



Activists of BNP shout anti-government slogans in a procession during hartal hours yesterday. —Star photo

## Lead poisoning

# 18m children suffer brain damage

BANGALORE, India, Feb 9: Health experts urged developing countries today to take urgent steps against lead pollution and halt its cruel toll on generations of children, reports Reuters.

The experts, in India for a three-day International Conference on Lead Poisoning, said the problem had left millions of children in developing countries with permanent brain damage.

"The problem is very serious," said Herbert L Needleman, professor of Psychiatry and Paediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh.

"Blood lead levels are terribly high in India, Bangladesh, China has a serious problem and so does Russia," he said.

The presence of lead in blood, especially in children, leads to permanent brain damage, lead levels of 10 micrograms per decilitre of blood are associated with disturbances in early physical and mental growth and in later intellectual func-

tioning. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates 15 to 18 million children in developing countries suffer permanent brain damage because of lead poisoning.

The WHO cites automobile fuels, paints, cooking utensils and drinking water systems as the main sources of lead poisoning. The problem of lead exposure in all its dimensions continues to be of concern," said Yasmin Von Schirnding, a WHO official working on sustainable development and healthy environments.

"Especially so in many developing countries that are only now beginning to address the very, very high levels of exposure to lead in the workplace," she told Reuters on the sidelines of the conference in the southern city of Bangalore.

Experts said the presence of lead in automobile fuel was a major source of lead poisoning in most developing countries. "When it comes to general

environmental lead exposure, gasoline lead is one of the major contributors to lead in the atmosphere," Schirnding said.

William A Nitze, of the US Environmental Protection Agency's international activities office, said lead poisoning levels would drop once lead was removed from automobile fuel. "Since we (in the United States) removed lead from gasoline, we've seen blood lead levels drop by about 90 per cent... it's made a tremendous difference to public health," he said.

On the first day of the conference on Monday, Reuters obtained a copy of an independent study showing that more than half the children aged below 12 in six leading Indian cities suffered from dangerous levels of lead in their blood.

The study was conducted in New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad over two years and involved nearly 22,000 children, pregnant women and industrial workers.

## JS body discusses promotion, transfer of judicial officials

A meeting of the sub-committee number-2 of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry stressed on formulating a proper and complete guideline for appointing GP, AGP, PP and APP, reports UNB.

Issues of transfer, promotion and disciplinary action against judicial officials also came up for discussion, held at the Sangsard Bhaban with sub-committee member Sheikh M Nurul Haq and other concerned high officials were present.

Besides, it discussed necessary steps for quick disposal of pending cases aimed at bringing dynamism in the judicial activities.

Committee member Sheikh M Nurul Haq and other concerned high officials were present.

## 8-year-old girl raped at Chandpur

CHANDPUR, Feb 9: A minor girl was raped allegedly by a union parishad chairman in the town today, reports UNB.

Police said Mizanur Rahman, chairman of Rupsha Union Parishad, took an 8-year-old daughter of a fourth-class employee to a garage at Mission Road and raped her.

When the girl cried out for help, local people rushed to the spot and rescued her. But the chairman, also accused in several other rape cases, fled the scene sensing the arrival of local people.

A case was filed with the local thana in this connection.

## Viqarunnisa function postponed

The annual sports of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College scheduled for February 11 has been postponed. A new date will be announced later.

The annual prize giving ceremony of the school, which was planned for February 13, has been deferred to February 14.

Education Minister A.S.H.K Sadique will be the chief guest in the function starting at 9:30 a.m.

## Narcotics Control deptt tests Feb 19

The written test for the posts of deputy inspector of the Department of Narcotics Control will be held on February 19, reports BSS.

Candidates from Dhaka division will have to sit for the test in Dhaka while candidates from Rajshahi division at the divisional headquarters.

The test for the candidates of Khulna and Barisal divisions will be held at the Khulna divisional headquarters while for candidates from Sylhet and Chittagong divisions at the Chittagong divisional headquarters.

Admit cards for the tests have already been mailed to the candidates' respective permanent addresses. Candidates, who have not yet got the admit cards, have been asked to contact the headquarters of the Department of Narcotics Control.

## Pak Shi'ite leader accuses govt of supporting Kashmiri, Afghan militants

MULTAN, Feb 9: A Shi'ite Muslim leader accused the government today of supporting extremist Islamic groups fighting in neighbouring Afghanistan and in Indian-ruled Kashmir, reports AP.

Addressing a news conference after burying five Shi'ite Muslims slain a day earlier, Alama Sajid Naqvi blamed their deaths on radical Sunni Muslims, who also fight with the Taliban religious army in Afghanistan.

He said they also fight in India's only Muslim-dominated state of Kashmir.

"Until Pakistan stops supporting (Pakistani) militants to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir, law and order will not improve here," said Naqvi, who heads, the Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan, a Shi'ite Muslim group calling for Shi'ite Muslim law in Pakistan, a majority Sunni Muslim country.

Earlier today police arrested 24 activists of the Sunni group, Sipah-e Sahaba (Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet), in connection with the killing Monday of Naqvi's followers. The slain men, all from the Multan district, some 240 kilometers south of the Punjab provincial capital of Lahore, were killed in separate incidents.

Three men were killed, some 35 kilometers east of Multan, where three bullet-riddled bodies were found in an abandoned car.

The other two men were killed near their home in Multan.



Armed with hockey sticks, a group of anti-hartal activists are seen in a bus during the shutdown yesterday. —Star photo

## Mannan meets Malaysian Human Resources Minister

Labour and Employment Minister M A Mannan, now on a 4-day official visit to Malaysia, met Dato' Lim Ah Lek, Human Resources Minister of that country yesterday, reports APB.

They discussed problems and welfare of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia, according to a message received here.

The Malaysian Minister of Human Resources spoke highly about Bangladeshi workers and assured that his departments would look into their problems. Mannan also visited the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur and talked to the officials regarding problems of Bangladeshis.

## Weather

### Light rain forecast

Light rain is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi division and the regions of Dhaka, Mymensingh, Tangail and Sylhet, reports APB.

Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, Met Office forecast.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged during the period across the country.

The country's lowest temperature 12.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Barisal and the highest 33.2 degrees at Sitakunda.

The sun sets today at 5:50 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:35 am.

Maximum and minimum temperatures and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	17.0	30.5	68	65
Chittagong	32.3	16.8	77	57
Rajshahi	15.8	28.8	74	76
Khulna	15.0	28.2	80	77
Barisal	12.0	30.0	94	77
Sylhet	17.3	32.7	57	48
Cox's Bazar	18.0	31.5	69	53

## Barisal Division headquarters bldg 50 per cent work of construction completes

BARISAL, Feb 9: About fifty per cent work on construction of office blocks and residential facilities for the newly set up divisional headquarters here has been completed, reports APB.

These, together with some other development projects, are being implemented by the Public Works Department at a cost of Tk 16.50 crore, sources said.

Construction of the office of the divisional commissioner at a cost of Tk 6 crore is going on at Ichhakati.

The residence of the divisional commissioner has been completed and that of the DIG of the Barisal Range is expected to be started soon, according to sources in the PWD.

Construction of two Police

Investigation Centres at a cost of Tk 2.14 crore at Sarshi and Banaripara and of 3 sub-registrar offices at Hizla, Mehendiganj and Banaripara involving Tk 1.11 crore is going on in full swing.

Two fire brigade stations in Gournadi and Banaripara municipal areas are being constructed at a cost of Tk 1.42 crore.

A Tk 1.40 crore rehabilitation centre for socially handicapped and distressed women is being constructed at Jagua on the outskirts of Barisal town.

About 60 per cent work on expansion of intern doctors' hostel at Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital has been completed. It will cost Tk 4.5 crore.

## Ekushey observance body formed

A central committee has been formed at the Dhaka University for observing the historic Ekushey February in a befitting manner, reports APB.

It was formed at a meeting held at the administrative office on Sunday with Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, the DU Vice-Chancellor, in the chair.

The meeting was also attended by the Pro-VC, the treasurer, deans of various faculties, provosts of halls, chairmen of various departments, directors of different institutes, representatives of the senate and the syndicate, representatives of the teachers' association and students' organisations, heads of offices and representatives of officers' and employees' associations.

Dr ASM Yusuf Haider, the President of the teachers' association was made the coordinator while Dr Mesbahuddin Ahmed, the Vice President of the Association, and Mohammad Ferdous Hossain, the general secretary of the association were made joint-convenors of the central committee.

Prof AKM Nur-un-Nabi, Proctor of the university, will act as the member-secretary of the committee. Besides, a number of sub-committees were also formed at the meeting.

The following resolutions were passed at the meeting:

— All programmes in observance of the 'Ekushey' will commence at 12-01 on the night

of February 20 and would continue without break till 2 in the afternoon of February 21. The national flag will fly at half-mast and black flags will remain hoisted on the day.

— No organisation should hang any picture or portrait on the Central Shaheed Minar, or hold any rally or meeting on the Shaheed Minar premises from 7 pm of February 20. No organisation should hold any meeting in the Shaheed Minar area (Doyel Chattar in the east, Plasey square in the west, Chankar Pool in the South and TSC in the North).

— The President will be the first to place wreaths at the Shaheed Minar at 12:01 past midnight, to be followed the Prime Minister, Cabinet ministers, Vice Chancellor and members of the Syndicate of the Dhaka University and the veterans of the language movement. The Ekushey observance committee will fix the programme of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament for placing her wreaths at the minar.

— Heads of various diplomatic missions in Dhaka will lay their wreaths at the Shaheed Minar at 10 am on February 21.

The committee has requested the television authorities to telecast live the programmes at the Shaheed Minar from 11 pm of February 20 to 12 noon of Feb 21 without any break.

## CU admission test begins April 25

From CU Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Feb 9: Admission tests for first year honours classes for the session 1998-99 of Chittagong University (CU) will begin April 25.

The university authority decided to distribute admission forms from March 15 to April 15. The examination system will be the same as the previous year. The tests will be held under five units — 'Ka' unit for students of science group, 'Kha' unit for students of arts group, 'Ga' unit for students of commerce group, 'Gha' unit for combined group and 'Uma' unit for students from any group for admission into Law Faculty. For admission into Marine Science and Forestry under the university, students of science group can apply.

## BSD Ctg dist council Thursday

From CU Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Feb 9: The 7th council of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), Chittagong district unit will be held at the Shaheed Minar premises here on Thursday.

Mojahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) will be present at the council as chief guest and Comrade Nazmul Hossain as special guest.

## Rickshawpullers thanked

Jatiya Rickshaw Sramik League yesterday thanked the rickshawpullers for keeping the movement of rickshaws normal on the streets by rejecting opposition-enforced hartal, reports BSS.

In a statement, Shukur Ahmed and Insur Ali, president and general secretary respectively of Jatiya Rickshaw Sramik League, urged the rickshawpullers to keep playing rickshaws normal today.



Dhaka City Awami League brought out an anti-hartal procession yesterday. —Star photo

## Foundation stone of Swadhinata Chattar laid

The foundation stone of the Swadhinata Chattar (the independence square) was laid by Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Muhammad Mustafiz Rahman, Bir Bikram, at a simple ceremony at the Dhaka Cantonment yesterday, reports BSS.

The square is being built at the Dhaka Cantonment in memory of the sacrifices made by seven Bir Sresthas and other freedom fighters who had laid down their lives during the War of Liberation in 1971. A colorful column engraved with the names of seven Bir Sresthas will highlight the proposed square. Around the column there will be a patch of green coated with planned gardens.

In his brief speech on the occasion, the chief of army staff said the square will enlighten our young generation with the correct history of the liberation struggle.

Dhaka Cantonment board is implementing the project on the western side of the Rajanigandha Super Market comprising about 2.25 acres of land. The project is likely to be completed by June next.

Among others, principal staff officers and other senior military and civil officers were present on the occasion.

## Bangladesh is poor due to politicians' failure: Ershad

NEW YORK, Feb 9: Former military ruler HM Ershad said, Bangladesh continues to remain poor because "we politicians have failed," reports UNB. "The people are simple. We could not give them jobs or the means to earn a decent livelihood," Ershad said.

His comments were carried this weekend by the conservative daily the Washington Times. Ershad was in Washington in connection with the annual Congressional Breakfast Prayer meeting in the US capital.

Ershad said there was no agreement among the Bangladesh political parties. Leading parties viewed each other as enemies, he said. He also proposed a novel formula to solve the country's current political crisis.

"Let them (contending politicians and parties) each take a five-year turn in power in peace," he said. He urged the opposition parties to learn to play a positive role. His comments were interpreted here as suggesting his willingness to allow the current Awami League government to complete its five-year term.

Ershad also said he was willing to mediate in the conflict between Iraq and the US. He claimed he had deep friendship with leaders in both countries.

During his stay in Washington, Ershad met with a few members of the US Congress and with the Assistant Secretary of State, Karl Inderfurth. "I wanted to pay respects to people who helped me when I was in prison," the former dictator told the Washington Times.

## 'People to resist any evil design to snatch away their voting right'

NAGARKANDA, Faridpur, Feb 9: Environment and Forest Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury today said the people will unitedly resist any evil design to snatch away their hard-earned voting right, reports BSS.

Addressing a foundation laying ceremony of a bridge at Nagarkanda, she said the government is determined to uphold the present trend to elect people's representatives through ballots, a press release said.

Referring to the huge gathering on the occasion despite hartal called by some Opposition parties, she said it is not possible now to mislead people through negative politics.

She said the announcement of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to hold general elections in 2000 before expiry of the tenure proves that the government does not want to cling to power.

Sajeda Chowdhury urged the Opposition political parties to give up hartals considering the on-going infrastructure development programmes in remote areas of the country.

She called upon all irrespective of party affiliations to be alert against the "so called politics of unholy alliances by certain quarter" for the sake of socio-economic development.

The 30-metre bridge to be constructed at a cost of Taka 42 lakh will significantly improve the road communications of Aghar, Ramkantapur and Gotti unions of the thana.

## Measures to curb growing refugee numbers in UK

LONDON, Feb 9: New government legislation to curb rocketing refugee numbers and raise deportations of illegal immigrants was announced in London today, reports APB.

The main thrust of Home Secretary Jack Straw's bill on immigration will be to try to accelerate the process of assessment of asylum claims, which at present can take years.

Other measures were new powers to demand proof of genuine marriages, to cut and replace state financial support with vouchers and food, and to fine haulage, ferry and train firms carrying illegal immigrants either deliberately or through a lack of deterrence.

Speaking to BBC television before his bill's publication, Straw stressed his main aim was to speed up the rate at which asylum seekers were processed.

The "faster and firmer" system would deal with initial applications within two months, with any appeal heard within another four months.

"It's one appeal only," he emphasised, admitting he expected deportations to rise. "Under this system we shall certainly get up the number of removals to a much higher level than before."

"That's crucial to make the system faster, so if we do make it faster and firmer then there will be less of an incentive for the bogus people to come here." Nothing would alter London's "international obligations to genuine people who are being persecuted," insisted the home secretary.

But he added: "Let us be in no doubt, this is the most comprehensive reform of the immigration and asylum system we have ever seen in this country."

"We now have 10 times the number of asylum seekers that we had, say 10 years ago, and that's the situation in most European countries. We have got to modernise the system."

Recent official figures showed 46,000 people sought asylum in Britain last year, up from 32,500 in 1997. Of these, the largest group was from the former Yugoslavia, predominantly from Kosovo, whose numbers accounted for 7,400.

Together with applicants waiting to be processed from previous years, the number of asylum seekers whose fate is yet to be decided is 75,000.

In addition the Home Office estimates the number of illegal immigrants secretly at large at 20,000. Other reports put the number of fake marriages at 10,000.

Immigration officers have warned of the growing "rocket" in human trafficking, in which individuals pay an average 8,000 pounds (£1,200 euros) for a ticket to London.

Refugee organisations have criticised the bill. Nick Hardwick, chief executive of the Refugee Council, said the proposals, the third shake-up in a decade, were a "mish-mash" of suggestions that risked plunging the system into even greater chaos.

"The government promised to introduce an asylum system that was firm, fast and fair. These proposals are certainly firm -- but we see no evidence that they will be fair or fast."

Meanwhile opposition Conservative interior spokesman Sir Norman Fowler criticised the bill for not going far enough.



A procession of BNP women activists was intercepted by police in the city's Bijoynagar area yesterday. —Star photo

## Sayed slams Opposition for calling hartals

State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed has condemned the Opposition parties for calling hartals when the government was observing a three-day national mourning to pay homage to King Hussein of Jordan, reports BSS.

Speaking as the chief guest at a freshers reception organised by the Suhrawardy Hall Chhatra League at BUET on Monday, Prof Sayeed called upon the Opposition parties to cancel their strikes to show respect to the anti-hartal feeling of the nation.

"I call upon the members of the Opposition parties to go to the mosques and offer *fatiha* for the eternal peace of King Hussein instead of creating terrorism and anarchy in the name of hartal," Prof Sayeed said adding "please try to be patient, tolerant and cooperative to the government to continue the nation building activities and the country's image building efforts."

Describing the glorious past of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) the State Minister said

the leaders and workers shout, feel proud as this is the most disciplined and ideology-based organisation which flourished under the guidance of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

## Bangladesh team to attend SAARC Youth Festival

From CU Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 9: A twenty-two member team of Bangladesh universities led by Dr Khan Tawhid Qsman of Chittagong University left for Gulbarg University, Karnataka, India yesterday to attend the SAARC Youth Festival. The festival will begin on February 13.

Association of Bangladesh Universities (AUB) sponsored the team to take part at the five-day festival.