur and Dinajpur has been routinely subjected to so called 'Monga', the seasonal unemployment. Quite reasonably the people of the north expected quick extraction mineral re-

Much expected natural gas pipeline did not extend beyond Bogra.

Foul plays create

The speakers said that some vested interest groups are involved in foul plays to create constraint to extraction of coal and natural resources. These groups are identified as brokers of carbon-traders engaged in so called 'carbon emission suppression' (delaying extraction of coal). They strongly criticized the wicked activities of Paribesh Andolon, Oil-Gas-Port Committee, Nagorik Commission and other groups active in frustrating foreign investments in the coal sector.

Speakers put stress on immediate extraction of coal and other minerals from the detected five coal mines. Since government has identified private investment as vehicle for industrialization and economic development local and foreign private investment must be encouraged to invest in coal mining that would ensure deployment of resource and technology and would contribute to create backward linkage industries, power generation and distribution, communication network, expansion of trade, generation of employment opportunities in the north-western Bangladesh.

The seminar adopted 16 points recommendations including immediate extraction of coal, leaving technical aspects to experts, stopping campaign against coal, extension of gas pipe line up to Dinajpur via Rangpur and Uttara EPZ, establishment of two fertilizer factories in northern region, development of rail and road communication, formation of Rangpur Division consisting of 8 northern districts, establishment of education board at Rangpur, establishment of technical and general universities in Rangpur, arranging special industrial package loan with reduced interest for the north and undertake appropriate river management in the downstream of Teesta barrage to protect all five districts of greater Rangpur from the devastation.

12-man body visits Barapukuria

Our Dinajpur Correspondent reports: A 12-member team visited Barapukuria coalmine, Phulbari and Dighipara to finalise the national draft coal policy, according to the BCMCL official sources. The advisory committee, formed to finalise the draft coal policy, has ensured that the policy would not recommend or ban any particular mining method to keep options open for both open pit and underground mining in the country.

The committee, headed by former BUET Vice-Chancellor Abdul Matin Patwari, at a meeting on Saturday at Barapukuria coalmine

local members of National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Port and the Citizen's Commission of the Bangladesh Economic Association.

The committee, however, did not agree in principle with the recommendations of the oil and gas committee and economic association urged the members to drop the open-pit mining method from the coal policy.

Drop open pit mining method

The groups demanded that the open-pit mining method better to drop from the policy as it would pollute the environment, oust thousands of people from their homesteads and destroy fertile farmland that produces three rice crops in a year.

The advisory committee also shared the view of the two groups that no coal export should be allowed from the country to ensure energy security of the coming generations.

We should not recommend or ban any mining method in the policy as the method should be of fixed on the basis of technical, social, environmental and economic aspects. If it is found that open-pit mining is not viable after analysing the costs and benefits, it is natural that no one will want to engage in open-pit mining, Patwari told the meeting.

Other members present at the meeting included University Grants Commission Chairman and environmentalist Nazrul Islam, Dhaka University teachers Badrul Imam and Mustafizur Rahman and Petrobangla Director Maqbul-E-Elahi, all of whom echoed Patwari's view.

Patwari, based on the estimate of the requirement for coal in the country for power generation, observed that if the country adopts only underground mining system, the extracted coal would be fully consumed even before 2025 although the government wanted to ensure energy security for 50 years.

As per the estimate of the framers of the draft coal policy, around 235 million tonnes of coal can be extracted by underground mining from four coal-fields that have a combined reserve of around 1,168 million tonnes. On the other hand, around 1,050 tonnes of coal could be extracted by open-pit mining.

Professor Badrul Imam, however, told the meeting that even if the open-pit mining method is allowed in the country, it would be impossible to operate more than one open-pit mine as country's coal reserve is situated in only two districts.

The afternoon the members left Dinajpur for Dhaka. Earlier they visited the Dighipara under Nawabganj upazila in Dinajpur.