

Phone: (202) 244-5071
Fax : (202) 244-2771/7830
E-mail: press.bew@gmail.com
Website : www.bdembassyusa.org



EMBASSY OF THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
3510 International Drive, NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

PRESS RELEASE

Date : 18 November 2015

Agriculture Minister Critical of Multinational Corporations for Promoting Biofuel Production

Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury has said the Bangladesh government has attached topmost priorities to agriculture, food security and nutrition that led to the self-sufficiency in rice production feeding a large population with domestic agricultural production.

Delivering a keynote statement at the 40th anniversary of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington DC, she, however, said although Bangladesh has made good progress in agriculture and economic growth, the country is increasingly facing challenges of population growth, climate change impacts and vulnerability to domestic and international price shock.

The Agriculture Minister appeared critical of biofuel production as she said although Bangladesh receives policy advice and funds from international organizations but unhelpful policies like production of biofuel sometimes attempted by some countries contradicts the overhanging goal of attaining food security for all.

She said it is felt that the expansion of biofuels has led to massive diversion of maize to ethanol production, reducing the maize supply for consumption as food, and thus causing maize price to rise rapidly.

Speaking on "Evolution of Food Policy", Matia Chowdhury observed sharp increase in land under maize cultivation also results in reduced soybean and wheat cultivation.

She said it is quite ironic that biofuels are still promoted by some multinational corporations as an ecofriendly sustainable alternative to fossil fuels when 2,500 liters of water are required to producing a mere one liter of biofuel.

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“Policies that promote biofuels have diverted large quantities of food out of food markets and committed them to the pursuit of relatively small amount of transport fuel,” she told the day-long IFPRI conference on Wednesday.

Government leaders, agriculture scientists and economists from USA, U.K, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Australia, Chile, Brazil, Ethiopia, China, India and Pakistan attended the conference split into different working sessions on food security, agriculture and nutrition, market, trade and macro-policies.

State Minister for Finance and Planning Mohammad Abdul Mannan also spoke at the conference.

IFPRI at the conference launched the Compact2025 global initiative for the elimination of hunger and under nutrition by 2025.

