

# Children suffering the most in heat

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

A woman at the Dhaka Children's Hospital cuddles and tries to soothe her infant son. "It is so hot these days that even his pillow gets wet," she said. "He has a cough and fever," she added.

The ongoing heat wave and the increase in humidity along with an unhygienic environment and their own impulsiveness, make children prone to heat-related diseases.

"Almost all diseases can occur due to increase in temperature and humidity," said Dr. Md. Salim Shakur, director of the hospital, adding that children between six months and three years are most vulnerable to such diseases. He broadly classified heat-related diseases as skin infections like prickly heat and scabies, dehydration that is worsened if the child already has diarrhoea, fever, cough, cold, and pneumonia, increased effects of asthma, water-borne diseases like typhoid, hepatitis E, airborne diseases like chicken pox and mumps, tonsillitis, sore throats, urinary tract infections, sleep deprivation and loss of appetite. External effects are irritable behavior and loss of concentration.

Development of microbes like bacteria and viruses that leads to infections is because of the tropical climate in Bangladesh said Shakur. Even food gets easily contaminated during the hot weather. Children, on impulse, consume unclean water, and fruit juices and cold

drinks made under unhygienic conditions.

The ongoing load shedding is an added risk as children spend their time at schools most of which do not have generators, proper ventilation and are overcrowded.

"The sudden change in temperature when children come out of the cooling effects of a fan or an AC could be harmful to children," said Shakur.

"ACs should be turned on under normal temperature but not overnight" he added.

Infants tend to sweat more on their backs, as they cannot turn on their sides, and a combination of the dried up perspiration and the extreme heat causes them to catch pneumonia easily.

As infants are generally made to lie on a flat piece of mackintosh, to prevent them from soiling mattresses, they perspire even more.

"These are very hot and adds discomfort to the child," said a nurse at the hospital.

When asked, a CNG driver told this correspondent that the members of his house consume non-sterilised tap water, yet they do not fall ill.

Dr. Shakur interpreted the statement as: "People who continuously consume non-sterilised water are prone to water-borne diseases and few of them survive without treatment."

He also added that it is a myth that poor children do not suffer from diseases. "Such children are almost invisible as they barely get attention unlike

children from well-off families," he added.

Responding to a question, he said that negligence towards female children in poor families are currently decreasing as women in the present generation have equal job prospects as men.

Treatment for heat-related diseases are increased consumption of hygienic liquids like water, fresh fruit juices and even soup. Shakur termed it a myth that consumption of hot beverages like tea or coffee or sour fruits appeases the feeling of heat. However beverages are stimulants and sour fruits can be a good source of Vitamin C, he said.

Children should not be given saline even during excessive sweating without doctor's consultation as not all children can take in the salt, said Shakur.

Consumption of drinks with too much table salt should also be discouraged, "Yogurt, if hygienically produced, is an effective means of producing bacteria that can prevent diseases and also aid digestion," he added.

Regular bathing of children or sponging of the neck, head and chest is also effective but should be done between 10am and 2pm.

When asked if the varying levels of temperature can cause diseases, Dr. Shakur said that there was no specific level that can cause diseases as different people can adjust to different levels of temperature.



A mother trying to calm her child with a cover in the scorching heat of summer.

## UK student visa turn elusive

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

British High Commission in Dhaka are refusing student visas as unscrupulous agents are processing the visa applications of students possessing fake certificates.

The figures of the UK High Commission in Dhaka in 2005 show there were 6,944 student visa applications of which only 2,857 applications were granted.

Although the number of UK student visa applications nearly tripled in the last five years, the success rate of applications declined from 52 percent to 37.5 percent.

This huge refusal rate was mainly due to the submission of forged documents by the visa applicants, their unreliable funding sources and bank documents. Moreover, the embassies think most of them have intention of not coming back after finishing study.

These figures were disclosed at a dialogue on "Migration to the UK from Bangladesh: Opportunities and Constraints" at the British Council auditorium on May 4.

The Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), Dhaka University organised the dialogue under the "Transnationalism and Development" project in collaboration with the British Council and the British High Commission.

Research fellows of RMMRU shared their research findings on labour and student migration with the participants at the dialogue.

Research fellow Siobhán McPhee said the UK labour market currently needs skilled nurse, plumbers, electricians, doctors, teachers, and semi-skilled and low-skilled workers in the food and hospitality sectors.

But this information is almost inaccessible to the potential migrant workers to UK due to lack

of information from labour attaché in Bangladesh High Commission in London and lack of vocational training in Bangladesh which is restricting potential migrants, said McPhee.

The research findings also stated that migration to the UK is now based on points system arranged in five tiers. The new system is not benefiting Bangladesh or the UK as it restricts migration opportunities. The system itself is a complicated process that encourages fraud and other forms of irregular migration.

An improved migration system must be developed to fight irregularities in the process since UK is the fourth largest source of remittance for Bangladesh, the researchers said.

In her presentation on the student migration from Bangladesh to UK, research fellow Penelope Anthias said the access of information regarding student visa to UK varies according to social class and for applicants from Dhaka and outside the city.

Schools and colleges in Bangladesh provide insufficient information about foreign education and most students are reluctant to approach British Council, which is the most honest source of information, she said.

The researchers said private counselling agencies can play a useful role in this regard but most of these agencies are engaged in fraudulent practices. These agencies provide the applicants with forged bank documents, offer letters, certificates and transcripts.

Besides, they charge high rates for processing UK student visa. They sometimes pay bank managers to answer the phone inquiries from British High Commission about any applicant. They help many unfit students to apply for UK visa.

Only a few of these are genuine

and the others are carrying out the unscrupulous business in absence of a regulatory body, the researchers alleged.

They said the fraudulent agencies are being helped by some fake UK colleges and other institutions, mainly located in East London with few small rooms and inadequate facilities. They do not offer proper courses.

The researchers added that out of 1,200 colleges inspected in UK in 2005, around 300 were found to be unfit to take foreign students and many of these are affiliated with agencies in Bangladesh.

Almost all discussants agreed that there must be a monitoring body for the agencies and the visa applicants should have greater access to information about the UK educational institutions providing quality services.

Jonathan Verney, first secretary of immigration, British High Commission, emphasised the need for a list of approved agents who can help students in visa processing.

This dialogue was moderated and coordinated by Dr Tasneem Siddiqui, professor of political science and coordinator, Transnationalism and Development project, RMMRU.

Richard Sunderland, deputy director of exams, British Council, Nurul Islam, director, research, monitoring and computer, Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, Ripa Walie, education promotion and marketing manager of British Council, and KM Mazharul Islam, operation manager to the Bangladesh liaison office of London Metropolitan University, among others, spoke at the dialogue.

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