

80,000 health workers not paid for 4 months

NAIMUL HAQ

About 80,000 fieldworkers under the family planning wing of the health ministry have not received their salaries for the last four months.

Sources said the failure of the ministry's planning wing to process the relevant documents in time has led to the non-payment of salaries of these employees working under the development budget.

They pointed out that it is a routine practice to have the annual operation plans (OPs) under the Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP) for the following year approved by the National Steering Committee (NSC) of the ministry by June every year.

But the planning wing sent the relevant papers to the NSC in September this year for approval of

15 OPs out of 28. Its failure to do the job timely not only caused the non-payment of salaries since August but also delayed procurement of drugs, contraceptives, vaccines and essential surgical kits in hospitals.

The mismanagement has also created uncertainty about the scheduled National Immunisation Day (NID) programmes on January 14. Funds are still not available for payment of about Tk 6 crore to about 60,000 volunteers and porters to be engaged in the drive.

Heads of a number of hospitals in the capital told The Daily Star they have very small stocks of medicines and surgical requisites.

Most hospitals including Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), National Institute of Trauma and Orthopaedic

Rehabilitation (NITOR) and Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital have already asked the Central Medical Store Depot (CMSD) for immediate supply of foreign drugs and surgical requisites.

"We need emergency supply of drugs and other apparatus by January," said the director of one hospital.

The CMSD sources however said quick supply of foreign drugs to the hospitals will not be possible. "We have to abide by strict rules and the process is often very lengthy. The time needed for procurement of foreign drugs is at least up to February," said an official of the CMSD.

It is learnt that Line Director of Essential Service Packages (ESP) Dr Mahbubur Rahman sent several reminders to the ministry to release

funds but is yet to get any response.

Due to fund shortage, recurrent expenditures like telephone, petrol and gas bills have also not been paid since July.

About the fund shortage, Health Secretary A F M Sarwar Kamal said, "We have had Tk 578 crore and most of it was released for procurement of essentials and we will soon have required drug supply."

About the non-payment of salaries, he said because of a writ the establishment ministry hesitated to release the funds for salaries. "But the legal matter has been resolved and we hope to pay up the salaries within two weeks," he added.

Sources said the fund shortage has not however affected foreign trips of officials of the health ministry and health directorate. About 250

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Khaleda receives peacekeepers' bodies, as nation mourns today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The bodies of 15 Bangladesh peacekeepers, killed in the December 25 air crash in Benin, arrive in Dhaka at about 4:00pm today instead of morning, as the last farewell to the officers by the West African country was an hour late.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will receive the bodies at Zia International Airport amid observance of a national mourning day, declared earlier from a cabinet meeting to mark the largest casualties in a single accident in Bangladesh Army since independence.

Bangladesh Army will accord a guard of honour to the officers, who were deployed to Benin's

two strife-riven neighbouring countries Sierra Leone and Liberia on United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions.

According to the latest from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), a UN chartered plane flying the bodies arrived at Nairobi airport at 12:00 noon Bangladesh time en route to Colombo to Dhaka.

The flight was scheduled to leave Nairobi after an eight-hour layover, but it could not take off because of a restriction of Nairobi Civil Aviation Authority that says a pilot must rest at least 12 hours to fly again.

"We are trying to bring the bodies home as early as possible, but something is beyond our

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Iran quake toll may hit 50,000

Relief workers plead for more aid

REUTERS, BAM, Iran

Some 50,000 people may have died in Friday's Iranian earthquake, officials told Reuters yesterday, as relief workers pleaded for more aid for survivors of one of the deadliest natural disasters of modern times.

"We are expecting the death toll to reach around 50,000," a senior Interior Ministry official said, sharply raising the projected tally from the nearly 30,000 already buried.

Some hungry children may have died in the freezing nights tormenting tens of thousands forced to sleep in the open at Bam, putting a premium on blankets and clothing as well as medicines.

"If we consider that, on average, five people lived in each house we can say the death toll will reach 50,000," the Interior Ministry official

said. Another official confirmed the forecast.

Such a figure could make the earthquake around the ancient Silk Road city the most lethal since a tremor at Tangshan in China that killed at least five times that many in 1976.

The death toll at Bam, 600 miles southeast of Tehran, may surpass that in northwestern Iran in 1990 and be double that of quakes in Armenia in 1988 and Gujarat in 2001.

Friday's tremor, which measured 6.3 on the Richter scale, struck just before dawn, killing entire families as they slept.

The Interior Ministry official said 80 percent of Bam's mud-brick buildings had been flattened and that many outlying villages had not yet been fully searched. Not only did

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Harkatul Jihad man gets life in arms case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court in an arms case yesterday jailed for life Mufti Abdul Hannan Munshi of Harkatul Jihad, also believed to have links to planting explosives near the venue for a Gopalganj rally of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Judge Mohammad Jahangir Alam Mollah of the Speedy Trial Tribunal—

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Exports, imports show good signs

CPD review says slow ADP progress, pressure on BoP problematic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Key variables influencing macro-economic performance have started off on a relatively strong footing during the first leg of the current

fiscal year with a stable export growth and a record import of capital machinery and industrial raw material.

However, the implementation of the Annual Development

Programme (ADP) remains sluggish, inflation is high, privatisation process is paralysed and pressure is on the balance of payment (BoP), according to the first interim report

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Hasina wants to pay homage to dead army officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed willingness to pay her last tribute to the 15 army officers who died in an air crash in Benin on December 25.

In a letter to Chief of Army Staff

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

With traditional sword and shield, a Garo warrior leads a procession to Wana, the conventional thanksgiving day function, at Askipara in Haluaghat on December 29. The Garos observed the day for the first time in 70 years.

Reviving a lost culture

INAM AHMED

The unmistakably wild drumbeat thumps on the eardrum. And the strange trumpeting noise of a wind instrument.

Then the warriors appear, their swords flicking in the air against the

backdrop of rolling Garo hills. They come in all colours and ages. They come dancing to the rhythm of music. And a culture lost for the last 70 or so years under the weight of Christianity wakes up from slumber.

The Garos, thought to be in Bangladesh for the last 1,000 years

or so, now want to get back to their roots they lost in the advance of Christianity. In their quest, they celebrated Wana or the Garo thanksgiving on December 29 in Askipara by the side of the Garo hills in Haluaghat, over 200 kilometres

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

We Mourn with the Nation

With the Nation

Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited

mourns deeply at the sad demise

(Inna Lillahe..... Rajeun)

of 15 Officers of Bangladesh Army deployed in Peace Keeping Mission of the United Nations in Sierra Leone in a tragic plane crash at Benin, Africa.

We pray to Almighty Allah for eternal peace of the departed Souls.

The Bank expresses its deep sympathy and profound condolence towards the members of the bereaved family.

May Allah help them to bear their irreparable losses.



Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited
YOUR TRUSTED PARTNER

AL turns to hartal to stunt uplift

PM tells Jessore rally

REZAUL KARIM, from Jessore

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday blasted Awami League (AL) for opting for destructive ways of hartals and other violent programmes with an intention to ruin the country and its economy.

Addressing a mammoth gathering at Jessore Eidgah Maidan, she

alleged the AL called hartal on January 3, at the very start of the New Year, "solely to obstruct peace, stability and the development spree".

Khaleda said the AL is harmful for the country as its members loot wealth to make their own fortune when in power and resort to

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

এলো
ক্রাউন এনার্জি ড্রিংক
শক্তির পুত্র

নিম্নোক্ত বাক্যই ক্রাউন এনার্জি ড্রিংক আর স্বাস্থ্যের এক শক্তির পুত্র। যা শরীরে শক্তি জোগায় আর স্বাস্থ্যের পিতামহ। যেমন: