

STATE-RUN SOCIAL PROTECTION SCHEME

60pc beneficiaries not poor

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Economist Wahiduddin Mahmud releases a paper 'The Limits of a Development Welfare State under Government Dysfunction' at a conference at Lakeshore Hotel in Dhaka on Thursday. — New Age photo

Public spending on social protection was double in one and a half decades in the country, but 60 per cent of beneficiaries were not poor because of flaws in the programme.

'Only one-third of poor households were covered' under the programme, said Wahiduddin Mahmud on Sunday while presenting a paper on Bangladesh: The Limits of Development Welfare State under Governance Dysfunction at a seminar at a city hotel.

He said this was symptom of partisan influence and patronage politics.

The seminar on Political Economy, Accountability and Governance was arranged by BRAC in partnership with associations including Think-Tank Initiative and International Growth Centre.

Speakers and participants on the inaugural day of the seminar discussed the relationship between 'good governance' and economic development.

They emphasised on proper functioning of the government organs for good governance and good economic growth.

Mustaq H. Khan of University of London argued that democracy was not essential to increase the economic growth, but was crucial for political stability of a country.

He also argued that a country could grow economically despite widespread corruption. In this connection he gave example of Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Kunal Sen of University of Manchester presented a paper on the Governance and Development Outcome in Asia in which he said Asia was underperformed in governance despite achieving high economic growth.

Wahiduddin Mahmud noted that Bangladesh achieved significant progress in many social indicators despite widespread poverty and governance dysfunction.

But the country's performance in basic civic and human rights was poor despite achievement in social indicators, he said.

Commenting on findings of the speakers, participant Ataur Rahman said there were syndromes that Bangladesh turned into a one party state in the absence proper function by the election commission and anti-corruption commission.

Dhaka University teacher MM Akash observed that default loan in the banking sector stood at Tk 57,000 crore and more than Tk 3,000 crore were smuggled to Swiss Banks due to bad political economy.

He said the country was doing very well despite bad ruling classes.

Former minister MK Anwar pointed out lack of serious civic rights under the present government.

Economist Rehman Sobhan delivered the concluding remarks at the end of the session.

Earlier in the morning, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister Mashiur Rahman inaugurated the three-day conference. He said influence that politicians have on economic decisions or political economics of the government affects the economy.

He said accountability had expanded but accountability was maintained under rules.

He said media was a platform between public and policies, but media owned by the private organisations delivered stories that keep public excitement.

Syed Saad Andaleeb of BRAC University raised three questions on governance, its optimal size, and monitor of it.

Brian Allemekinders, in-charge of the High Commission of Canada, said good governance was needed to achieve the government plan to turn the country into a middle-income country by 2021.

Canada is disappointed with the last general election as half of the parliament members were elected without contest, he said.