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Half of population feared infected with TB bacteria

By Nurul Kabir

More than 50 per cent of the people in Bangladesh may have been infected with tuberculosis bacteria while at least 3.5 lakh get infected every year.

The Directly Observed Treatment, Short-course (DOTS) method, already introduced in the country in late 1993, is the most effective weapon against the 'epidemic'.

A visiting international team of WHO experts has made the observations in a report scheduled to be released today.

"It is likely that over half of all Bangladeshis are already infected with TB bacteria. There are at least 3,50,000 new cases annually," the report said, quoting a study conducted with WHO assistance.

The WHO team, which has visited nearly 100 TB control projects in the country over the last two weeks, noted that 80 per cent of the TB patients were being cured where DOTS method was applied.

But the WHO Report on Tuberculosis Epidemic, 1997, says, "The programmes not using DOTS often cure only 40 per cent of the patients."

"The DOTS method of treatment is capable of making a TB patient non-infectious within a couple of weeks, while six to seven months of regular treatment can cure the patient completely," one of WHO team members claimed yesterday. "The medication in the DOTS method mainly includes taking a few capsules and pills."

Compared to other strategies of TB treatment, DOTS method is less expensive. According to the report, the "incremental cost for introducing the DOTS strategy in the country has been around 40 US dollars for each patient treated." The cost of country wide DOTS coverage is estimated at 10 cents (less than five taka) per capita.

Success of the DOTS, however, largely depends on trained health workers who need to visit the patients on a regular basis and help them complete the medication until cured, the experts believe.

The field-level introduction of DOTS strategy began four years ago in four thanas in the country. By now, the method is applied in 363 thanas. Nearly 30 thousand health workers have so far received training in various aspects of DOTS strategy. The project has so far received support from the World Bank and the Government of Netherlands, while WHO is providing technical assistance.

In 1994, an NGO network including Dhaka-based BRAC and Brussels-based Damien Foundation signed an agreement with Bangladesh government for joining the national TB control programme and expand the DOTS strategy. Presently, the NGO network is working in 35 thanas out of the 363 covered by the TB programme.

Foreign investment in setting up hospitals allowed

The Cabinet has decided to allow direct foreign investment and joint venture projects to set up hospitals in the country for the development of medicare services, reports BSS.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the cabinet held yesterday with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The meeting also decided to allow appointment of foreign specialist doctors in a "proportionate rate" in these hospitals.

The cabinet meeting also approved a proposal for amending the University Grants Commission Ordinance, 1973, and accepted another proposal in principle to amend the existing laws for the universities run with government finances.

Earthquake: 2 more bodies recovered

From Staff Correspondent
 CHITTAGONG, Nov 24: Two more bodies were recovered from the rubble of the building that collapsed in Friday's earthquake, police said.

They were identified as Raju, 7, and Morium, 40.

They were recovered during rescue operation today.

With this, the death toll in Friday's earthquake which jolted the port city along with other parts of the country rose to 17, according to BSS.

The rescuers comprising army, fire brigade personnel and police said five more bodies are still lying buried under the rubble.

PM's directive to submit report on Sadia's death

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the authorities concerned to submit a report within 48 hours on the death of a four-year-old girl, Sadia, in Chittagong, reports UNB.

Sadia was injured in a building collapse caused by the Friday's earthquake and later died in a hospital.

Sheikh Hasina gave the directive after Home Minister Rafiqul Islam, who visited Chittagong on her advice to see the aftermath of earthquake, briefed her on the latest situation.

At a meeting at her Secretariat office, Home Minister See Page 12 Col 6

Accord on Banani, Gulshan lake development project challenged

The High Court has issued a rule nisi upon the government to show cause why the Banani-Gulshan-Bardhara Lake Development Project Agreement signed between RAJUK and Indus Valley Investments shall not be declared null and void and unlawful, reports UNB.

A HC division bench, comprising Justice A M Mahmudur Rahman and Justice Abu Syed See Page 12 Col 6

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Gujral's 'no' to Cong demand for ousting DMK

NEW DELHI, Nov 24: India's minority ruling coalition today challenged its key ally to carry out its threat of withdrawing support following a controversy over the 1991 murder of Congress premier Rajiv Gandhi, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral in a bid to end days of political paralysis culminating in parliament being indefinitely adjourned today, defied the Congress (I) party's threat to table a motion of no confidence.

Gujral sent a letter to the Congress saying its demand that his coalition ditch a founder member, the DMK party after it was implicated in Gandhi's killing, was 'unjustified'.

The Congress which has kept the United Front coalition in power for seven months, said last week it would withdraw its backing if the DMK was not ousted.

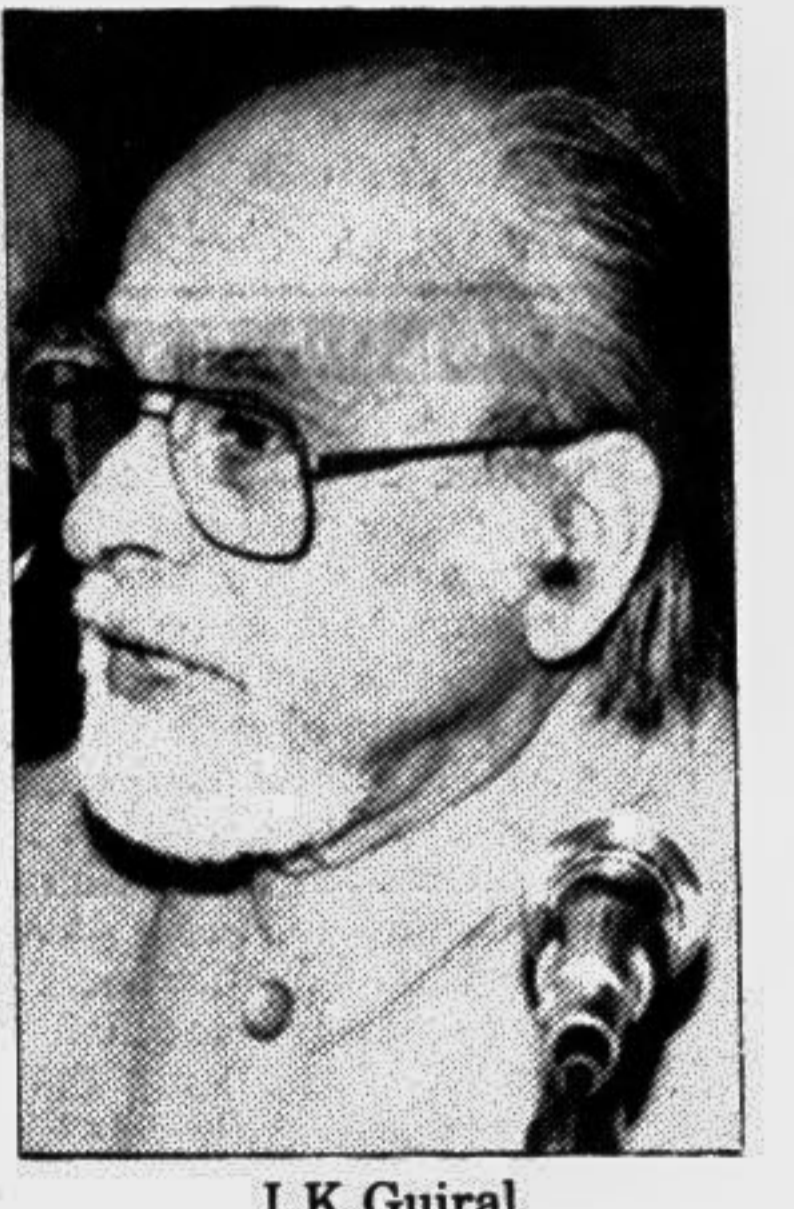
It said it could not support a government containing a party implicated in the assassination of its former leader. The DMK has rejected the allegations.

Gujral's letter to the Congress effectively calling it a bluff, was seen as an attempt to end an impasse which sent Indian stock prices and the rupee tumbling today.

Analysts said the Congress, badly split over whether to force new polls and struggling to recover after being routed in

NEW DELHI, Nov 24: The Congress Working Committee (CWC) tonight failed to arrive at any decision on the future course of action after receiving the letter from Prime Minister I K Gujral, reports PTI.

See Page 12 Col 8



I K Gujral



People enjoying traditional winter pitha (cake) at a roadside makeshift stall in the city. — Star photo by AKM Mohsin

Raising of bank rate, taka devaluation Govt step ill-advised, observe business circle, bankers

By Inam Ahmed

The central bank's decision raising the bank rate and devaluing the Taka has come under sharp criticism from the business circle and bankers.

They viewed that this was an 'ill advised' move and would affect industrial productivity.

They also cited contradiction in the government's argument that credit to the private sector needed to be squeezed by increasing the bank rate to eight per cent from 7.5 per cent.

They say there is a huge unmet demand for more credit and the government is also finding out avenues to channel funds to meet that gap. The bank rate rise is in clear contradiction to such efforts of the government.

Top functionaries of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) pointed out that bank financing of investments in private sector declined by Tk 232cr during July-September 1997 and by Tk 434cr during fiscal 1996-97.

But the commercial banks advances to private sector during July-September 1997 increased by Tk 1565cr.

"After cross checking, we found that of these advances, Tk 700 crore is the interest for the outstanding loans. Factually, this is not money disbursed," said a MCCI functionary.

While the commercial banks did not invest in the private sector, their investment in the public sector through treasury bills and bonds increased by Tk 681 crore during July-September 1997.

On the other hand term deposits of banks kept on increasing. During July-September, 1997, it further increased by Tk 799 cr whereas demand deposits fell by Tk 720 cr.

"This is a bad signal showing that there had not been any opportunity for investing money," said the MCCI functionary.

"We are not against adjustment of Taka value with Dollar. But to make it the only means of improving competitiveness of Bangladeshi export products is unacceptable to us. Because, competitiveness in the long run depends on productive efficiency, and efficiency of support services like port, transport, etc."

A top entrepreneur of the country said, "Devaluation means price loss of export products. A country having an adverse balance of trade can not afford to depend entirely on devaluation for export promotion."

A bad effect of such frequent devaluation is already reflected in the balance sheet of the companies, said the chief executive of a leading pharmaceutical company. "Our turnover has increased over the year. But our profit was not commensurate with turnover because of cost increase due to devaluations last year," he said.

"Increase in bank rate at this juncture is ill advised. Last See Page 12 Col 1

PDB unwilling to sign 2 accords Power generation by barge-mounted plants to be costlier

By Sharier Khan

The Power Development Board (PDB) is unwilling to sign final accords for setting up of two barge-mounted power plants in the private sector considering their financial viability, official sources said.

"Barge mounted power plants use imported oil as the main raw material. Therefore, the cost of power generated by such plants is usually much higher than that generated by gas-based plants," said one official. This has discouraged PDB to pursue the already-delayed schemes.

Some sources, however, said that PDB was well aware of the high cost of power generation by barge-mounted plants before inviting different foreign companies to bid for those. But it had emphasised the need for such plants as those could be set up within 10 months.

In the last one year, the PDB has been negotiating for setting up of four barge-mounted plants in Khulna and Haripur.

The average power tariff offered by the foreign companies ranges between 10 to 12 US cents per kilowatt hour while PDB's average power tariff is around 3 cents.

The sources further said that each of the plants would cost Bangladesh Tk 4950 crore in 15 years and PDB would not be able to pay such a big amount.

In the first week of last month PDB, after final selection of four companies, signed agreements with only two foreign companies—Smith Cogeneration and Wartsilla Power—for setting up barge-mounted plants in Haripur and Khulna.

As PDB is no longer interested in such plants, the signing of contract with Westmont Off-shore of Malaysia and New England Power Company is being delayed.

The two companies, which signed agreements with PDB, also made little progress.

"Besides, the companies See Page 12 Col 7

Bangabandhu Murder Case Mushtaque engineered Aug 15 coup: PW-42

The incident of August 15 was engineered by Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, the villain and Mir Zafar of the contemporary history, along with his associates and many of his relatives, said a witness in the Bangabandhu Murder Case, reports UNB.

The comment by Major (dismissed) A H Ziauddin Ahmed, the 42nd prosecution witness, came on a suggestion from the defence counsel for Lt Col (ret'd) Sultan Shahriyar Rashid Khan during cross-examination in the trial court yesterday.

As Advocate Abdur Razzak Khan put up a suggestion "Basically you were responsible for observing the August 15 operation in the Dhaka city," the witness said: "This is not true. The villain and Mir Zafar of the contemporary history, Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, along with his associates and many of his relatives engineered the August 15 incident."

The witness, who was the Dhaka Detachment Officer-in-Charge of DGFI on August 15

morning, said no gathering or meetings were held protesting the August 15 incident as those were banned through a gazette notification. Political activities were also banned following the assassination of Bangabandhu, he added.

In reply to a question, Major Ziauddin said no protest could be held after the radio announcement on August 15 morning as there was a curfew in force.

He said Martial Law was not promulgated on August 15 morning with support from the Armed Forces and there was also no such announcement over the radio on August 15 morning.

Martial Law was promulgated through a gazette notification on August 20, the witness said.

He denied a suggestion that the then CGS Brigadier Khaled Mosharruf had taken over control of the army by giving different assignments to them from the early hours of August 15, 1975.

Replying to another question See Page 12 Col 7

Ershad's call to dispel confusion Summon spl JS session, discuss CHT accord

By Staff Correspondent

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad has demanded that the planned peace accord on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) be placed in the Jatiya Sangsad for discussion before it is signed.

"The Sangsad should be summoned to a special session to discuss the CHT issue to dispel all confusions and misgivings from the public mind about the proposed accord and to make sure that it is uniform and within the constitutional framework," he told a press conference at his Bardhara office in the city yesterday afternoon.

The conference was organised to spell out the party's stance on the planned CHT accord.

Supporting the government move for peace in the CHT, the former President said, "a peace treaty is a must and we hope there will be no confrontation in the hill areas after the planned agreement is signed."

Ershad further added, "but the government must guarantee that the settlers in CHT will not be driven away by the tribals. The non-tribals are feeling scared."

The JP chief also blamed BNP Chief Begum Khaleda Zia for confusing the people through her claims that the proposed agreement would jeopardise the national sovereignty.

Commenting on BNP's opposition to the proposed peace accord, the former President said all the successive governments including that of BNP tried for a peace accord and the party while in power talked to the Shantibahini to that end.

"BNP is opposing the peace move because signing an agreement will be counted a plus point for the Awami League government," he commented.

Giving a brief resume of the steps his government took for ending insurgency in the CHT, See Page 12 Col 8

Last retreat of Pallas' Eagle under siege

By Shehab Ahmed



Pallas' Eagle (inset) and their roosts, the hijal trees, now being threatened. — Photo by Anisuzzaman Khan

The last retreat of the Pallas' Eagle in Bangladesh is under siege.

Listed in the Red Data Book of endangered species, the bird's roost is facing the greedy axes of certain elements in Tangaur haor, a vast wetland in remote Rangchi village of Tahirpur in Sunamganj district. The Red Data Book is compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

As you're reading this story, chances are there that some of the thousand hijal and other trees on the banks of the vast waterbody, home to the last surviving birds, have already been felled.

These trees are on public land near the Bangladesh-India border. Those were undisturbed for sometime until politically backed elements showed their interest on the forest.

Bird watchers and ornithologists who visit the area every year said after a recent tour that the surviving pairs, now in their breeding season, nesting in the forest, are under threat.

Some 80 eagles are now liv-

From Our Correspondent
 RAJSHAHI, Nov 24: The motor sramik unions of the northern districts jointly called a transport strike in all the routes of Rajshahi Division for an indefinite period from Wednesday.

The strike was called to protest "toll collection by the government-supporters." They See Page 12 Col 8

BCL leader murder 16 Feni BNP activists sued
 FENI, Nov 24: Sixteen leaders and workers of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) including a local stalwart have been sued in connection with murder of a BCL leader in the town on Wednesday, reports UNB.

BCL leader Salahuddin Ahmed was abducted by terrorists on Wednesday afternoon from Panchgachhia road and beaten to death.

The victim's younger brother Sajjad Ali filed a case the next day with the Sadar police accusing among others, district BNP joint convener Prof Jinal Abedin.

Earlier, police on suspicion arrested Rana, Mofiz and Ripon, but they were not named in the case.

2000 huts gutted at Chittagong
 From Staff Correspondent
 CHITTAGONG, Nov 24: About 2000 thatched houses were gutted at Amin colony under Panchalaish thana in the city last night, police and fire service sources said.

Several thousands of people were rendered homeless due to the fire, witnesses said.

Fire service sources said the origin of fire and loss of property were yet to be ascertained.