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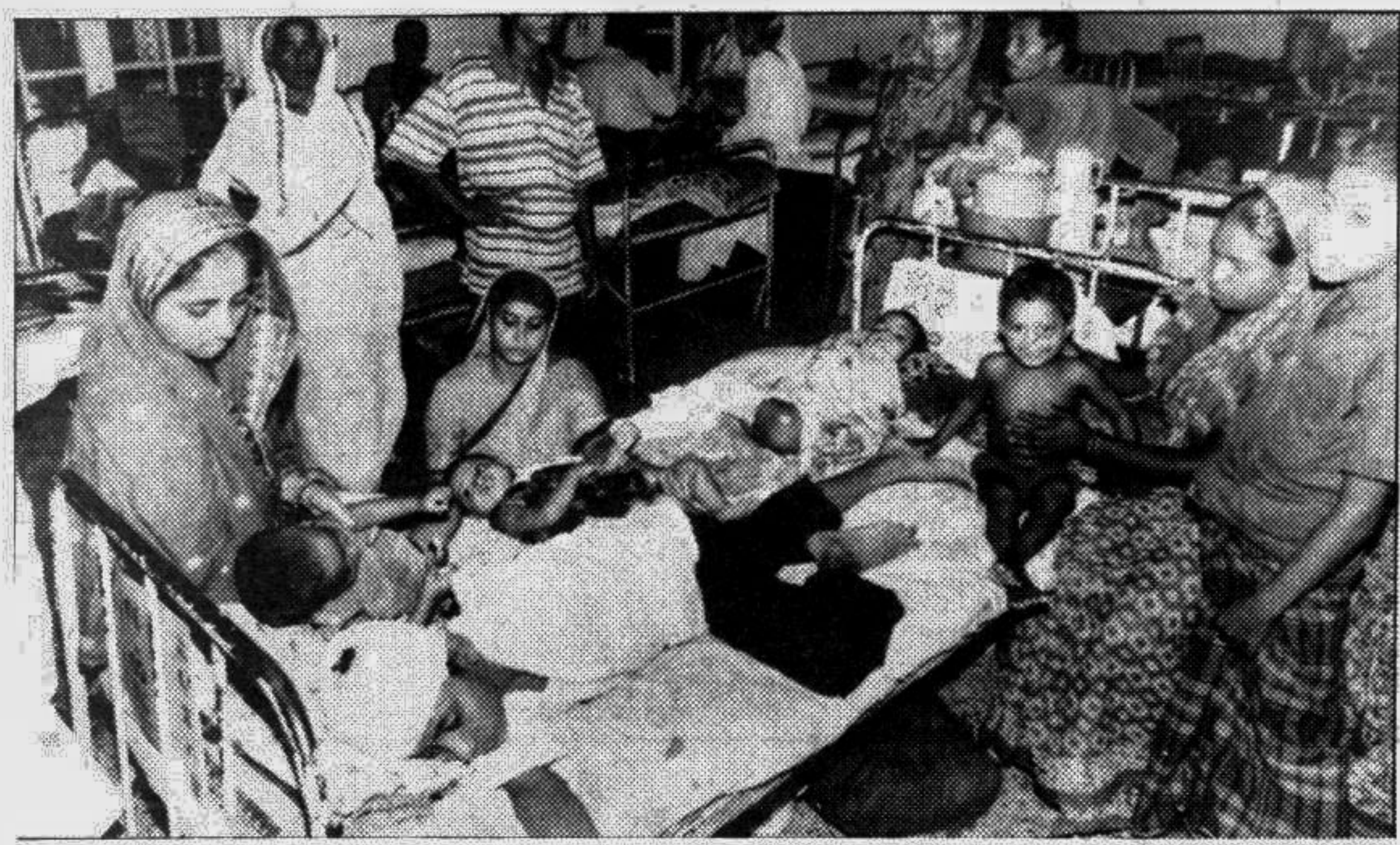
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So much for child-care!
Five children are seen sharing a single bed in the casualty ward at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday, speaking of the woeful conditions at the hospital. —Star photo:

Children suffer at DMCH

By Naimul Haq
Acute shortage of beds has forced five children suffering from grievous burn injuries to share a single bed at the Casualty Ward - 33 at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Two-year old Rabbi, Sumaya, 3, Arif age, 7, Nipa Akhtar, 7, and Babul, 7, were seen sharing the same bed at the centre of the congested ward.

About 70 per cent of Nipa Akhtar's body bear burn injuries. Babul's left and head were badly burnt in electric shock and Arif has become crippled due to severe burns in his legs. Sumaya and Arif suffer burn injuries in different parts of their bodies.

Parents and guardians, sick and tired of requesting the doctors concerned for allotting separate beds for the children, quoted doctors as saying the hospital has 'no vacant bed' for the past one year.

"I am compelled to keep on standing most of the nights beside the 'shared bed' of my son," said Rabbi's mother Rebeca Begum.

Most of the attendants of patients in the ward narrated similar sufferings to this correspondent.

A plastic surgeon at the hospital said, "There is a strict rule that a patient suffering from burn injury should be given separate bed. Movement of a burn patient in sleep or in rest could mean disastrous."

Unfortunately, children suffering from burn injuries have no other beds at the hospital. They are accommodated in the Casualty Ward on 'mutual understanding' with the doctors concerned.

Waiting for waterlogging

The city's western part is exposed to a serious crisis

By Morshed Ali Khan

A vast area in the western part of the city is increasingly becoming vulnerable to serious waterlogging, as the government has failed to ensure the setting up of a planned retention point at Kallyanpur, according to WASA sources.

The 275-acre area earmarked for the planned retention point is rapidly being earth-filled by private developers. If it is not stopped, the sources warn, the Tk 40 crore Kallyanpur pump house will become inoperative with no water to pump out from inside the flood protection embankment.

With the earth-filling and construction work on the planned retention point going on, rain water in a large area of the city will flow in other directions resulting in instant waterlogging. The excess water will also put pressure on the storm sewerage network and may even result in a 'series of cracks and bursts', WASA engineers said.

The pump house was set up to keep the western part of the city within the flood protection embankment free from waterlogging.

Since 1995, the Tk 136 crore project proposal for the retention point has been lying with the Planning Commission for ECNEC approval. After the pre-ECNEC approval in March last year, some officials of the Planning Commission have 'mysteriously and illegally' held up the scheme ignoring even the Prime Minister's announcement in 1996 to set up the retention point, the sources pointed out.

The Planning Commission first asked WASA to reduce the size of the retention point which it did, an official said. Recently it asked WASA to obtain permission from Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) which owns about 110 acres of land at the site.

"The more the project is being delayed, the more buildings are coming up at the site. Acquisition of land from the private owners should begin immediately, otherwise it would be too late," he said.

Of the 275 acres of land for the planned retention point, 110 acres belong to BADC, 24 acres are khas land and 141 acres are privately owned.

"When we first planned the retention point, we desperately sought Rajuk's help for enactment of a law to protect the low lying areas of the city, but it did not pay any heed to our request. Then we decided that we would take up a project and save the vital area," said a top WASA official. He, however, added that Rajuk was now trying to convince the government about the necessity of such a law.

The has a total of six planned retention points. Of these only one - at Goran Chandra (behind Botanical Garden) - has been approved. It would cover an area of 600 acres and land acquisition process by the Water Development Board has already started. About the other five in the eastern part of the city, official said the matter would only be finalised after the flood protection embankment is completed.

Regulators override Janata

Central bank torpedoes plan to hike Beximco loan limit

By Inam Ahmed

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has rejected a Janata Bank (JB) approval to increase the loans to Beximco Pharmaceuticals by Tk 17 crore, more than 40 per cent up from what it enjoys with the bank.

JB approved the increase of Beximco Pharma's loans from Tk 40 crore to Tk 57 crore last month and sought BB permission on April 24.

As a precondition to increasing loans, JB had asked Beximco to adjust and regularise all its overdue loans with the bank. In addition, the group was also asked to adjust its Tk 9.05 crore overdue debenture loans.

However, financial experts now question on what grounds the JB credit committee had agreed to this increase in loans. This was a sudden increase of loans by 42.5 per cent. The pertinent question is why Pharma suddenly needed this increase? Did its production and sales increase correspondingly to require such enhanced fund? If so, where have its profits gone? The profit itself could be ploughed back as working capital.

Moreover, Beximco Group has over Tk 195 crore loans with JB, most of which are now overdue.

Beximco Pharma has Tk 54.04 crore loan liabilities with JB of which its Tk 30 crore CC (cash credit) loan has crossed the limit and now stands at Tk 31.07 crore. Another loan of Tk 199.93 crore has been rescheduled.

M/S Beximco Chemicals also enjoys Tk 15 crore cash credit limit with JB. But the company has also crossed the limit by Tk 58 lakh.

Beximco Engineering has crossed its loan limits of Tk 35 crore by Tk 4.40 crore. This loan has now become overdue and the company has applied for renewal of the loan.

Beximco Denims enjoys a Tk 21.5 crore CC loan limit with the bank, which has been crossed by Tk 76.76 lakh. In addition, Denims has another Tk 183.07 crore with JB of which Tk 21.89 lakh has become overdue.

On top of this, Beximco Ltd has a Tk 9.05 crore overdue debenture loan with the bank. After the group applied for increase in loans, it promised in return to repay this amount in instalments. It has already deposited a post-dated cheque for Tk three crore with the bank. It promised to repay the rest of the money in three instalments in July, August and September.

According to BB's Central Information Bureau (CIB) report of April 18, 1999, Beximco Group's unclassified loan liabilities stand at Tk 812.83 crore while it has Tk 146.73 crore classified loans with different banks. This classified amount includes Tk 1.78 crore of sub-standard loans and Tk 144.95 crore bad loans. The group's total overdue liabilities stood at Tk 206.28 crore.

Experts also point out that when a company has several defaulted accounts and is in desperate need of money, the easy way out for it is to increase its loan limits with another bank. Then the increased amount is used to repay its old debts. They say this might be the case with Beximco Group now.

While JB had extended its loan limits, the group has already failed to repay several instalments with IFIC Bank since December.

EU prefers cash-for-work

Food aid may change its form

By Staff Correspondent

In a major shift in its food security strategy, the European Commission (EC) plans to substitute its food aid by cash allowing the beneficiaries to enjoy more options.

EC intends to gradually shift towards the provision of cash as a substitution for food aid, thus putting greater emphasis on Cash-for-Work programmes rather than Food-for-Work. Paul Webber of Food Security and Food Aid Unit of EC said yesterday prior to his departure from Dhaka.

Webber led a 10-day mission to prepare a new 'EC Food Security Strategy for Bangladesh'. The mission, assisted by the Food Security Unit of EC Delegation in Dhaka, held consultations with the government and other parties concerned.

Explaining the new strategy at a press conference at EC Dhaka office, Webber said the strategy was designed to enhance financial capacity of beneficiaries. "There is sufficient food in markets but main problem lies with poor purchasing capacity of a large number of people in Bangladesh."

Webber told newsmen that the new EC food security strategy, expected to be adopted by the EC headquarters in Brussels in July, would cover the period 1999-2002. During this period, EC would channel up to 90 million euro equivalent to over Tk 450 crore.

Last year, EC provided Bangladesh with 26 million euro or Tk 130 crore as regular food aid plus an additional 32 million euro or Tk 160 crore as emergency response to 1998 flood. Since independence, Bangladesh has received EC food aid worth Tk 1050 crore.

According to EC estimates, transfer of wheat as food aid to Bangladesh cost Tk 12 per kilogram whereas in real terms the grain is worth Tk seven or eight.

So, Webber said, providing cash as aid would give more value to the beneficiaries and they would have more options to buy food with that money or use the money in various other capacities.

When the question of leakage and systems loss in food aid distribution arose, both Webber and Romer agreed that cash rather than food aid would do better in ensuring food security for over 30 million people - one fourth of the country's population who now do not have enough food to eat. They hoped that cash aid would also restrict level of leakage.

Romer further added that food aid is well justified in an emergency situation while in normal situation cash flow to rural poor would derive good results.

Webber stressed on economic growth and social stability for early achievement of food security in Bangladesh and hoped that staff strength in Dhaka office of EC's Food Security Unit would be enhanced.

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Illegal boards stand on illegal bills

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has mysteriously spared some illegal hoardings during its current drive to remove thousands of unauthorised billboards from city streets.

Most of these "privileged" illegal hoardings are the ones that have been put across the roads overhead. Hundreds of them have been put up at Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani, Uttara and many other parts of the city. The advertisers are clinics, private universities and colleges, hospitals, schools, beauty parlours, real estate developers and so on.

In all the cases, these advertisers have dug the green shoulders off the roads or the footpaths on both sides.

Sources in the DCC's Revenue Section, responsible for hoarding, said that they could never officially allow such across-the-road hoardings except on overbridges. They said none of these advertisers ever sought permission before putting up the billboards.

But other sources, unravelling the mystery behind the exclusion of these hoardings, said that a section of officials at the Revenue Section was unofficially collecting "fees" for those hoardings.

The sources said that officials always depend on the field-level workers for the planning and these workers would never give any information that would jeopardise their own interest.

In a recent case, this correspondent reported to the Revenue Section that a clinic was digging the footpaths on road-9a at Dhanmondi to put up an overhead hoarding across the road. The official at the section noted down the name and address of the offender and said action would be taken. But nearly six months have gone by and the hoarding is still there.



Haunting hoardings
A crackdown was launched recently but these hoardings escaped the inspectors' attention. —Star photo

Bogra BCL

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No, sooner had the sun set than the shops in the vicinity put their shutters down amidst disgruntled activists of the agitated on a rampart. Shops were being looted and one Saded's residence was set ablaze. Saded's belong to one group of the local BCL unit. Arsonists could not be identified and no arrested was made when the report was filed late last night.

According to police and eyewitnesses, Samar was repeatedly stabbed by miscreants at Hakir Morh, Sultanganjpara. He succumbed to injuries after being admitted to Mohammad Ali Hospital. As Farhad went to the hospital to see the body, he came under attack and was repeatedly stabbed. He died on the operating table.

Police suspect that Samar was killed due to an internecine conflict within the party while his supporters avenged his death by killing Farhad.

Police was deployed in all key points in the town and also at the hospital area to contain violence. Residents in Bogra feared further flare-up.

Barely five months back, another round of internal conflict led to the killing of Masum, the then secretary of the Bogra town unit of BCL. Police have not been able to arrest anyone in this connection.

Alternative to hartal

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launch march from Dhaka to Barisal.

"We want to sustain the support and spontaneity shown by the people during the Dhaka-Panchagarh road march. We think it will become easier to launch the one-point movement against the government if we can carry out three or four more marches from the capital to different parts of the country," said a Standing Committee member.

A number of people at different rallies during the march said they were also against hartal.

BNP secretary-general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star on the last day of the march that the mass support to his party clearly proved that people had expressed their no-confidence in the Awami League government.

"We hope that people will continue to support BNP as we are fighting for the welfare of the masses," he added.

Another senior leader said that party leaders and workers had become demoralised following boycott of the recently held municipal elections, but this road march would certainly rejuvenate them.

Shahidul Islam, a local businessman at Panchagarh, told The Daily Star that Khaleda Zia would not need to go there before the next parliamentary polls.

"This campaign is enough for the party's win in two parliamentary constituencies in this district," he added.

Meanwhile, UNB adds: opposition's road march evoked interest in foreign diplomats as they watched it closely and wished it should be an effective alternative campaign against the government's failure.

Some ambassadors, especially from the European countries, phoned senior BNP leaders including Khaleda Zia's advisory council members to know the over-all impact of the three-day road march.

A team from the US Embassy also accompanied the march to have first-hand impression of the opposition programme.

Pakistan's predictable win

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he was in danger of being dismissed for the lowest World Cup score ever - 45 by Canada against England at Old Trafford in 1979.

The Scots, who prepared for Akhtar by facing net bowlers from 18 yards, were spared that embarrassment by their Yorkshire professional Gavin Hamilton, who made 76 before he was last out.

Hamilton put on 59 for the sixth wicket with Brinkley (22) and 61 for the seventh with Alec Davies (19).

Earlier, Yousuf Youhana and Moin Khan helped Pakistan survive a shaky start by compiling a run-a-ball stand of 103 for the sixth wicket after half the side had been removed for 92.

The Pakistani top order, which slipped to 135 for six against the West Indies, once again revealed its frailty against Scotland's ordinary bowling attack.

Youhana, however, took Pakistan to safety with 77 not out while Moin chipped in with 47 off 41 balls.



Parasite on promenade
These self-proclaimed soldiers of Bangabandhu have made the walkway beneath the Fulbaria foot-over near Gulistan in the city their kingdom and the street-side vendors the subjects, who allegedly pay 20 taka per day for 'trouble-free' life. This is one of many examples of how the name of the great leader is used for criminal activities by the so-called supporters of the ruling party. —Star photo: AKM Mohsin