



Awami League brought out an anti-hartal procession in the city yesterday. — Star photo



BDR personnel were deployed near Dainik Bangla crossing yesterday during the hartal called by the BNP-led opposition alliance. — Star photo

Under Secty Gen of IFRCs calls on Shahabuddin

Ibrahim M Osman, Under Secretary General of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCs), called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday, reports UNB.

Osman as special envoy of the IFRCs Secretary General conveyed Shahabuddin the deepest appreciation of the Secretary General for his interest in upholding the image of the Red Cross movement and the national society.

The envoy sought his support for efficient management of the national society and improvement of the existing working relationship between the society and the federation.

Osman appreciated the excellent management and services of the blood bank maintained by BRCS.

Shahabuddin, also the Chairman of Bangladesh Red Cross Society and ex-officio President of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, lauded the IFRCs role in expanding the humanitarian activities around the world and mitigating the sufferings of natural disaster victims in Bangladesh.

Julian Francis, Disaster Preparedness Delegate for Bangladesh and Bob McEwen, Delegate of the International Federation, were present.

Bangladesh envoy to SA presents credentials

Bangladesh High Commissioner to South Africa Akramul Gader presented his credentials on Friday to President Nelson R Mandela, according to a message received here from Pretoria yesterday, reports BSS.

Presenting the credentials Gader conveyed the personal regards of President Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Mandela.

The envoy told the South African President that the people of Bangladesh hold him in high esteem. He also recalled the gracious visit of President Mandela to Bangladesh during the silver jubilee celebrations of Independence in 1997.

Gader was among 12 other ambassadors and high commissioners who presented their credentials before Mandela retires.

In reply President Mandela conveyed his best wishes and regards to the Bangladesh president and the prime minister and expressed the hope that the new high commissioner would be able to contribute substantially to the strengthening of relations between the two countries.

President Mandela is likely to retire on June 16.

Looting at press club Bakul placed on 2-day remand in Rajshahi

RAJSHAHI, June 13: Bakul, a local resident who was arrested Saturday night in connection with looting at the press club, was today placed on a two-day remand, reports UNB.

Police produced Bakul before the court this morning seeking permission to take him on remand and the court permitted the police to keep him on remand for two days.

A gang of miscreants allegedly led by Bakul damaged valuables of the press club and looted the cash Thursday.

Bakul was caught red-handed when he reportedly attacked the club again the following day.

BTMA hails budget

Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association (BTMA) has hailed the government for slashing tax on several items of the textile sector in the proposed budget for the fiscal 1999-2000, reports UNB.

In a statement yesterday, BTMA said many entrepreneurs would come forward to invest in the textile sector due to tax cut on several areas.

The association termed the decision timely of the withdrawal of 2.5 infrastructure development surcharge and 3 per cent advanced income tax on the import of raw cotton while 2.5 per cent surcharge on infrastructure development and 15 per cent VAT on synthetic fabrics.

BTMA leaders said the realistic decision would create interest among the entrepreneurs for fresh investment in the textile sector as well as help establish adequate related industries enabling the country's textile sector to complete in the quota free global market after the year 2005.

Thanking the Finance Minister for proposing 25 per cent alternative facilities, the association observed that the move would help increase the use of local yarn and cotton on one hand and save huge foreign currencies on the other.

BTMA urged the government to keep provision for continuing the facilities in the textile sector till 2005.

Global meet on low birth weight begins today

National and International experts will discuss in detail the issue of low birth weight (LBW) at birth in Bangladesh and similar other countries during a four-day meeting beginning in the city today, reports BSS.

UNICEF, Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project (BINP), World Bank, USAID and ICDDR,B are jointly sponsoring the international meeting to be inaugurated by Minister for Health and Family Welfare Shahabuddin Yusuf today at 8-40 am.

Health experts from the WHO, UNICEF, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, The Royal Tropical Institute of the Netherlands, Johns Hopkins University, Cornell University, Emory University and ICDDR,B will take part in the working sessions on the low birth weight of children at birth during the meeting.

Addressing a press conference yesterday, the ICDDR,B acting director Prof George Fuchs said the experts would come out with broad-based recommendations after the meeting on improving nutritional status of mothers and children in countries like Bangladesh.

He said they would also put their suggestions on how to improve other social and economic factors to help raise the weight of children at birth to a standard level.

The ICDDR,B experts Prof Lars Ake Persson, Dr Istiaque A Zaman, Dr Shams-El-Arefeen, Dr Iqbal Kabir, Dr S K Roy, Dr Rubina Shaheen and Ms Laura Kelly of USAID, Washington, were also present at the press conference.

Obituary

Renowned Scottish jute trader RH Martin, who was engaged in jute trading in Narayanjan and Calcutta, died on Saturday in Scotland, an Ishpani Limited press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

Martin also worked for a World Bank aided project on jute in Dhaka.

FM to attend installation ceremony of new SA President

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad will leave the city today for Pretoria to represent Bangladesh at the installation ceremony of newly elected South African president Thabo Mbeki, reports BSS.

Azad will lead a two-member delegation to the ceremony which will take place on June 16.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed was invited to attend the function which will also mark the formal retirement of President Nelson Mandela from active politics.

The Foreign Minister has been nominated to represent Bangladesh at the function which is expected to be a grand show. Acting Foreign Secretary Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed is the other member of the delegation.

Sources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) said that Azad will carry four letters — two each from President Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, addressing to President Mandela, and the new President Mbeki.

Azad will be accompanied by his wife Bilkis Samad Azad.

VAT to help make tax system more fruitful: NBR

National Board of Revenue (NBR) has advised the manufacturers, sellers and service providers not to be frightened seeing some more products and services under VAT net, reports UNB.

In a statement yesterday, the Board sought cooperation from the taxpayers in implementing a participatory and easy tax system.

It said the value-added tax was introduced on July 1, 1991 and needs to be gradually extended up to wholesale and retail levels to make the modern tax system more fruitful.

"This is why the government is bringing more products and services under VAT net every year," the statement said justifying the inclusion of some new areas in the VAT net in the coming fiscal.

To make the VAT system more acceptable and easier, the government in the outgoing fiscal year introduced a participatory system involving chambers and trade associations to fix the tax.

Khagrachhari Press Club to be completed in current fiscal

KHAGRACHHARI, June 13: Chairman of Khagrachhari Hill District Council, Jatindra Lal Tripathy has called on the local journalists to focus the joys and sorrows of the inhabitants of the area, reports BSS.

He has assured the Khagrachhari Press Club Executive Committee that the Hill District Council will complete the construction of the first floor of Khagrachhari Press Club building in the 1999-2000 fiscal. He was exchanging views with the members of the club in the club's auditorium on Friday.

General secretary of the club Tarun Kumar Bhattacharyya, BSS Khagrachhari correspondent Jiten Barua, journalists Nurul Alam and Abu Tayeb among others who participated in the discussion.

The ground floor of Khagrachhari Press Club building was built at a cost of about Taka seven lakh, jointly funded by the then Khagrachhari Hill District Local Government Council and Khagrachhari Army Brigade.

BCL, JCD hold rallies on DU campus

By DU Correspondent

Leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of ruling Awami League yesterday urged the opposition not to call hartal frequently for the sake of economy and political stability in the country.

The BCL leaders also urged the politicians to solve all their political issues in Jatiya Sangsad, not on the streets.

They were addressing a rally on the Dhaka University campus protesting yesterday's nationwide hartal call by BNP-led opposition alliance against the proposed national budget for fiscal 1999-2000.

The BCL leaders criticised the opposition leaders for enforcing the hartal even before the budget had been passed by the Jatiya Sangsad.

They urged the opposition leaders to raise their protest during the budget discussion in the Parliament. They also urged the countrymen to make a strong resistance against the various destructive activities, including hartal of the opposition.

Presided over by DU unit of BCL president Sajjad Hossain, the rally was addressed by BCL president Bahadur Bepari, general secretary Ajay Kar Khokan and AKM Ajim.

Earlier, activists of the BCL brought out a procession on the campus terming the hartal as 'useless and politically motivated'.

Opposition BNP backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) also brought out a procession and held a rally on the campus chanting slogan against the proposed budget.

Terming the budget anti-people, full of falsehood and against the national interest, the JCD leaders said that the countrymen would be affected

by it as price hike has been proposed on paper, book, pen, medicine and other essentials used by the poor people.

JCD vice-president Monjur Elahi, Monwar Hossain Rana, Mostafizul Islam Mamun and Asaduzzaman Asad addressed the rally presided over by Manir Hossain.

Witnesses said the situation became tense following chase and counter chase between the activists of the two archrival student organizations after several gunshots were fired from an anti-hartal motorcade near Shahbagh crossing at about 11 am.

Sources said both the pro and anti hartal activists locked in the chase and counter chase at Shahbagh area that left one JCD activist injured.

Nat'l Moon Sighting Committee meets today

A meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee will be held today at 7 pm in the conference room of the Islamic Foundation to ascertain the beginning of the holy month of Rabiul Awal of 1420 Hijri year, reports BSS.

Committee chairman and State Minister for Religious Affairs Maulana Nurul Islam will preside over the meeting.

The Islamic Foundation has requested all to inform at telephone numbers 9559493, 9555947, 9555951, 9550280, 9559643, 9556407 and 9558337 or fax 9503397 if the holy moon of Rabiul Awal is sighted anywhere in Bangladesh.

Employment Bank disburses Tk 1cr among 350 youths

Bangladesh Employment Bank has so far disbursed over Taka one crore in credits among 350 unemployed youths to create self-employment, bank sources said yesterday.

The bank, which was launched in September last year and operating through six branches at the divisional headquarters, will open 11 more branches next month as part of its expansion plan. Managing Director of the bank Al Masudul Huq told BSS.

The new branches will be opened in Noakhali, Faridpur, Bogra, Rangpur, Tangail, Pabna, Jessore, Patuakhali, Comilla, Mymensingh and Tunipara.

"We have also plans to open branches at all greater district and new district headquarters in phases," he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the bank in September last year to involve the country's unemployed youths in economic activities by providing them with employment opportunities.

Of the declared paid up capital of Taka 100 crore, the bank has by now raised Taka 97 crore

with Taka 75 crore provided by the government and the rest coming from shares given to different banks.

The bank has been providing credits to skilled but unemployed youths at 14 per cent interest rate, which may go down to 11 per cent in the case of timely repayment.

The terms of the loan being given without collateral ranges from two to five years.

Skilled youths, especially those trained from the institutions under the Directorate of Youth Development, are taking loans from the Employment Bank suiting their expertise.

Small-scale projects including tailoring and embroidery works, poultry raising, fish farming and running dairy, computer, photocopy, engineering stalls, hotel and shops are getting preference for the bank's financing, Huq said.

The bank is going to appoint 650 people soon to run its activities smoothly, he said.

"I ask the unemployed youths to avail the unique opportunities offered by the bank and keep the fund revolving by regular repayment," Huq said.

Meril-Prothom Alo Star Awards on ATN Bangla tomorrow

By DU Correspondent



A special television programme on 'Meril-Prothom Alo Opinion Poll on Stars and Critic Awards' will be telecast in ATN tomorrow at 9 pm.

Anchored by Afzal Hossain and Subarna Mustafa, the programme was participated by

noted stars from TV, film, music and modelling worlds.

Sabina Yasmin, Tapon Chowdhury, Sumon Chatteropadhyay and band group Renaissance rendered songs and Jewel Ich also participates in the programme.

Jail Killing Case Date for framing charges against 21 accused refixed

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court yesterday re-fixed June 28 for framing charges against 21 accused in the Jail Killing Case, prosecution sources said, reports BSS.

Former acting president Syed Nazrul Islam, former prime ministers Tajuddin Ahmed and M Mansur Ali and former Minister AHM Quamruzzaman were killed in the Dhaka Central Jail on November 3, 1975.

Labour minister back home

Labour and Employment Minister M A Mannan returned home yesterday morning after leading a nine-member Bangladesh delegation to the 87th annual conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, report BSS.

Son of Bush enters presidential race

CEDAR RAPIDS, June 13: George W. Bush plunged into the US presidential race, declaring "there's no turning back" from his bid to user in a new era of Republican politics, reports AP.

"I am proud to be a compassionate conservative," he said Saturday. "And on this ground I will make my stand."

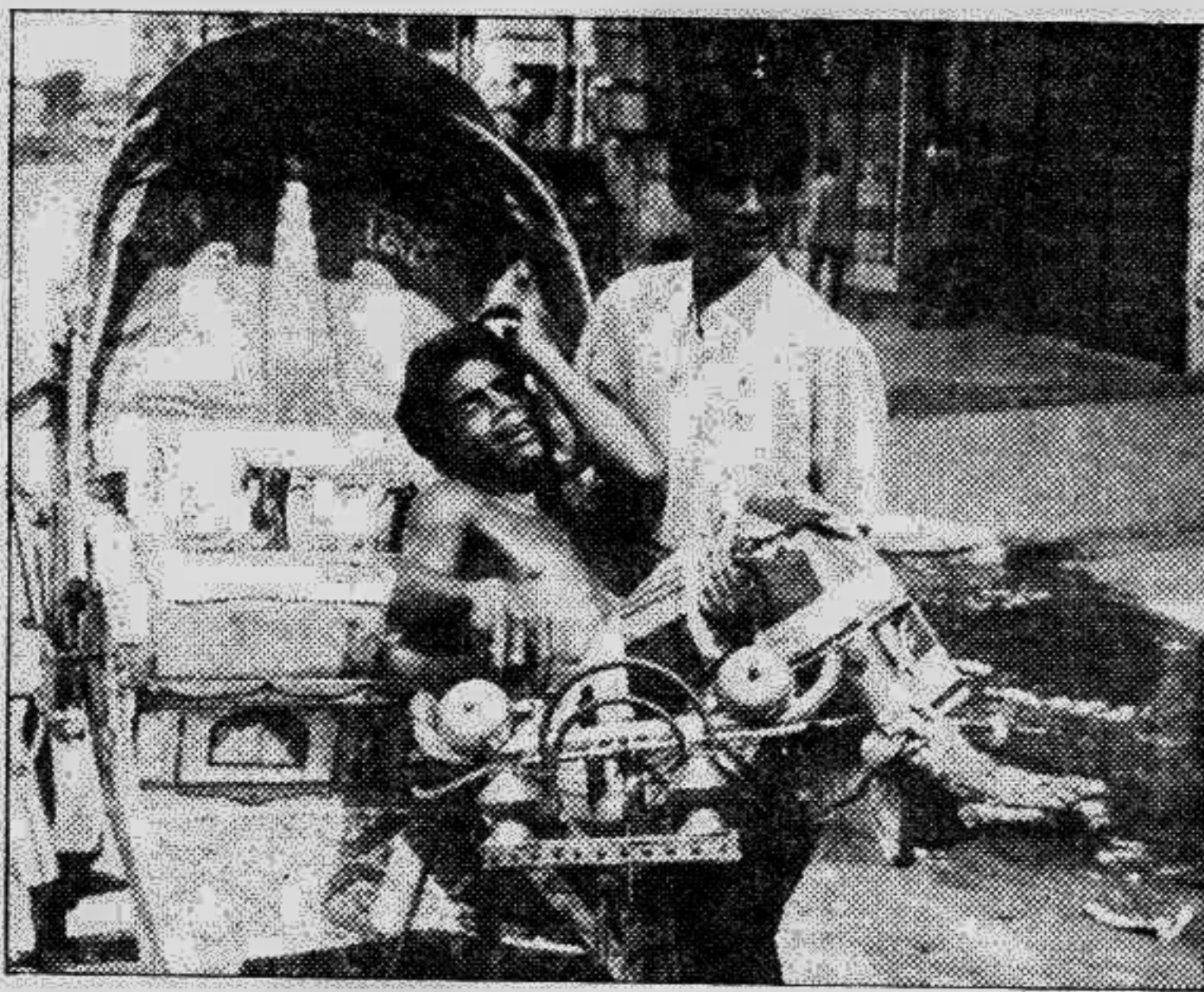
The Texas governor, who went to Iowa on his first campaign trip, already is positioned as the party's leader in polls, money-raising and endorsements, ahead of the 2000 elections. On Saturday, Bush said the exploratory campaign is over.

"There's no turning back and I intend to be the next president," he said. "I am some kind of fired up."

Bush, 52, is many ways the phantom frontrunner. The son of former President George Bush is little-known outside Texas. He has held elective office for just four and a half years and has little experience as a national figure.



A BNP procession in the city during yesterday's hartal. — Star photo



A passerby helps a rickshawpuller wounded by bombs hurled by pickets at Jatrabari during the hartal hours yesterday. — Star photo

Petrobangla

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awaiting Energy Ministry's clearance, the sources said.

The Energy Ministry is now thinking of hiring these consultants for its so-called Hydrocarbon Cell instead of PCD. Formed more than a year ago to work as a regulatory body for foreign oil companies, the Hydrocarbon Cell has only one official now.

"The government does not seem to be very serious about monitoring of PSCs," commented a source. "Besides hiring consultants, Petrobangla had initiated a process to recruit new officials. But ultimately, no recruitment was made. And now, they are planning to transfer the PSC consultants to the Hydrocarbon Cell."

Through this tender, Petrobangla sought a diagnostic assessment of current PSC management, the purpose of which is to identify required improvement within PCD of Petrobangla.

The Terms Of Reference (TOR) in the tender says, "The PSC adviser would run a programme for establishing technical review, monitoring, and control of the PSCs, a program for establishing financial control including audit of the PSC and a program for establishing quality control and quality assurance of the equipment, machinery and materials used in the operation and its procurement system."

It adds, "The advisor would also run a program on job training to develop managerial and staff skill and resources to operate and maintain the PSC, develop and install such PC-based computer system as is needed for control of the PCD, ensure compliance with PSC provisions and adopt appropriate measure in case of violation of any contractual obligation, ensure environmental safety and management in the operation of PSCs."

Petrobangla identified that there would be a number of professionals who would be involved in these programmes. They would be technical experts including processing engineer, plant design specialist, drilling engineer, petroleum engineer, geo-science experts like geologist, geophysicist, geochemist and financial experts experienced in budget control, financial administration and audit.

50 pc babies

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Malnutrition and below-normal pregnancy weight of mothers are the main reasons for birth of low-weight babies, Dr George J Pache, Interim Director of the ICDDR,B said.

"The rate of low birth weight in Bangladesh is the highest in the world. Several factors lead to persistence of low birth weight, most importantly malnutrition."

Dr Shams-El Arefeen, Epidemiologist, Public Health Science Division of the organisation said, "Low birth weight is also an intergenerational problem. This means, if a girl is born with low birth weight, she may grow up stunted and may give birth to a low birth weight baby."

Bangladesh has the highest rate of childhood malnutrition in the world. More than 51 per cent the children born with low birth weight were found to be stunted, the study said.

A week-long international workshop organised jointly by the Unicef, Bangladesh government, World Bank and USAID begins in the capital today to suggest remedies against low-weight births. The conference is being sponsored by ICDDR,B, it was told at the press briefing.

Mentionably, the government has launched an integrated nutrition project in 60 thanas of the country to create awareness among people about nutrition and effects of low weight births.

ICDDR,B officials who were present at the press briefing include Lars Ake Persson, Division Director of Public Health Sciences Division, Laura Kelly, Director of Communication, Child Health Research Division, Dr S K Roy, Scientist, Clinical Sciences Division, Dr Rubina Shaheen, Senior Medical Officer, Public Health Sciences Division and Dr Istiaque A Zaman, External Relations and Institutional Development.

BNPPP meets today

A meeting of the BNP Parliamentary Party (BNPPP) will be held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban at 7 pm today, reports BSS.

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia will preside over the meeting, a BNP press release said last night.

Millions at risk

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ruzzaman, chairman of DCH Trust, told The Daily Star.

Prof Zaman said, "Based on our recent random survey in the villages (20 tubewells, a union, in 61 districts), we estimate that the number of people at risk of arsenic cancer will go into million. Officially, 7,600 cases of arsenic cancer patients have been detected in the country, so far, during a recent government survey, funded by the United Nations' Development Program (UNDP) in 200 villages found 57 people were amputated."

According to World Bank sources, epidemiological studies in Chile, Argentina and Taiwan for arsenic patients indicate that the rate of internal cancer due to groundwater arsenic contamination is very high.

The US Army's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) study conducted by Prof Allan H Smith, a leading epidemiologist, says: Only ten per cent of those affected by arsenicosis will develop visible signs like melanosis, keratosis, skin cancer and gangrene. The remaining 90 per cent will develop internal cancer mainly lung cancer and renal failure.

Prof Allan Smith who talked to the Daily Star during his recent visit to the country as a WHO consultant focusing on the problem said, "The problem in Bangladesh is similar to Chile and Taiwan but much more severe. People there have much better nutrition that acts as a shield against poison to some extent, whereas in Bangladesh it is not so. The number of internal cancer patients, naturally, is far higher than what was imagined before."

Dr Tony Fletcher, a British environmental epidemiologist from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine who also spoke to this correspondent during his recent visit to the country said, "What I have seen is very grave. The number of patients could be very high. There is an urgent need for health related research on arsenic."

The most severely affected areas are Faridpur, Chandpur, Laxmipur, Noakhali, Jessore, Chapai Nawabganj and Narayanganj.

According to World Health Organisation, people drinking water containing more than 50 parts per billion or 0.05 milligram per litre is harmful to health. Tubewell water analysed for arsenic by DCH and United Nations' Children Fund (UNICEF), and some leading NGOs show that a significant number of STWs across the country are affected by arsenic contamination.

On an average out of all samples of tubewell water analysed (laboratory method) for presence of arsenic more than 60 per cent showed levels of contamination more than the permissible level. UNICEF tested more than 25,000 samples of water from across the country and found about 22 per cent of them to be contaminated.

According to a recent study by British Geological Survey of "Groundwater Studies for Arsenic contamination in Bangladesh," the scale of the problem is clearly very serious. In terms of population exposed it is currently the largest and most serious groundwater arsenic problem in the world.

Although it is not easy to tell what is the exact number of people suffering from complications but those who are working at the grassroots identifying arsenic patients put the figure at a very alarming number.

Currently the government is identifying patients by way of examining skin lesions. However, the standard technique of

laboratory testing of hair, nail, urine to verify presence of arsenic in body is not taking place at government initiative which puts the government completely in the dark about the number of cancer patients in the affected areas.

In the current programme for screening of arsenic patients there is no provision for surgical intervention of patients suffering from cancer, neither is there any plan to rehabilitate them.

Experts from both home and abroad studying patients said poisoning from arsenic damages liver, kidney, lung, bladder, pancreas, and spleen and in some cases digestive tract. "The internal damage cannot be seen nor can it be felt. The damage is done over a period of time spanning from ten to 20 years depending on the age and sex."

Many experts have questioned the process of identifying such patients and giving them remedy. "Who is going to find the patients and through what process? Due to the presence of arsenic in drinking water what would be the fate of the younger generation? Alarmed experts asked in disbelief."

A study by Dr Mahmudur Rahman and Dr Shibtosh Roy of DCH indicates that those who suffer from arsenic poisoning suffer from vomiting tendency, constant headache, distaste for food, frailty and blood vomiting.

The government is about to implement a World Bank - Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) funded two-month comprehensive programme in 1200 villages to identify affected tubewells and patients in six thanas, one from each division.

Based on the lessons, another 85,000 villages would be screened for similar identification programme.

DCH is the only body that was involved in countrywide identification of tubewells and patients in all the districts of the country in collaboration with Jadavpur University of Calcutta.

CU rallies

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campus after the student bodies promised to keep their activities peaceful.

But, Jamaat-backed Islami Chhatra Shibir and pro-Awami League Chhatra League were locked in a gunfight on the campus on Friday.

On Saturday, after failing to hold a rally in the campus, Chhatra Shibir announced that it would enforce an indefinite strike in the university from Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Anti-communal Student Alliance, a platform of anti-Shibir student organisations, demanded punishment of those involved in Friday's incident.

Four-member team to attend confce in Tehran

Bangladesh will attend the founding conference of the proposed Union of the Legislative and Consultative Assemblies of the Islamic countries to be held on June 15 and 16 in Tehran, an official press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

A four-member delegation led by Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury will attend the conference.

Other members of the delegation are Prof Ali Ashraf, MP, Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Finance, Md Fazul Haq, MP and Md Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, MP.

The delegation was scheduled to leave for Tehran Sunday night.