

World Aids Day

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Serological Surveillance found presence of four per cent HIV infection among the IDUs in Dhaka.

According to the National AIDS Committee and surveillance team members and experts, the rate is quite alarming as it remains one per cent less than the highest five per cent HIV epidemic index.

The rate of HIV/AIDS remains less than one per cent among the other vulnerable groups - truckers, migrant workers, gay, hijras (hermaphrodites), professional blood donors, heroin smokers and, hotel, brothel and street based commercial sex workers.

High prevalence of HIV/AIDS in neighbouring India and movement of population, less use of condom and presence of sexually

transmitted diseases (STD) in the country are the major risk factors for HIV in Bangladesh, say experts.

With the theme "Live and Let Live" the country will observe the World AIDS Day in a befitting manner as elsewhere in the world.

To observe the day, the government and different other organisations have taken programmes today.

LIFE, a non-government organisation, United Nations Information Centre and Children Voice have launched a month long signature campaign to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS across the country.

Bangladesh Parliament Members Group will hold a discussion and organise a cultural function today to generate awareness about AIDS.

Welfare Association of Repatriated Bangladeshi Employees will hold a discussion and screen documentaries on HIV/AIDS.

CARE Bangladesh will organise a symbolic stand-in at four over-bridges in the city and participate in the national rally today.

Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum will hold a discussion meeting on HIV/AIDS tomorrow.

TUs in EPZs

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"We are still discussing the issue," Aman told reporters after the meeting, also attended by representatives of foreign, commerce and industries ministries and Bezpa (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority).

He said the committee would try to fashion an even-handed strategy so that neither side is affected.

The recommendations will be presented at the next meeting of the Bezpa board of governors to be held with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

"We will try to hold the meeting as soon as possible after finalising the report of the inter-ministerial committee, as a threat of cancelling the generalised system of preference (GSP) by the US is looming on us," a high official of Bezpa said.

The US is threatening to cancel GSP in January next year, if Bangladesh fails to withdraw the restriction on trade unionism in the EPZs.

By contrast, foreign investors in the EPZs have long been threatening to withdraw their investment if trade unionism is allowed in the zones. Foreign investment in the EPZs is estimated at around \$600 million.

The Bezpa board will take the final decision on whether or not to withdraw the restriction and allow trade unionism in the EPZs.

Bangladesh has two main EPZs employing over 1.30 lakh workers and four new EPZs have recently opened.

2 Japan diplomats

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to "non-combat zones" and must take part only in reconstruction and humanitarian work.

Japan's plans to send troops were put on hold earlier this month after a suicide attack on an Italian base in the southern Iraqi town of Nassiriya killed 19 Italians and nine Iraqis in the deadliest attack so far on multinational forces in Iraq.

After the bombing, Japan sent a fact-finding team to southern Iraq, where the Japanese would be based. Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba said the mission had reported that the area was relatively stable.

In Tokyo, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi said there would be no change to Japan's plans to dispatch troops to support the reconstruction of Iraq.

The deaths were the first of Japanese in Iraq since the US-led invasion.

Spokesmen for Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar also affirmed that the attack wouldn't cause Spain to end its presence in Iraq.

PSC closes ears

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the walls of Madhu's canteen at Dhaka University yesterday evening.

As many as 47,000 examinees, vying for about 4,500 cadre service posts, sit for the BCS written exams, being held in Dhaka, Chittagang, Rajshahi and Khulna at home and in London abroad simultaneously.

The PSC cancelled the 24th BCS preliminary test held on February 28 over allegations of question leaks and held the test again on August 8 amid further allegations of leaks. Although many examinees agitated for cancellation of the second test, the PSC did not give in to them.

Opposition Awami League (AL) Joint Secretary Obaidul Kader in a statement yesterday condemned alleged question leaks as instrumental to politicising every sector and demanded punishment to the guilty.

Leaders of AL's student chapter, Bangladesh Chhatra League, also expressed deep concern over the allegations.

3,625 women

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Bangladesh Mahila Parisad, marking the eve of International Fortnight Protesting Violence against Women from November 25 to December 10 and World Human Rights Day on December 10.

Mahila Parisad compiled the figures of oppression from news items published in 10 national dailies including The Daily Star.

"Original figure is much higher than this, as many cases of oppression didn't come up in the dailies," said Masuda Rehana Rosi, who read out the report.

Speakers at the conference observed that women in Bangladesh live in an unequal society and violence against them is widespread indoors and outdoor.

"Suicide tendency among young girls has increased alarmingly following harassment by the eve-teasers. But young girls should

face the challenge and the culprits by protesting," said Ayesha Khanam, general secretary of Mahila Parisad.

The Parishad will hold a series of programmes organising human chain, open discussion and exchange of opinions.

"Women victims do not get justice and many offenders go free under government protection that encourages violence against women," said Hena Das, president of Mahila Parisad, who chaired the conference.

Bangladesh Mahila Parisad -- a leading platform for women -- will observe the fortnight protest, which has been observed worldwide every year since 1994 after the women conference held at Vienna in 1993.

Vice-presidents of the Parishad Bela Nabi and Chitra Bhattacharya, Rekha Chowdhury and Nasim Ara Minu were present.

Tributes paid to Ahmedul Kabir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a condolence meeting yesterday paid rich tributes to Ahmedul Kabir, a pioneering media personality and chief editor of the Sangbad, who fostered secularism and humanism.

They said Kabir, also the president of Gonotantri Party, always spoke in favour of common people throughout his life.

Organised by the staff of the Sangbad at its office in the afternoon, the meeting was presided over by the Editor of the daily Bazlur Rahman.

He said Ahmedul Kabir was a man of principle and never compromised with anything wrong.

On his contribution to the independence of the country, Rahman said Ahmedul Kabir had to endure a lot of harassment during the Pakistani rule, but he never bowed down to any pressure or threat.

Veteran journalist Santosh Gupta said the biggest success of Ahmedul Kabir as an editor of the Sangbad was that he was able to express the opinion of the common people through his newspaper.

Altamash Kabir, son of Ahmedul Kabir and executive director of the Sangbad, said his father always spoke of democracy, secularism and the common people.

Conducted by Kasheem Humayun, managing editor of the Sangbad, the meeting was also addressed by NAP President Muzaffar Ahmed, journalist K G Mustafa, Justice Kazi Ebadul Haq, journalist A B M Musa, Justice K M Sobhan, Gonotantri Party leaders Aziza Idris and Saiful Islam and Ahmedul Kabir's son Ardashir Kabir and daughter Nihad Kabir.

Earlier, a one minute silence was observed at the beginning of the meeting to pay homage to the memory of Ahmedul Kabir.

Couple killed in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Unidentified assailants killed a couple at Phulpara village under Mirpur upazila early hours of yesterday.

Police said lunus Ali, 36, and his wife Farida Khatun, 30, were returning home from a folk song show at Mona Fakir's house at the same village at around 2:00am when the killers picked them up at gunpoint.

They were found dead near Kursha canal in the morning. Police recovered their bodies and sent them to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

Police said a previous feud might have been the reason behind the killing.

A case was filed with Mirpur Police Station.

Dengue

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machines in eight out of 10 DCC zones once a week. These machines are 20 times stronger than the ordinary ones," said Dr Azizul Huq, chief health officer of the DCC.

The DCC has also formed 12-member rapid action team for each of the DCC zones to receive complaints regarding the disease, Dr Huq added.

PM hopeful

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Khaleda said a favourable investment climate exists in the country and called for more Japanese investment here.

Sakurai said Japan-Bangladesh relations are excellent and that the two nations could be a model of cooperation and friendship in Asia by further strengthening and expanding their bilateral relations.

The JBPL president expressed his eagerness to find out more about the ongoing development process and recalled his visit here in October last year on the occasion of 30 years of Japan-Bangladesh diplomatic relations.

He felt the need for formation of a Bangladesh-Japan parliamentary committee so that lawmakers of the two countries could identify areas of cooperation and work accordingly for welfare of the two peoples.

Sakurai said the prime minister's planned visit to his country next year will be an opportunity for Japan to demonstrate its goodwill for the people and government of Bangladesh.

Khaleda Zia said the people of Bangladesh consider Sakurai to be their close friend for his contribution to Japan-Bangladesh relations as the leader of the JBPL. She requested Sakurai to convey her personal greetings to the emperor and the prime minister of Japan.

Discussing WTO (World Trade Organisation)-related issues, Sakurai said farmers must be given their due share in development to ensure their welfare.

The prime minister told the Japanese leader about her government's various development programmes for farmers, agriculture and agro-based industry in the country.

The prime minister paid tribute to the memories of the men, women and children in the occupied Palestinian territories who died for the cause of peace, justice and independence of their country.

Referring to walls being built by Israel, Khaleda Zia said construction of the so-called 'security walls' seriously undermines international efforts for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

She urged the international community to act together with renewed vigour and greater resolve to ensure a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. "Bangladesh remains convinced that comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be guaranteed through the full and unconditional implementation of all relevant UN resolutions," she said.

She added that Bangladesh remains committed to all efforts aimed at achieving genuine peace in the region.

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FDI figure mismatch

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has not been doubly counted under other heads.

"For a fuller picture, one needs to know the stock situation of the FDI which is not available in the survey. More importantly, the Bol survey includes loan, so we should know the outside outstanding private debt which will have an implication on the foreign exchange reserve."

The economist believes this kind of survey should be carried out by an independent regulator like Bangladesh Bank, not by an interest party like the Bol, for better credibility.

"At the end of the day, we should not be complacent about \$400 million FDI as Vietnam has an average FDI flow of \$1.4 billion a year," he added.

Commenting on the Bol's survey, a top official of Bangladesh Bank said the Bol estimate includes reinvestment.

"If a foreign company does not repatriate its profit and makes reinvestment, the Bol should have a record and the company concerned should issue shares against such investment."

However, he said the problem could be resolved if the Bol sits with the central bank.

Speaking at the press briefing, outgoing President of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) Wali Bhuiyan also feels Bangladesh Bank and the Bol should sit together to keep a tab on the actual FDI flow in the country and remove the differences between the figures of two government agencies.

"Foreign investors face uneven competition here, they do not have a level playing field," Bhuiyan said. The FDI flow may double if there is no political uncertainty and law and order and overall infrastructure are improved, he felt.

President of American Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bangladesh Aftabul Islam said US investment in Bangladesh showed a negative trend due to the government's delay in making decisions.

"US investors are frustrated here. The Washington-based US-BBC, which represents 34 US companies having investments in Bangladesh, is now almost non-existent," he added.

Explaining the survey findings,

Lararge Surma Cement Ltd. (France), Sheba Telecom Pvt. Ltd. (Malaysia), Shell BD Exploration and Development BV (the Netherlands), Orchid Garments Ltd. (Hong Kong) and GrapevinePhone (Norway) were top five FDI sources outside the EPZs during January-June this year.

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Norway accounted for about 19 percent of the total FDI last year followed by the US with 17 percent, Singapore 14 percent, Hong Kong and Malaysia 9 percent each.

France topped the list of FDI source with \$43.60 million investment outside the EPZs, followed by the United Kingdom with \$33.42 million, Malaysia \$24.77 million, the Netherlands \$21.73 million, Hong Kong \$19.86 million, Norway \$14.86 million and South Korea \$12.64 million.

In the EPZs, Hong Kong stays ahead with \$20.25 million investment followed by the US with \$19.33 million, South Korea \$17.92 million, Germany \$5.98 million, Japan \$4.64 million and the UK \$4.45 million.

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Indian overflights

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held in New Delhi on Monday, he said.

The president expressed the hope that a recent thaw between India and Pakistan would culminate in the resolution of all disputes between the two countries, the news agency said.

However, he stressed that Pakistan tied peace to 'honour, dignity and sovereign equality.'

The first round of talks between aviation officials and experts from Pakistan and India held in August in the Pakistani garrison city of Rawalpindi ended in an impasse.

The Rawalpindi session broke down when India reportedly refused Pakistan's demand for guarantees against unilateral overflight bans.

The two countries severed air links after the December 2001 attack on India's parliament, blamed by New Delhi on Pakistan-backed Kashmir separatists.

The nuclear-armed neighbours started a process of normalisation after Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee offered a symbolic hand of friendship to Pakistan in April.

Vajpayee in a recent statement also announced he would meet with Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali during a summit of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) here in

Khaleda expresses

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The prime minister said the past year witnessed rapid deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories in the face of continued violation of fundamental human rights by the Israeli occupation force. The peace process has also been stalled despite occasional glimmers of hope, she added.

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Petrobangla

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objections," Shahidul Islam, chairman of the committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The committee asked the energy ministry to take stern actions against gas pilferage and misuse.

The parliamentary body also formed a sub-committee headed by Sarder Shakawat Hossain Bakul to find out the reasons as well as the guilty of such activities and asked it to submit its report in a month.

The committee also asked the ministry to take steps to ensure exploration of more gas to meet domestic demands after 2015, when the existing reserve will begin to dry up.

"We will have to face a gas crisis after 2020 if we cannot explore more by the time. In view of the present reserve, we asked the ministry and Petrobangla to take steps for more exploration," Shahidul said.

Officials of Petrobangla told the meeting that they could not start gas exploration in offshore deep waters of the Bay of Bengal, as the region was not determined as an economic zone. India has explored gas from deep waters off shore.

Petrobangla earlier told the parliamentary body that it needed Tk 12,000 crore to take necessary steps to meet domestic gas demands until 2025.

Explaining why internal resources are not commonly used for gas development, KM Mosharraf Hossain, state minister for energy, told the meeting that red tape often caused unusual delays.

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Arms cache

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his visit to the DC's office, "Exemplary punishment will be awarded to the culprits, whoever they are."

However, the home minister told The Daily Star that he would disclose the identity of the people involved in the transportation of the arms and explosives and their whereabouts once the investigations are over.

"We are now working to trace the culprits, their aim and route of the arms," he said.

Hygiene way

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The picture was just as gloomy in the village of Notun Askarpara in Sitakunda, where only 14 of the 98 families had hygienic latrines at the start of the programme in May 2003.

Notun Askarpara reached the target of 100 percent sanitation this August in line with the NGO-modelled community-based approach.

On the delay in implementation, Jahanaara Begum, a member of the Askarpara village committee, says, "Our neighbouring Dakkhin Askarpara had initiated the programme two years ago and we were encouraged by such an interesting initiative. It took us some time to make all villagers aware."

Although there are no data on the improvement in health of the villagers, diarrhoea has visibly decreased among the people. Abdul Gaffar, whose younger sister died of diarrhoea at 5, says, "Now I'm happy to know that no-one will have the same pain of losing the loved ones to diarrhoea."

Over 20 NGOs at home and many others abroad are replicating the model of ensuring total sanitation at the grassroots level.

The Village Education Resource Centre is also spearheading awareness campaigns in Rajshahi, Bhola, Chapainawabganj and Naogaon.

World Bank Country Director Christina Wallich after a visit to the sites in Teknaf and Sitakunda said, "The World Bank finds these efforts most encouraging and hopes that they will be replicated internationally."

Moreover, specialists from three US government agencies -- the State and Energy Departments and the Air Force -- strongly disagreed with at least some of the findings, according to the CIA analyst, who denied that these expressions of dissent had been suppressed.

"All agencies were fully exposed to these alternative views, and the heads of those organizations blessed the wording and placement of their alternative views," Cohen insisted.

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UP chairman

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since the murder are Akkas Ali alias Sayeed, Nuru Mondal, Moimuddin alias Rab, Abdul Gafur, Mostofa alias Mosta, Moslem Mollah alias Ilias, Ayen Uddin alias Jabbar, Abdus Samad alias Akkel and Ashu alias Tuheen.

The Speedy Trial Tribunal of Rajshahi division in its verdict also found the convicts Tk 5,000 each, failing which they have to serve six more months in jail.

Judge AFM Aminul Islam found all the convicts guilty under the penal code and read out a 35-page judgement in a crowded courtroom.

Tipped-off, a police team led by the then officer-in-charge (OC) of Bera Police Station, Noor Alam, went to Bangalpara to arrest members of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party on September 11, 2000.

The terrorists opened fire on police and critically injured SI Hedayetul Islam. The victim died on the way to Pabna Sadar Hospital the same night. Terrorists Ratan, Shaheen and Jahangir were also killed during the fierce firefight.

OC Noor Alam lodged a case with Bera police accusing 17 persons the following day. After investigation, Bera police pressed charges against 14 on May 9, 2001.

The tribunal examined 38 prosecution witnesses and completed the trial in 53 working days.

Special Public Prosecutor Ketab Uddin moved for the state, while advocates Abu Bakar and Zahir Uddin defended the accused.

BJP, Cong lock horns

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the general mood of the voters before the next general elections up to a point but not a total guide to what will be the result of coming parliamentary polls, analysts say.

Vajpayee and Sonia have whizzed across the four states leading the respective sides' electioneering which has often been marked by bitter war of words and trading of charges.

Both BJP and Congress used to