

Sleep can increase brain power

BBC ONLINE

Scientists say that they have shown how the brain can crack complex mental puzzles while its owner is sleeping.

Research at Luebeck university, in Germany, says tests on 106 volunteers back up anecdotal evidence that a good night's sleep can help solve problems.

The volunteers were shown a number puzzle in which was embedded a "hidden code" revealing the answer, the journal Nature reports.

Those kept awake overnight reportedly had far less chance of solving it.

The scientists believe that because the brain appears to restructure information from the previous day during sleep hours, a period of sleep may produce insight into problems such as these.

Other experts say it is the first hard evidence that creativity and problem-solving may be assisted by the activity of the brain during sleep.

Dr Jan Born, who led the study, said: "This restructuring might be occurring in such a way that the problem is easier to solve."

He highlighted a period of sleep called slow-wave sleep - a deep sleep not thought to be punctuated by dreams.

Govt given 3-day ultimatum to nab Siraj killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Businessmen of Nawabpur yesterday gave a three-day ultimatum to the government to arrest the killers of Shariful Haque Siraji, one of the owners of Siraji Home and Overseas Machinery, who was apparently killed by muggers in Tejgaon Tuesday.

The businessmen will observe a two-hour token strike at all business establishments in Nawabpur on completion of the ultimatum on January 26 if the killers are not arrested by then.

The decision came from a rally of businessmen organised at Nawabpur, protesting the killing of Siraji and demanding arrest and punishment of his killers. They also brought out a procession in the area, wearing black badges and hoisted black flags atop their business establishments.

Pry teachers

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announced a programme of posting mass letters and calling the prime minister's office over phone from January 25 to February 15 to press home their appeal.

At least 20 teachers became ill and were transfused saline during the hunger strike, according to the strikers. Noted journalist and columnist Ataus Samad helped the strikers break fast by serving serbat yesterday.

Several hundred teachers observed the hunger strike, which began on January 20. Leaders of different political parties, including Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu, teachers and workers parishad expressed solidarity with the teachers' movement.

Shamsul Alam, president of BNPTA, said the agitating teachers will submit memorandums to the prime minister through the deputy commissioners (DC) and will hold rallies and demonstrations in every district in phases from February 16 to March 31.

"We will continue our movement until the government meets our demand," Alam said.

The BNPTA Secretary General Abdur Rahman Bachu and other leaders were present at the rally.

During its month-long programmes in April, the BNPTA will organise hour-long token road and highway blockade programme, exchange views with leaders of different political parties including four-party alliance leaders and various other professional and teachers organisations, hold rallies and demonstrations at the divisional towns and submit memorandum to the prime minister.

Budget revision

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The finance minister claimed the macroeconomic policies to be on track, with over-performance in key targets such as reducing budget deficit. But, "closure of NCB [nationalised commercial bank] branches and loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the manufacturing sector has slowed, particularly owing to strong labour union opposition," he explained.

Saifur envisages phasing out of Multi-fibre Agreement (MFA) quotas at the end of 2004 and uncertain political climate as the main medium-term risks in attaining the original macroeconomic framework for the current fiscal year -- of real GDP growth of 5.5 percent and inflation of 4.5 percent.

Due to the country's high dependence on ready-made garment exports, the adverse impact of the MFA phase out could be substantial on external position, output and employment, he

Even small reductions in this sleep phase have been linked by other studies to a decrease in memory function, and in decreasing ability to recognise "hidden structures".

Their 106 volunteers were all given a quick look at a test that involved sorting numbers based on a couple of set rules.

However, underlying these rules was a third, "hidden" rule which, when spotted, dramatically simplified the completion of the puzzle.

Some of the volunteers then got a full eight hours' sleep, while others had various degrees of sleep deprivation.

The scientists then sat back to see which volunteers had a flash of inspiration and spotted the third rule and how quickly they managed it.

Twice as many of the rested participants caught on to the rule than volunteers from the sleepless group.

Dr Carl Hunt, director of the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research at the National Institutes of Health in the US, said that the study was important.

He said: "A single study never settles an issue once and for all, but I would say this study does advance the field significantly."

"It's going to have potentially important results for children for school performance and for adults for work performance,"

Transfer of 3 CHT insttts yet to get go ahead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A government decision to hand over three institutes in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region to CHT regional council is yet to get the go ahead.

Following a meeting with representatives from Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) on December 24 of 2003, the government decided to turn Vocational Training Institute, Primary Education Institute and Cotton Development Board to CHT regional council as part of its initiative to implement the CHT peace accord.

The three institutes are currently under Science and Technology, Education and Agriculture ministries. Respective district councils would run the institutes once those are transferred to CHT regional council, sources said.

Moni Swapan Dewan, deputy minister of CHT affairs said, "Ministries concerned with those institutes did not take proper steps to implement the decision."

However, a top CHT affairs ministry official seeking not to be named said an agreement between district councils and ministries concerned to settle the transfer was almost final.

According to the CHT peace accord, the government would transfer 33 activities and institutes to regional council or district councils. Six years into since the deal was inked, the government is yet to implement any of them, sources added.

Demanding full implementation of the accord, the PCJSS announced a 120-hour road blockade programme in the CHT region from 19 January.

Manik Killing

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Maosit groups and local criminal gangs.

The IFJ asked the government to ensure a full and thorough investigation into the killing and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

"[The executors of] such an horrific attack must not be allowed to go unpunished," the IFJ letter said adding, "It is imperative that the government send a clear message to rogue groups that those who threaten and harm journalists -- in this case, in the worst possible way -- will be brought to justice."

The IFJ also called upon the government to ensure safety of all journalists working in Bangladesh.

The year 2003 witnessed a total of 91 deaths of media persons, an increase from 18 in 2002. Manik Saha is the first journalist to be killed in 2004.

Edn boards Agitating IT staff abstain from work

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Employees of computer centres at the nine education boards in the country yesterday observed abstention from duties, demanding regularisation of their jobs.

The employees including assistant programmers, assistant engineers and data entry operators abstained from their duties also to press home their demand for festival bonus.

"It is unfortunate that the government is not considering our demand despite importance of our job in the education sector," said an employee of a computer centre at Dhanmondi in the city.

The computer centres of the education boards are operated on contract by IT professionals who process registration for examinations, mark sheets, certificates, and do other necessary functions.

They alleged that the education boards earn huge revenue from registration of educational institutions, students and examination fees, have surplus revenue in their accounts and often pay extra allowances to permanent employees.

"But they do not want to give us festival bonus," said the employee preferring anonymity.

Of the boards, seven have only one permanent system analyst each and all the other officials are appointed on contract basis.

Teesta water

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Once the technical committee for undertaking a joint survey on the availability of water in Teesta is constituted, it will need at least three months to do the job, Duggal said.

On the face of it, the formation of the technical committee might give the impression that the process to search for an accord on the Teesta would be further delayed. But sources in both the delegations said it was essential to provide the basis for an understanding free from disputes that might crop up later on the quantum of water available in the river.

The sources point out that what sets the proposed technical committee apart from the usual such mechanisms is the timeframe -- middle of May this year -- set for its mission.

They said the mutual trust and understanding to be displayed in quest for the accord on the Teesta would have fall-out on the discussions on the six other rivers.

If indeed, the two countries are able to finalise the accord, it will be the second major water-sharing treaty after the 1996 document on the Ganges which was signed by prime ministers H D Deve Gowda of India and Sheikh Hasina.

The agreement on the Teesta would demonstrate that both New Delhi and Dhaka are keen on working together irrespective of the governments of the day in the two countries, said the sources.

VDP man

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Saiful Islam Khan and Tariqul Islam, both from Dumuria, the same night with a .32 foreign revolver, said Habibur Rahman, superintendent of Khulna police.

An influential local leader of the ruling BNP has link with one of arrested persons, police suspect.

Some 82 firearms have been looted from the securitymen in six south-western districts in the last eight years, sources said.

PM leaves

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followed by a cultural show in honour of the Bangladesh prime minister.

On January 25, the prime minister will leave Indonesia for Brunei Darussalam. During her visit, the official talks with the Sultan of Brunei, Haji Hassanah Bolkiah, will be held on January 25 at Royal Palace in Bandar Seri Begawan.

Economic cooperation, trade, investment, manpower export, energy and education will figure prominently in the talks. Potential areas of cooperation will also be identified to further deepen the relations between the two countries.

The prime minister will leave Brunei Darussalam for Dhaka in the afternoon of January 26.

Kushtia bypolls

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Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The meeting called upon the people of the constituency to elect Reza Ahmed as a four-party alliance candidate in the by-election.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, BNP Secretary General and Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Textiles Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Health Minister Khandaker

Mosharraf Hossain, Oli Ahmed, Chief Whip Khondoker Delwar Hossain, and Kushtia BNP President Shahidul Islam were present at the meeting.

Media played

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Lawmaker Rustom Ali Farazi at Wednesday's meeting suggested restoring media confidence for more coverage on the coalition's development activities.

A group of lawmakers chimed in and accused the media of confining itself to writing against ministers, lawmakers and other party leaders.

Taking the floor, BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said it would not be wise of the BNP to depend on the media.

"The alliance gained two-thirds majority in the last general election despite media's stand against us. The media failed to resist our victory," a senior BNP leader quoted Bhuiyan, known as media-friendly, as saying.

Bhuiyan accused the media of misleading people and asked the lawmakers to hold rallies and processions in their constituencies to tamp down 'misconceptions' about the government.

"What will the common people do if you (lawmakers) become

disappointed... attend parliament sessions and hold public meetings in your areas to highlight our success," he said in his efforts to boost the apparently flagging morale of party leaders.

BNP Chairperson and its parliamentary party chief Khaleda Zia told her deputies to prepare before they join TV debates with opposition lawmakers.

"You should peak carefully not to dent the image of the government," she is learnt to have said.

Her younger brother Syed Iskandar MP made a proposal of seeking permission from the BNP secretary general before any lawmaker joins debates on television.

BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General and eldest son of the prime minister Tarique Rahman took a swipe at newspapers during a ceremony of laying foundations of Bogra Press Club on Tuesday.

The anti-media remarks created mixed reactions among policymakers present at Wednesday's meeting and many described the wholesale blame as unwise.

Airport Road

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tion of the beautification and development work of the road.

The Perc in its final report recommended punishment to the persons responsible for wasting state funds in the name of 'beautification and development' of the Airport Road.

"It will never be possible to stop wastage of government funds without punishing them," the Perc said in its report made public recently.

Huda went to the site yesterday and expressed satisfaction over the progress of works on the seven-kilometre-long Airport Road between Banani Railway Station and Zia International Airport, including dividing the road into eight lanes, earth-filling and plantation and construction of foot-path, service lane, drains and fountain.

He said 55 percent of the development works has been done and the project will be complete within the next six months.

The minister said the beautification and development work of the Airport Road was taken up with the patronisation of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia who took personal interest in the project.

AL calls hartal

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rape victim Mahfuza Khatun, 35 at Sathkira hospital.

Mahfuza, wife of freedom fighter Atiar Rahman of village Hijaiddi in Kalaroa upazila, was forcibly taken to a bush in the village and allegedly gang-raped by ruling party cadres on August 26 night.

The attackers fired four shots in the air, put up road barricade and forced Hasina's car to stop in front of the residence of BNP lawmaker Habibur Islam Habib. However, police made safe passage for Hasina, also the leader of the opposition in parliament, within 10 minutes.

Twenty-four journalists accompanying her could not escape the wrath of the attackers and were assaulted and had their cameras snatched.

Witnesses said the attack was made by some 50 people led by the BNP lawmaker's elder brother and BNP Kalaroa thana BNP President Rafiqul Islam.

As Kalaroa police declined to record the case, former Kalaroa thana AL Secretary Moslem Uddin filed a case with the cognizance court 'KA' Sathkira on September 2, 2002 against 27 persons with Habib MP as the main accused.

The court ordered Officer-in-Charge of Kalaroa Police Station Golem Kibria to investigate the case and submit a report. Kibria, the investigating officer (IO), took the statements of Monsur Ahmed, BM Nazrul Islam, Abu Ahmed and Engineer Sheikh Mujibur Rahman out of 18 witnesses. The IO did not notify the other witnesses, the AL

leaders alleged.

Meanwhile, having been pressed by Habib MP and local BNP leaders, the IO submitted his final report saying the case was false and baseless. The lawyers said that they wanted to go through the case docket including the IO's report earlier but the court authorities said that the file was missing.

Over one hundred lawyers appeared Magistrate Court yesterday and prayed for time so that they could go through the documents but the court rejected their plea.

However, in the next session Magistrate MI Siddique declared the case dismissed. On hearing the verdict, several hundred leaders and activists of AL and its front organisations held a protest meeting on the court premises and announced an eight-hour hartal on Saturday in the district. Monsur Ahmed, Sheikh Abu Nasim Moina, Nazrul Islam, Farida Akhtar Banu, Abu Bakar Siddique, Azharul Islam, SM Haidar and Firoz Ahmed, among others, addressed the gathering.

2 cops

FROM PAGE 12

Mazbat Hossain (35) and ASI Nizamuddin remained missing till the filing of this report last evening and are feared dead.

Frogmen from Barisal Fire Service are engaged in the rescue operation but neither the missing policemen nor six firearms and some 280 rounds of ammunition could be recovered.

Gharial found at Padma

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The Padma basin stretching from Godagari to Char Diar Khidirpur and Yusufpur in Rajshahi was virtually a breeding place for Gharials, which were regularly seen nesting on the banks till the late 80s and early 90s.

The RU zoologists have kept the latest found Gharial at their departmental Aqua Laboratory and were having problems rearing it.

"We cannot keep it at our Aqua Lab long as our research works will start in March. We will leave it with Rajshahi Zoo or any other wildlife organisation for proper conservation," said Prof Altab.

Only a handful Gharials survive in neighbouring Nepal, while in Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh, the species has been all but wiped out, wrote Damandeep Singh on the National Geographic website.

Observation and surveys by local wildlife experts Dr Ali Reza Khan, AW Akhond, Dr Farid Ahsan, Mizan Rashid and others have it that the Gharial population in Bangladesh rivers has declined.

Defamation suit Court summons Inqilab editor, publisher

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday summoned the editor, publisher and two reporters of the daily Inqilab to appear in the dock after hearing a defamation suit filed by writer-columnist Shahriar Kabir.

Shahriar filed the suit with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court for carrying what he said was a false news item last year.

Magistrate Emraddul Haque summoned the accused -- Editor AMM Bahauddin, Publisher ASM Bakibillah and reporters Towhidul Islam and Abu Rushed -- to appear in court on March 26.

Shahriar in his complaint objected to the report headlined "Ammunition of sniper rifles recovered from the house of Shahriar Kabir" that the daily ran as its front page lead story on December 8.

But Shahriar claimed the house from where the ammunition cache was recovered belonged to Bablu, one of the tenants of the wife of his late brother.

He described the report as motivated and said it tainted his public image.

Couple takes life after quarrel

A CORRESPONDENT, Chuadanga

A young couple allegedly committed suicide by hanging in the same mango tree near their house at Ranglarpur village under sadar upazila early in the morning yesterday.

A quarrel between Iqbal Hossain, 28, and Asma Khatun, 20, the previous night might have led to this, sources said.

Police recovered their bodies and sent them to Chuadanga General Hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed with Chuadanga Police Station.

Young Gandhis join Congress

AFP, New Delhi

The heirs to India's most influential political family, Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi, have officially joined the main opposition Congress party led by their mother Sonia Gandhi, a party spokesman said yesterday.

"Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi are integral part of the Congress and they are its primary members," spokesman Anand Sharma told a news conference.

"I will give you all information later as to when they joined and where. Historically, they are in the party and technically, yes, they are primary members."

Both can now officially contest the forthcoming parliament elections as Congress candidates.

There is already speculation that Priyanka may contest from Rae Bareilly in northern Uttar Pradesh state -- the parliamentary seat of her grandmother and former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

The brother-sister duo have been vigorously campaigning over the past three days in the villages of Rae Bareilly and neighbouring Amethi, where their mother is an MP.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's ruling BJP wants to hold elections before the end of April to take advantage of strong economic growth caused by a bountiful monsoon last year.

Hasina urges

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passing days in great panic," she told the engineers, who gathered from different parts of the country.

"In such a situation professionals have lost the desire to work, as inept and unskilled persons have grabbed the important posts under the identity of alliance loyalists," she added.

The AL chief observed that democratic rights, functional parliament and freedom of expression are prerequisites for development. "But, unfortunately, under the present regime there is an acute absence of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, transparency and accountability in the country," she said urging the engineers to take up the issues with the people in a concerted way.

The opposition leader also defended her party's stance on staying out of parliament sessions and said, "We have no way to speak for the people in parliament."

She once again accused the ruling coalition deputies of hurling 'abusive speeches' at the opposition legislators in parliament and criticised the role of the speaker in conducting the sessions impartially. "The situation is so grave that even the opposition leader was asked to submit notice for delivering speech in the House," she said.

Pointing out that Bangladesh's parliament follows the West Minister style of parliamentary democracy, Hasina asked, "Is there any precedent in the British parliament where the speaker switched off the microphone of the leader of the opposition and asked for submission of notice before speaking on anything?"

Presided over by Quamrul Islam Siddiqui, the programme was also addressed by Nurul Huda, Rezaul Karim and Rezaul Islam Rizu.

Wars 'useful', says US army chief

AP, Washington

The head of the United States army has said that the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have provided a "tremendous focus" for the military.

General Peter Schoomaker said in an interview with the news agency that the wars had allowed the army to instil its soldiers with a "warrior ethos".

But the general, who became chief of staff in August, denied war-mongering saying the army must be ready to fight.

He also said he doubted recruiting more troops was a solution to army stress.

"You aren't stronger because you have more people," he said, adding that expanding the army was similar to pouring water on sand.

Many senior military figures have expressed concern about "overstretch", a problem which has become particularly acute in post-war situations like Iraq which require more troops than combat.

But General Schoomaker says the answer could be to expand combat strength by freeing troops from other assignments.

General Schoomaker said the attacks on America in September 2001 and subsequent events had

IOJ

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the Ahmadiyyas sect non-Muslim at a meeting of top alliance leaders on January 14 bred commotion in the party.

"We are extending all-out support to the anti-Ahmadiyya movement led by Khatib of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque and we will do everything to realise the demand," said Amini.

Welcoming the government ban on Ahmadiyya publications, he hoped that 'good sense' would prevail and the government would declare the sect non-Muslim soon.

Talking to The Daily Star, ARM Abdul Matin, senior vice-chairman of IOJ's Haq faction, said an anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment was rife and might explode into a conflagration at any moment if the government failed to respect 'people's sentiment'.

Appreciating the government step to ban Ahmadiyya publications, he said: "The government is dragging its feet on the vital issue," adding, "It should follow in the footsteps of countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates that have already declared the community non-Muslim."

Claiming that an OIC resolution in 1974 declared the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim, he said, "They are not even allowed to enter the holy cities of Makkah and Madina."

He alleged Israeli connection with the community.

Business team

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Moniruzzaman, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) President M A Awal, Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association President Kaji Monirul Haque, Bangladesh Soap Manufacturers Association President Sariful Islam, Bangladesh Computer Samity President S M Iqbal, Bangladesh Association of Software Information Services President Habib Ullah Neamul Karim, FBCCI First Vice-President Kamal Uddin Ahmed, FBCCI directors Abdul Wahed and Mir Nasir Hossain, DCCI Director Khondaker Abdus Salam, Dhaka Stock Exchange Member Lutfor Rahman Badol, Bangladesh Jute Spinner Association Member Shafiqur Rahman Shafi, "K" Line Bangladesh Ltd Managing Director Asif A Chowdhury, Md Mosharrar Hossain MP and Habibul Alam Chowdhury.

There will also be a 13-member journalist and media team in the prime minister's entourage.

He denied any pressure from senior colleagues for non-introduction of the bill proposing a legislation that will carry a two-year imprisonment and a fine of Tk 1 lakh for blasphemy.

The bill provides that no one will be allowed to make any derogatory, demeaning or blasphemous remarks, either verbally, in writing or in forms of art, against Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity or other religions.

Iraq guerilla attacks

FROM PAGE 1

foreign soldiers and international organisations. Police and hospital officials in Falluja said insurgents had attacked a bus carrying women home from work at a US base near Habbaniya on Wednesday.

Police said the Iraqi women were Christians who lived in Baghdad and were taken every day by minibus to the base west of the capital, where they worked as cleaners and cooks. Buses carrying the women had been shot at before, they said.

Spain's Defence Ministry said the wounded Civil Guard police commander, Gonzalo Perez Garcia, was head of security for a Spanish military brigade in Iraq.

Spanish forces had searched a house and left, leaving Perez Garcia and two Iraqi policemen to complete the search, when a car arrived. The car sped off when its driver saw the house was occupied and Perez Garcia and the Iraqi policemen gave chase.

The occupants of the vehicle then opened fire on their pursuers,

given the US army a rare opportunity to change.

"There is a huge silver lining in this cloud," he said.

"War is a tremendous focus... Now we have this focusing opportunity, and we have the fact that [terrorists] have actually attacked our homeland, which gives it some oomph."

He said it was no use having an army that did nothing but train.

"There's got to be a certain appetite for what the hell we exist for," he said.