

## Maternal deaths remain high despite international efforts

5.2 lakh women die a year globally

BSS, Dhaka

Each year more than 525,000 women die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. In addition, over 50 million experience pregnancy-related complications, 15 million of which lead to long-term illness or disability, according to a PANOS report.

For years, this has been the single greatest cause of premature death and disability among women of reproductive age in the developing world. Today maternal deaths are second only to deaths from AIDS.

The tragedy is that almost every one of these deaths is avoidable. Failures to address the needs of pregnant women are a social injustice of huge proportions.

A new report from the Panos Institute (London) on 'Birth rights: New approaches to safe motherhood, highlights the fact that since 1987, when an International Safe Motherhood Initiative was adopted, there has been little evidence of significant reductions in

the number of women dying globally.

The report cites a number of factors that contribute to these deaths.

Many countries have practices enshrined in law and culture, which inhibit women's chances of surviving pregnancy and childbirth. Early marriage, for example, can lead to childbearing before physical development is complete. Lack of access to safe, legal abortion and advice is another example.

The report goes on to point out another reason for maternal deaths is that maternity facilities are under-resourced. According to a study of 49 developing countries, almost half of maternity services would not be able to carry out one or more of the life-saving procedures they are meant to offer.

In addition, there is a gap between what scientific evidence has shown to be best practice, and what actually happens to many women when they give birth.

The current target of the Inter-

national Safe Motherhood Initiative is a 75 per cent reduction in deaths from 1990 levels by 2015. "This target is achievable," says Judy Mirsky, the author of the report.

"But governments must be prepared to implement the necessary changes in their laws and policies and to improve maternity services for all women."

Across regions, lifetime risks of maternal death vary from a low of 1 in 4,000 in Northern Europe to a high of 1 in 16 in sub-Saharan Africa and 1 in 12 in East and West Africa.

In South-east Asia, the lifetime risk of death is 1 in 55, 1 in 75 in the Caribbean and 1 in 140 in South America.

The World Bank has estimated that the financial cost of basic maternal and new-born health services is, on average, three US dollar per person per year in developing countries, while maternal health services alone could cost as little as two US dollar per person.



President A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury offering munajat after laying the foundation for reconstruction of Dhanmondi Eidgah Jame Mosque in the city yesterday.

## Mosques can contribute to social advancement: President

Foundation for expansion of Dhanmondi Eidgah mosque laid

BSS, Dhaka

President Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday said the mosques could contribute to social advancement side by side its basic role as religious centres.

Prof Chowdhury said this as chief guest at the foundation laying ceremony of a six-storey building of Dhanmondi Eidgah Jame Mosque.

The new mosque with around 11,000 person capacity will be constructed at the east side of the historic Dhanmondi Eidgah Maidan, on 7.04 bighas of land. The Eidgah was established during the reign of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan by his son Shuja in 1640.

The reconstruction of 75,796 square feet mosque having a floor for women devotees, basement car parking, library and other facilities will cost about Tk 12 crore. It will be completed in five years.

The money will come from people's donation and discretionary fund of the president, a member of the mosque committee said.

Prof Chowdhury, who offered Juma prayers at the existing mosque on the site, assured of providing financial supports from his discretionary fund. He said as per the teachings of the Islam, Muslims have to be liberal towards other religious communities. Prof Chowdhury strongly

pleaded for setting up a library in each of the modern mosques in the country and said a room for physicians should also be kept in the mosques to provide free treatment to the poor.

He also suggested keeping information technology (IT) facilities in the mosques.

Advocate Khondoker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, MP, spoke on the occasion as special guest while former secretary and president of the mosque committee A M Ahsan Ullah presided.

Among others, Ward Commissioner Abul Khair Bablu and General Secretary of the mosque committee K A Bhuiyan spoke on the occasion.

## Dhaka Int'l Film Festival begins Jan 20

With a renewed pledge to promote movement for alternative movies, the 7th Dhaka International Film Festival begins in the city on January 20, says a press release.

The Dhaka festival will feature screening of over 100 famous films - both contemporary and retrospective - at its main venue, the Public Library Auditorium, two other auditoriums and five cinema halls in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

The countries that have already confirmed their participation in the festival are Iran, India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Egypt, Rwanda, France, Germany, Switzerland, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Russia, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

There will be a set of competitions in the festival organised by Rainbow film society, which celebrates its silver jubilee this year.

As part of the festival, a good number of local films will be screened and films on genocide, inclusive of Bangladesh's War of Liberation, will add a special dimension.

Three seminars will highlight criticism of films, vulgarism and bad culture in movies, Asian films, television and film institutes.

"We hope, ladies and gentlemen will return to watch the world class movies and decent local films," festival director Ahmed Mujtaba Jamal said while exchanging opinion with the journalists on Thursday.

Festival committee adviser Mohamed Mijaral Quayes, members Saiful Islam Chowdhury, Rashed Rhine and Md. Abdul Hossain were also present on the occasion.

## Singapore urged to allow more Bangladeshi remittance houses

BSS, Dhaka

Finance and Planning Minister M. Saifur Rahman, now on a visit to Singapore, yesterday urged the authorities to allow operation of more Bangladeshi remittance houses to enable Bangladeshi workers to remit money home through official channels.

During a meeting with his Singaporean counterpart Lim Hong Kiang, Saifur Rahman said Bangladesh is deprived of a huge amount of valuable foreign currency because of the illegal transfer of money through hundi in the absence of adequate facilities in using proper channel.

Rahman also urged the Singaporean authorities to punish those who use illegal hundi as a means to transfer money instead of the authorised banking channel and issue employment passes for Bangladesh nationals to work in

the Agrani Exchange and other remittance houses.

The finance minister arrived at Singapore yesterday on a four-day visit.

Nearly 60,000 Bangladeshi workers are now employed in Singapore.

The Singaporean finance minister responded favourably to his Bangladesh counterpart's request, saying that his government would want remittance through proper channel.

He instantly directed the MAS authorities to issue employment passes needed for Agrani Exchange and assured Rahman of issuing more passes for other remittance houses.

Saifur Rahman said Dhaka-Singapore ties have always been good. He also stressed on further strengthening economic and commercial relations between the two countries.

## 2nd DEATH ANNIVERSARY



THE 2ND DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF LATE AMINUL HUQ, THE FOUNDER OF SMART GROUP OF INDUSTRIES AND FORMER VICE CHAIRMAN OF PRIME BANK LTD. IS ON 06.01.2002, SUNDAY. ON THIS OCCASION MILAD MAHFIL WILL BE HELD ON 6TH JAN 2002 AFTER ASR PRAYER AT HIS RESIDENCE HOUSE NO.-55, ROAD NO.-13, BLOCK-E, BANANI, DHAKA-1213.

ALL THE RELATIVES, FRIENDS AND WELL-WISHERS ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND THE MILAD MAHFIL AND PRAY FOR THE DEPARTED SOUL.

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- ACCOUNTS CUM INVENTORY OFFICER.**
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## Global confce on water begins Jan 13

BSS, Dhaka

A five-day 'Global conference on water, indigenous knowledge and practice: Role of media' begins in the city on January 13 to focus on the governance and management of water resources.

The World Water Forum of Journalists (WWFJ) in collaboration with Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB) is organising the conference to formulate a media strategy for optimum use of water and food security. WWFJ secretary general and FEJB chairman Quamrul Islam Chowdhury told newsmen yesterday.

Over 100 water experts, journalists and activists from home and abroad will take part in the conference, he said.

Water Resources Minister L K Siddiqui is expected to inaugurate the conference at CIRDAP auditorium.

## Myanmar envoy hosts reception

UNB, Dhaka

Myanmar Ambassador U Ohn Thwin yesterday hosted a reception at his residence on the occasion of the 54th anniversary of Independence Day of the Union of Myanmar.

Ministers, politicians, diplomats, journalists, academics and high civil and military officials attended the reception.

## 13 firearms recovered

BSS, Dhaka

Police arrested 1,130 people and recovered 13 firearms, 21 bullets and 23 explosives from different parts of the country in the last 24 hours ending at 6 am yesterday, a police press release said.

The arrested included five terrorists. Of the firearms, three each were recovered from Dhaka and Munshiganj while the remaining seven from different districts.

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