

Hospitals run out of drugs for funds dearth

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lack of funds, halting the supply of contraceptives, drugs, surgical equipment, and vaccines, have put many district hospitals on the brink of suspension of their operations, said health directorate officials and civil surgeons.

Drugs and contraceptives supplies in many districts have almost run out and any further delay may cause extreme difficulties for those district hospitals to operate, some civil surgeons told The Daily Star.

Earlier Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) on February 11 allowed use of Tk 10,617 crore for the Health, Nutrition and Population

Sector Programme (HNPS) for the next three years, which they maintained would only be executed through 29 annual Operational Plans (OPs).

Following the ECNEC meeting the prime minister formed a six-member secretaries committee, which was assigned with supervising the execution of all OPs.

As the committee is still reviewing the Project Implementation Paper (PIP), none of the 29 OPs has yet been prepared for implementation, virtually keeping all activities in the health sector at a stand-still, sources in the health ministry said yesterday.

"The sector-wise programme is in serious trouble as bulk of the essential work of the ministry

remains stalled," said a senior official of a development partner expressing grave concern.

The financial approval of HNPS is yet to be made. Funds for the health ministry would only be made available if the planning commission were satisfied with the spending plans of HNPS.

However, the secretaries committee is expected to meet and place the final draft of HNPS to the ECNEC on March 10. It is anticipated that the ministry may get approval this time since launching of HNPS in reality is already two months behind schedule.

The health secretary could not be contacted for his comments till writing of this report yesterday.

FOREX SMUGGLING Charge-framing hearing against Lobi Mar 25

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Nineteen years into the pressing of charges, a Dhaka tribunal has fixed March 25 for a hearing on charge-framing against BNP lawmaker and Bangladesh Cricket Board President Ali Asghar Lobi in a foreign currency smuggling case.

Judge Mohammad Sirajul Islam of the First Metropolitan Tribunal, Dhaka on Thursday adjourned the hearing following a time petition by Lobi's lawyer.

The same tribunal same day framed charges against former Awami League lawmaker HBM Iqbal and 29 others on same charges.

The tribunal could not frame charges against Lobi as he was not present in the court on that day.

The prosecution story in brief is that Lobi with the help of others collected Saudi rials equivalent to Tk 92 crore from Bangladeshis working in Saudi Arabia in the name of sending those to their relatives in

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PHOTO: STAR

Figures in the sculpture of Raju in front of the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) appear in red cloth, as demonstrators shrouded them yesterday to protest an attack on leading writer Humayun Azad.

DU in stalemate as teachers' strike continues

HASAN JAHI'D TUSHER

The stalemate at Dhaka University (DU) due to the teachers' strike continued for the ninth day yesterday as the DU Teachers' Association (Duta) would not budge until the government met their demands.

The Duta started an indefinite strike on February 28 demanding immediate arrest and punishment of 'real attackers' of DU teacher and writer Humayun Azad, resignation of the home minister and sending Azad abroad for treatment.

Duta General Secretary Muhammad Akhteruzzaman said, "We shall withdraw the programme (strike) only if the government accepts our demands. We shall meet President and Chancellor (of DU) Iajuddin Ahmed and if he assures us of meeting our demands, the programme will end. Otherwise, we shall go for tougher programmes."

Meanwhile, the DU Syndicate at a meeting yesterday urged the prime minister to take steps soon to send Azad abroad for better treatment.

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PHOTO: STAR

STRIPPING THE FORESTLAND Villagers carry logs from a Dighinala forest in Khagrachhari, a Chittagong Hill Tracts district that loses trees to illegal logging every day.

3,309 women raped in last 3 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 3,309 women were raped across the country in the last three years, of whom 351 were killed and 32 committed suicide, according to a press release.

Odhikar, a coalition for human rights, on the basis of news items run by national dailies, revealed the figure on the eve of International Woman's Day yesterday.

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Power crisis feared to be worse in summer

UNB, Dhaka

The current power crisis aggravated further yesterday after suspension of production of another 150 megawatts of electricity due to technical trouble at Ashuganj plant.

The disruption occurred amidst frustration among the Power Development Board (PDB) officials, as the launch of a 210mw plant

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Prayer Timings		
March 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-30	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-10	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

'Outlaws' slaughter ward commissioner

Rajshai BNP puts blame on AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Assailants with suspected ties to the outlawed Purbho Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) yesterday bludgeoned and slaughtered a municipal commissioner and ruling BNP leader in Rajshahi, police and witnesses said.

The attackers hit Anwar Hossain, ward commissioner of Durgapur municipality and joint secretary of the municipal BNP, with an iron rod before slaughtering him in an attack the local BNP

blamed on main opposition Awami League.

Witnesses said the gang of 12 came on bicycles and attacked the 34-year-old on Nargis Cinema Hall Road at about 10:00am, close to the bustling Durgapur Bazaar and 100 yards off the police station.

The operatives, holding up their guns, shouted slogans in favour of the underground outfit, blamed for a series of killings in the northwest district since September 29 last year.

Later in the day, an anonymous

person called several local journalists and claimed responsibility for the killing, identifying himself as a spokesperson for the PBCP.

"We have successfully killed Anwar. Locals hated him... he was our class enemy," a journalist quoted the caller as telling him.

Police arrested Halim, said to have called Anwar out of home in Sapalgachhi village, took him to the town by motorbike and dropped him at the hospital crossing in the morning.

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Israeli hit on Gaza camps kills 14

AFP, Gaza City

At least 14 Palestinians were killed and some 81 others wounded early yesterday as scores of Israeli troops targeted two refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, hours after a failed elaborate Palestinian suicide mission.

Hospital officials said three boys, aged eight, 12 and 15, were among those killed in the operation at the al-Bureij and neighbouring Nuseirat refugee camps while Hamas said three of the dead were members of its radical Islamic movement.

Witnesses said around 30 tanks and jeeps, with aerial cover from two Apache helicopters, secured the entrance of the Bureij camp in central Gaza at around 3:00am (0100 GMT).

After taking over several buildings at the entrance to the camp, the army then announced by loudspeaker that it was imposing a curfew and ordered residents to stay indoors.

An Israeli army source said troops had refrained from entering the center of Bureij as "the area where we are operating in is where the terror cells are

located".

Residents told AFP that some 1,500 people then surged to the entrance where fierce clashes broke out. They were joined by residents from Nuseirat who also pelted the troops with missiles and explosives, triggering exchanges of fire.

Palestinian and Israeli sources said anti-tank missiles, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), Molotov cocktails and stones were hurled at the troops, without causing injuries

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Benapole port remains shut for 4th day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The deadlock in import and export through Benapole land port rolled into the fourth day yesterday after the Indian Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) Agents' Association went into an indefinite strike from March 4.

The Indian C&F agents staged the strike to protest what they said were excesses of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) at Petrapole border, on the other side of Benapole. The BSF personnel recently assaulted C&F agent Shekhar Das when he was trying to enter Bangladesh without multiple visas.

The strike has severely hit revenue earnings of the government. Over 2,000 trucks loaded with goods have remained stranded at Haridaspur border of India having failed to enter Bangladesh due to restrictions imposed by the BSF. Perishable goods in several hundred trucks are rotting to spread stench, posing a public health hazard.

The frontier guards want Indian C&F agents to obtain multiple visas citing security reasons.

There has been virtually no move at official level to end the impasse until 6:30pm yesterday, customs sources said.

SSC EXAMS 329 expelled on 2nd day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 329 examinees were expelled for cheating, while five teachers were relieved of their duties for failing to contain unfair practices on the second day of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination yesterday.

Examinees sat for the test of English second paper.

A total of 135 examinees under Rajshahi Education Board, 65 in Dhaka, 52 under Jessore education Board, 26 in Barisal, 38 in Chittagong, nine in Comilla and four in Sylhet were expelled, according to officials at control room of the Education Ministry.

Two teachers each were relieved of their duties in Rajshahi and Barisal while one was in Dhaka.

Libya ships out last WMD parts

BBC ONLINE, Tripoli

Libya has sent all its known remaining nuclear weapons-related equipment to the US as part of a disarmament deal.

A ship carrying 500 metric tons of equipment left Libya on Saturday for an undisclosed site in the US, White House spokesman Sean Mc-Cormack said.

He said long-range missiles and launchers were also part of the cargo.

The move follows Libya's surprise announcement in December that it was scrapping its weapons programmes in a bid to end its international isolation.

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BB for narrowing spread to lower lending rate

Banks under fire for depriving depositors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The central bank at a meeting yesterday expressed dissatisfaction at the commercial banks for carrying on profiteering at the expense of depositors.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has been asking the banks to narrow the gap between their interest rates on lending and deposit, also known as interest spread, which contains their profit and expenses, by cutting down lending interests.

The commercial banks however have slashed interest rates on both deposit and lending, thereby

keeping their high interest spread or profit margin intact.

"We've advised the banks how to reduce the interest spread without penalising the depositors," BB Deputy Governor Nazrul Huda said after the meeting with the chief executives of all commercial banks at the BB head office.

"In Bangladesh this spread is too wide: between 6 and 12 percent," he noted, "whereas in other countries it normally ranges from 3 to 4 percent."

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Lalmoni Express starts rolling

BSS, Lalmonirhat

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday inaugurated Lalmoni Express inter-city train, making direct rail link between the northern town and the capital.

The PM launched the train's maiden trip to Dhaka at a simple ceremony at Lalmonirhat railway station at 12:20pm.

A special munajat was also offered on the occasion.

According to sources, the train, running via Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge, would use meter gauge rails to carry passengers to and from Lalmonirhat every day except Saturdays.

It would also stop at Kaunia, Gaibandha, Bogra, Shantahar, Natore, Sadanandapur, Saidabad, Ibrahimabad, Tangail, Joydevpur and Dhaka airport stations en route to Kamalapur.

From Tuesday, it would start for

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