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They only put 'red mark' but can't say where to get 'safe water'

By Naimul Haq

"I don't know if the government officials understand what the implication of putting red mark on my tubewell. Officials from Dhaka came last year and painted my tubewell neck red and told us not to drink water from it," said an old man in Laxmipur thana of Comilla.

The man, confused about where to get 'safe drinking water' for his family, said "If they have to come and tell us not to drink arsenic contaminated water, then why is the alternative source of 'safe' drinking water. None of them has given us the alternative."

The old man and his family continue to drink water from the tubewell regardless of the consequences.

Under a government move to prevent people from drinking arsenic contaminated water, World Bank and UNDP personnel are putting red marks on tubewells (TWs). Red mark prohibits use of water from the TW for drinking and cooking purposes while green mark means the water is 'safe'.

A survey on arsenic patients and contaminated TWs in the country is being carried out. Despite the move, at a cost of millions of taka, thousands of villagers in the affected areas continue to use contaminated water. Most of them are confused about where to find 'safe' drinking water.

A villager in Comilla ex-

plained, "Unless we have an option, we have to use tubewell water which we considered 'safe'. Due to the risk of water borne diseases, we avoid using surface water. Besides, most of the ponds and rivers nearby have dried up now. So what can we do?"

When contacted, a health ministry official said, "The villagers have been warned about the consequences of drinking contaminated water, but they have not told been told where or how to get 'safe' water. It is the biggest problem following the detection of arsenic contamination of groundwater."

In Abhoyanagar thana in Jessore, widow Rehana Begum said, "I have been drinking water from my tubewell for the last 16 years. One day in June last year, some people from the capital came and painted it red and asked us to stop using it for drinking and cooking. They gave the warning but failed to give us any solution to the problem."

According to Dhaka Community Hospital (DCH), out of 12,000 TWs surveyed in 64 districts to detect presence of arsenic, about 60 per cent were found to have the toxic metal more than the permissible level of 50 parts per billion (ppb) or 0.05 mg per litre.

DCH, in collaboration with Jadavpur University of Cal-

cutta, was the first in the country to detect arsenic patient. The first patient was found in 1989 in Chapainawabganj.

The survey report said that 52 districts were affected by the groundwater arsenic contamination and over 2,700 patients were suffering from cancer related to toxic effect of arsenic. Thousands of other people across the country are at risk of being affected by arsenic contamination.

Dr Shibtoosh Roy of DCH, who has wide experience of conducting surveys for arsenic patients and affected tubewells, said, "We find it hard to convince people not to continue using contaminated water. To them, red or green marks are meaningless unless they are given a choice."

He added, "On an average, out of every 100 families in the affected areas, about 30 per cent are found to be affected by severe arsenic poisoning."

Meanwhile, experts are divided over providing 'treated surface water' or continuing to install TWs as a solution to the contamination problem.

Some experts point out that treated surface water is the best source of 'safe' drinking water. But Unicef says that as long as there is no concrete decision on surface water options, groundwater is the safest source of drinking water in Bangladesh.



Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal, youth front of opposition BNP, took out a procession in the city yesterday demanding jobs for youths and protesting 'police repression' (top), and traffic congestion caused by the Juba Dal rally (above).

Juba Dal demands jobs for youths

By Staff Correspondent

Hundreds of leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal, youth front of BNP, yesterday paraded different city streets demanding jobs for the unemployed youths and protesting arrest and police harassment "without any cause".

Juba Dal city unit organised the procession that started from Mukhtangan and terminated at Shahbagh crossing. The processionists chanted various anti-government slogans.

Earlier, a rally was held with city unit president Abu Sayeed Khan Khokon in the chair. BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Moudud Ahmed, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Juba Dal president Mirza Abbas and general secretary Gayeshwar Chandra Roy addressed the rally.

Mannan Bhuiyan said the Awami League government has frustrated the youth community as it failed to provide jobs to lakhs of unemployed youths, both literate and illiterate.

Not only that, in a pre-planned way the government is destroying the youths by allowing smuggling of various drugs, especially phensidyl syrup.

On terrorism, the BNP secretary general said both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister frequently preach that all are equal before law, the government is not arresting terrorists belonging to the ruling party's student wing. They were freely moving on the Dhaka University campus and were clashing among themselves, he mentioned.

Besides, the government is yet to arrest ruling party MP even after detection of a bomb factory and explosions at his house at Chhatak. Similarly no action was taken as yet against the killers of Sajal Chowdhury, who are also moving freely.

Bhuiyan said the administration has totally collapsed due to politicisation of the government.

He asked the government to step down immediately and hand over power to caretaker administration for mid-term national polls. Otherwise, he warned, the government would be dislodged through mass movement.

She was speaking at a function on the joining of Jatiya Party Organising Secretary Feroz Kabir in Awami League. The function was held at the International Conference Centre in the city yesterday.

Several hundred leaders and workers of Savar Jatiya Party, led by Feroz Kabir, shifted their allegiance to the ruling party.

The prime minister charged BNP with instigating "terrorism" and warned that terrorist acts would be dealt with a strong hand.

Even action will be taken against those who will try to damage her party image by resorting to terrorism, she said, adding that law will take its own course and legal actions will be against any criminal.

Terrorists will be brought to book: Hasina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government would not protect anybody involved in acts of terrorism at the cost of her party image, report agencies.

She reiterated her stand that terrorists whoever they are would be brought to book. The anti-social elements and trouble makers have no political colour and identity, they are mere criminals, she added.

BNP is indulging in "negative politics" and is trying to invent issues by killing people and creating anarchy, she said.

"BNP has taken a plan to spend crores of taka for creating anarchy in the country by unleashing terrorism and vandalism," she said.

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Ershad for summit of top opposition leaders

Former president H M Ershad favours immediate summit of top opposition leaders and framing of a joint declaration to steer the current anti-government agitation to its logical end.

"I feel that such a summit would have been effective and a guideline for our movement could be declared to pull down the government," he told UNB over telephone.

Asked if he thought BNP chief Khaleda Zia was hesitant to sit together, Ershad said: "I don't have any doubt about her sincerity; she is very sincere. But, you know, there may be differences of opinion in a political party — some may think one should go alone, some may think otherwise, which is quite obvious."

To another question, Ershad said: "Who needs whom... For the sake of a united movement, one needs another."

Asked whether the current movement would lose momentum if the planned summit could not take place, the JP chairman said, "We aren't subservient to any party. If we fail to go together, Jatiya Party has the strength to go its own way with support of the people."

He, however, said the liaison committee with representatives of the four opposition parties had been sitting regularly and would be announcing simultaneous programmes to carry forward the agitation.

"As an opposition party, we are in movement, staging har-

Tomorrow's hartal Campaign on to drum up support

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance will observe a half-day countrywide hartal tomorrow to protest electricity, water-gas crisis, deterioration of law and order, and government's "failures" in different sectors.

The hartal will begin at 6 am on Tuesday.

BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaate-Islami and Islamic Oikya Jote simultaneously called the hartal from separate public rallies in the city on May 3.

The four parties have started the campaign in the capital city and elsewhere in the country to drum up support for the shutdown. BNP and its front organisations yesterday brought out the hartal processions in different thanas chanting slogans in favour of the hartal and against the government.

Meanwhile, Jamaat will observe countrywide demonstration today protesting corruption, terrorism and repression on women.

World Cup

From Page 1

Essex, chasing a revised target of 205 in 34 overs after rain had stopped play for over an hour, were restricted to 199 for eight thanks to some accurate bowling from left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique who returned with four for 44 from his seven overs. Left-arm twerker Enamul Hoque and off-spinner Aminul kept the pressure on Essex batsmen sharing four wickets evenly between them.

Bangla commentary

Bangladesh Betar is all set to broadcast ball-by-ball Bangla commentary of all five matches of Bangladesh.

Thamim Ashraf Chowdhury and Chowdhury Zafarullah Sharaifat will be the commentators.

After their first match against New Zealand on May 17, Bangladesh will play take on West Indies on May 21 at Dublin, Scotland on May 24 at Edinburgh, Australia on May 27 at Chester-le-Street and Pakistan on May 31 at Northampton.

Hunger strike

From Page 1

technical assistance. It started commercial production in 1967 with an investment of Tk 300 crores.

Since then there was no capital restructuring of the mill that forced it to lag behind, sources said. The installed production capacity of the mill was 2.5 lakh MT a year.

UNB adds: The Chittagong Steel Mills will remain under layoff for next two years. Efforts will be taken to restart the public-sector industrial unit by modernising it under a joint venture, sources said.

The CBA claimed that the mill could be made profitable if the authorities provided a working capital of Tk 40 crore.

Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation sources here said the pay-off decision was finalised at a high-level meeting of the government on May 5.

The district administration is being assigned to execute the 'golden handshake' plan, they told UNB.

Earlier, it was scheduled to be laid off on March 31, but the decision was held back in the face of resistance from the employees and workers.

The responsibilities of the schools and madrassahs run by the mill will be transferred to the district administration.

Export Market Development programme approved

The government undertook a comprehensive Export Market Development Programme for 1999-2000 under which electronic commerce and visa system for exporters will be introduced, reports UNB.

The programme was approved yesterday at a Management Board meeting of the Export Promotion Bureau with Commerce and Industries Minister and Chairman of the Board Tofail Ahmed in the chair.

It also includes participation in 27 international trade fairs, arranging two single-country fairs and sending marketing missions abroad to develop Bangladesh market.

The international trade fairs where Bangladesh is scheduled to participate include those in USA, Germany, Japan, Italy, UAE, India, Australia, Turkey, Spain, Iran, Hong Kong, South Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Egypt.

In these fairs the exportable of Bangladesh, including knit and woven garments, ceramics, melamine, leather and footwear, frozen foods, tea, jute and jute goods, fashionable items, handicrafts, toiletries, medicine, houseware, natural flower and other manufacturers, will be displayed.

The two countries where the meeting decided to arrange single-country fairs are Nepal and South Africa.

It will also send three marketing missions to USA, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, UK and Belgium to explore markets of new products in the respective countries.

Bangladesh participated in 26 International Trade Fairs in the current fiscal year under the same programme with 183 private and public trade organisations joining the exhibitions.

The companies got spot export orders of 12 million dollars, future order of 30 million dollars and 461 trade inquiries from the foreign buyers.

The EPB has also taken steps to formulate its own web page to make available exportable goods in the electronic commerce transactions that is scheduled to start from July next.

A five-member committee was formed headed by Commerce Secretary for selecting sites and other measures to establish at least three 'garments palis' outside the capital.

Other members of the committee are Industries Secretary, BGMEA President, BSCIC Chairman and Vice-chairman of EPB.

The meeting also discussed quota distribution procedure for garments export to USA and Canada.

The meeting asked the EPB to take stern action against the parties involved in quota forgery, including forced shutdown of business.

Speaking in the meeting Tofail asked the EPB to introduce

Durban convention to focus on eco-tourism

From M Anwarul Haq

DURBAN, May 9: Nearly 1300 delegates from 60 countries including Bangladesh, representing product exhibitors, tour operators, airlines and service sectors, have congregated here for a four-day International Tourism Marketing Convention, called INDABA.

Billed as South Africa's premier trade showpiece, the annual exhibition — INDABA — the biggest so far, was opened today by Dr Paolo Jordan, Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

Nearly 800 exhibitors have opened stalls displaying a wide array of tourism services and packages. The focus of the convention is on eco-tourism which recently became a matter of growing global attention and attraction by travellers in a world where environmental concerns are being addressed by governments and people alike.

The convention has been organised at the International Conference Centre, a few metres from the wonderful "golden mile" that runs along the Durban coastline and a number of unspoiled beaches on the eastern shores of the Indian Ocean.

Durban, which also harbours the largest port in South Africa, has a population of nearly one million with a cosmopolitan flavour having an unique composition of indigenous Africans, Asians, whites and foreigners.

Nearly half of Durban's population are of Sub-continent origin including Bangladeshis, Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans.

The word INDABA is derived from the Zulu language, meaning a meeting, or get-together. INDABA is providing a platform for tour operators to exchange information and create business opportunities.

Bangladesh delegate at the conference Zahid Hossain, who looks after South African Airways in Dhaka and leading a team of half a dozen leading tour operators says, "INDABA will give an opportunity to familiarise our people with services and facilities provided by South Africa, which is now opening up as an emerging destination for business and recreation."

Nearly eight lakh tourists visited South Africa last year. Even Westerners who traditionally choose a European or American destination now opt for SA, which has excellent infrastructure facilities and offers African game safaris, bird sanctuaries, eco-diving and exotic sites with plenty of mountains and scenic spots.

The INDABA, organised by South African Tourism Board (Satour), is being held at the juncture of South Asia's second all-race democratic elections, scheduled for June 2.

"For any tourist or occasional traveller there is a lot of Eco-tourism to be discovered in South Africa," says G A Pretorius of the SA Tourism Board.

Indeed the face of South Africa has changed a lot and it is now in a position to reveal its "real beauty of people and nature" says Julie Morna, a computer programmer, whose forefathers migrated to SA from the Sub-continent nearly a century ago. Explaining the change since the election of Nelson Mandela in the first all-race elections in 1994 she said:

"South Africa is a melting pot of people and places. It is steeped in old traditions but has undergone sweeping political reforms. People can now have a look at all the radical changes in the political field and social fabric against its rich reservoir of unchanged and unspoiled natural richness," said Julie Morna who considers herself a "born again" South African.

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, one of the main contestants in the upcoming elections, says the country has a vision of an African Renaissance and the INDABA will instill a new spirit of celebration.

INDABA will give the participants from around the globe a chance to look at South Africa in its new garb. Only few countries offer so much of splendour as South Africa spread over 1.2 million sq kilometres.

No wonder, the authorities here speak of South Africa as "A World in One Country."

Kidnapped businessman rescued in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, May 9: Police here today rescued a kidnapped businessman and arrested one person in this connection, reports UNB.

Haji Soleman Sawdagar was kidnapped near a school in Chandganj thana on Saturday night.

Rape: 2 held

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The police officer said there was more to the story. "The UP member had been made chairman of a sanitation project which resulted in a conflict of interests between her and the alleged rapists," he said and added that the UP chairman also did not handle the issue properly.

The SP said the victim had been shifted to an apartment in the Thana complex where she was being treated. "I talked to the victim today and ordered the TNO and OC of Pakundia thana to take care of her," the SP said last night by phone.

He said the victim was still suffering from the trauma.

Raushan did her SSC in 1976, and was elected UP member last year under the new local government law providing for direct election of a female member in each union.

Leave to appeal

From Page 1

Badruddoza Chowdhury, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament filed a writ petition challenging the ruling of the Speaker.

It was argued in the writ petition that Dr Alauddin Islam and Md Hasibur Rahman Swapan took over as State Minister and Deputy Minister respectively in the AL government, it is a case of floor crossing and hence their memberships of the parliament are not valid.

Attorney General Mahmudul Islam with Advocate on-record DAG Bakhtiar Hossain and AAG Bazlur Rahman Chhanna moved for the Secretary of the National Election Commission Moudud Ahmed appeared for Khondker Delwar Hossain and Professor AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Rajuk

From Page 1

high rise commercial building in place of open space earmarked for a car park, the petition was rejected and termed it an illegal action.

The rule is returnable within eight weeks.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed moved the writ on behalf of BLAST, while Altaf Rahman, Shahmaz Babil and A Mannan Khan assisted him.

Ctg dockers

From Page 1

In January, but held back in the face of resistance from the dock workers.

Meanwhile, the plan for construction of a 22-km Patenga-Fouzdarhat bypass to the private port site is almost complete.

International Development Assistance (IDA), a soft-lending window of the World Bank, has agreed to sanction a grant worth Tk 250 crore for the project.

Tears not enough

From Page 1

He is not sure what was mixed with the drink. "Probably it was methanol not ethanol or rectified spirit. Taking of methanol is always fatal," he said. Methanol is a chemical used for varieties of purposes, including varnishing and painting.

But the DMCH is yet to determine what it was as it has very limited facility to test the viscera. A few viscera have been taken for tests from the victims, Rafiquddin said.

Outside, the long rows of squatting relatives of the victims continued their efforts, praying and hoping against hope that their dear ones would survive.

On the long corridors waited Roni, 12, and Puja, 4, for their father Tansen, a sweeper of the Narasingdi Sonali Bank. Their mother Durga Rani was inside beside Tansen.

Chaturdas, brother-in-law of Tansen, said it was a way of life for the town's poor and impoverished working class to wash off tiredness from day's work and their worries with a bottle of cheap liquor, be it from homeopathy shops or vendors, even if it means sickness or empty stomachs for families.

He also takes it. But the sad events made him thinking of giving it up, he said.

The guilt had forced 11 patients to run away as they could not bear the probing questions, contempt and the deaths in their midst, hospital employees said.