

Anti-venom plant lies idle for funds crisis

Importers make windfall

NAIMUL HAQ

The only plant for manufacturing antidote to snake poison in the country has been lying idle for over two decades due to fund constraints, allowing the importers to charge unreasonably for the antivenoms.

In 1978 under a World Health Organisation (WHO) funded special project, an antitoxin plant was established at the Institute of Public Health (IPH). Immediately afterwards, the plant equipped with a few biochemists, virologists and relevant research workers successfully produced antitoxin on a trial basis and by 1982 it got ready to start production as per the WHO standard.

Since then the plant is waiting in vain to start its full-fledged operation profiting the drug stores that hike the prices of antivenoms.

Drug stores now sell the imported antivenom antidote at

about Tk 600 a 10 milliliter vial whereas the same amount of antidote when locally produced would cost a little over Tk 150.

During a visit to the plant last week this correspondent found all machinery under lock and key lying under thick layers of dust. Some of those stainless steel tools have even been rusted due to, what a source said, years of neglect.

"We have requested the health ministry several times to provide us with adequate fund at least to keep the equipment functioning, but got no response," said a source on condition of anonymity.

When contacted, Dr Md Aminul Islam, Director of IPH said, "I have no fund for the maintenance of the expensive machinery of the plant. I know the equipment is decaying but I really am helpless."

"The plant originally was based on a faulty design. Those who installed the apparatus in fact kind of

cheated us. The equipment was not meant for commercial production of the antidote. They were simply brought for experimental purposes," Dr Islam observed.

During the visit this correspondent also found that most of the staff and officials were sitting idle. Out of 20 horses required for deriving the antitoxins, only five are now left with no veterinarian to look after them.

Though the plant is capable of manufacturing 1,20,000 vials of antidote a year, the current demand for antivenoms in the country is being met by the private sector imports who sell the anti-dote at higher prices.

The antidote the plant made during trial proved effective to neutralise the venom of Cobra, Crate, Russell and Ekies species of the serpent commonly found in the country.

Sylhet flood situation unchanged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The overall flood situation in Sylhet region is yet to show any mark of development.

Although the region experienced no rain during the last 24 hours, water rolling down from across Indian hills continued inundating fresh areas in Beanibazar and Jakiganj upazila yesterday.

Direct road communication between the district headquarters and Beanibazar upazila remained snapped as Sadalkhal-Alinagar-Gachhtala parts went under knee deep water. Some passenger coaches continued plying the roads amid risks while other transports stopped using them.

In Beanibazar, all the 10 unions and pourashava areas had been deluged under water, but no relief or grants reached affected people till 6:00pm.

With gushing waters, Jakiganj-Atgram Road was inundated in Jakiganj upazila yesterday. New breaches developed on Kushiara

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PHOTO: STAR

Floodwaters maroon a house in the outlying Kandigaon village in Sylhet, as the rivers in the region burst their banks with run-off that rolled down from upstream Indian hills.

Tribunal set up to try Saddam

Jordanian lawyer slams judge selection

AP, Baghdad

Iraqi leaders have set up a tribunal of judges and prosecutors to try ousted dictator Saddam Hussein and other members of his Baathist regime, a spokesman has announced.

Salem Chalabi, a US-educated lawyer and nephew of the head of the Iraqi National Congress, was named as general director of the tribunal, and he has named a panel of seven judges and four prosecutors, INC spokesman Entefadh Qanbar said on Tuesday.

The tribunal, with a 2004-2005 budget of \$75 million, will also prosecute any members of Saddam's regime who are charged, Qanbar said. A date has yet to be set

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PHOTO: PID

Delegates of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the International Conference Centre at her office yesterday.

Magistrate violates law in sentencing arrestees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A magistrate yesterday violated a Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) ordinance by sentencing 62 women, arrested ahead of the Awami League's Hawa Bhaban siege programme, to three-day imprisonment before the police took them to court.

As per the ordinance, every arrestee has to be produced before a court to defend oneself and the judge is to ask whether he or she pleads guilty or not. The magistrate yesterday failed to follow that provision.

The 62 women were punished with imprisonment along with a fine of Tk 50 each, in default of which they would be confined for an additional two days.

The breach of the ordinance by the magistrate prompted anger

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RAJSHAHI UNIVERSITY Four more appointed sans advertisement

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Rajshahi

Four fresh appointments and attempts to recruit 35 section officers and doctors to Rajshahi University (RU) without proper procedure add to the ongoing stalemate over the controversial April 17 recruitment of 544 employees.

Before leaving for Dhaka a couple of days ago, RU Vice-Chancellor Professor Faisul Islam Faruki appointed two drivers and two helpers to the university without advertisement and proper scrutiny, sources alleged.

The planning section of the university wrapped up its preparation for recruiting five doctors and 30 section officers in a fresh round of appointment, which will be signed by the VC after he returns from Dhaka tonight.

"The files and papers for recruitment were sent to the VC's office for approval," said a source adding they were appointed out of political partisanship.

In a further development, Munnujan Hall Provost Professor Fahima Khatun yesterday told reporters that she would resign in protest at the recruitment of 544 employees, which she called illegal.

The RU Teachers' Association's indefinite strike that began on Tuesday to demand immediate cancellation of the controversial recruitment and removal of the VC and Pro-VC continued. Teachers yesterday have been in office, but did not work.

About 200 of the 544 employees are yet to join office due to lack of

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BSF proceeds erecting fence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Tension mounted again between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force (BSF), as the BSF continued erecting a barbed wire fence yesterday morning.

The BSF started to fence the Padma Shakhra border near Bhomra land port, violating Tuesday's flag meeting decision made by the two sides.

Both the BDR and BSF took face to face position and re-enforced their forces along the bordering areas. The BSF authorities stopped the construction work at about 12 noon when the BDR cautioned its counterpart, hoisting red flag opposite to Panitara area in India.

At a flag meeting, second in two days, held at Padma Shakhra yesterday afternoon, the BSF authorities agreed to break down the fence erected until yesterday, meeting sources said.

Lt Col Mahbubur Rahman, commanding officer of 12 Rifles

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Rajuk's drive against delinquent builders caught in lawsuits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakhsha (Rajuk), the city planning authority of Dhaka, is in a dilemma with thousands of lawsuits that render its initiatives to contain building code violations ineffective.

Rajuk Chairman Iqbal Uddin Chowdhury said building code violations are so wide and varied that it has become well nigh impossible for Rajuk inspectors to find a single building in the metropolis free

of the fault. "I can tell you, 99 percent of the buildings in the capital are in gross violation of the existing rules."

In most cases, building code violators get away with their acts by seeking and getting stay orders from courts on Rajuk interventions.

For example, recently, Rajuk cancelled the plan of a building in Lalmatia for a number of building code violations and took measures to demolish the structure. The developer went to a court and obtained an order to maintain the

status quo invalidating the Rajuk initiative and continued with construction of the six-storey house.

As many as 5,000 such cases are pending with different law courts, said a Rajuk official. Most of the building code violators manage to complete their construction works within the period of the stay order or status quo, he said, adding, in some cases the courts' judgements even go for the defaulters.

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Work on high-tech traffic signal system starts in May

BSS, Dhaka

Installation works of computerised traffic signal in the capital begins next month in a bid to ease traffic congestion and control entire traffic system.

In the first phase, the new high-tech signaling system will be set up at Gulshan-1, Gulshan-2, Matshya Bhaban and Shahbagh crossings and later expanded to 69 traffic points of the metropolis in phases.

"The signal system will be installed under Dhaka Urban Transport Project at a cost of Tk 14 crore," Abdul Qaiyum, director of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC)

portion of the project, told the news agency yesterday.

They have procured necessary equipment and accessories from Australia and Austria to introduce the elaborately planned system, he said adding that traffic movement in the city will be automatically guided under the new system.

ATS, an Australian firm, is currently working to set up a central control room for the sophisticated signaling module and will start installing the total traffic management service from mid May.

ATS engineers will also cover maintenance of the system for three years. Engineers and experts of the

firm will also impart necessary training to the DCC engineers for running the system, Qaiyum added.

He said the current signaling system, however, will remain operative side by side with the new one, he added.

The computerised signal system is being introduced to make the city free from vehicular congestion and overall improvement of traffic movements.

The executive director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Board expected installation works would be completed by August-September.

HC asks REB to explain dismissal of RPCL chief

STAR REPORT

The High Court has asked the Rural Electrification Board (REB) chairman and some other officials to explain by May 1 why the dismissal of the chief of Rural Power Company Limited (RPCL) will not be declared illegal.

The court notice came last week after a conflict surfaced between RPCL Managing Director Abdus Sabur and some officials of REB and its company RPCL over alleged corruption in the donor-funded first phase 280 megawatt Dhaka North Power Plant.

Early this month, some REB board members dismissed Sabur on

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7 Palestinians killed in Israeli raid

AFP, Gaza City

Seven Palestinians were killed yesterday, raising to 11 the overall death toll from an Israeli incursion into the northern Gaza Strip that the army said was aimed at halting rocket attacks by Palestinian militants.

The deaths occurred during clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen in Beit Lahiyah, which left another 45 people wounded.

Witnesses said at least two of the dead were militants who had been involved in armed clashes with the army but that others had been merely throwing stones.

The dead gunmen were named as Raafat Abu Hasira, a member of the radical Islamic Jihad, and Suheil Al-Hirsh, from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

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CTG ARMS HAUL IO dropped, CID to probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The OC of Karnaphuli Police Station has been dropped from the charge to probe the largest ever arms haul at Chittagong port, as the CID is most likely to take over.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) yesterday received an order to this end, said a senior officer of the CMP requesting anonymity. The officer said a letter issued from the

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Prayer Timings		
April 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-27	6-31
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Car bomb kills 10 in Saudi Arabia

REUTERS, Riyadh

At least 10 people were killed and dozens wounded when a car bomb destroyed a Saudi security service building in the capital Wednesday, witnesses said.

Officials in Riyadh described it as a "terrorist attack" and Arab television said the body of suicide bomber had been found. One Saudi source said five car bomb attempts had been foiled in the past week but this, the sixth, got past tight security.

"The front of a building is blown off and smoke is still rising," a Reuters correspondent said from outside the building, which housed administrative offices for the secu-

urity forces.

People on the scene said they saw 10 bodies and dozens of wounded being carried into ambulances. Fires raged long after the blast, which left a deep crater and a street carpeted in debris from the shattered six-storey building.

"We believe it is a terrorist attack," a Saudi Interior Ministry source told Reuters. He said a car packed with explosives blew up in al-Murabaa district.

The kingdom, a key US ally and the world's largest oil exporter, is battling a tide of Islamist militancy linked to Saudi-born Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

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India plugs Bangladesh border

REUTERS, Mandal Bazar, India

India sealed its eastern frontier with Bangladesh yesterday as the strife-torn border state of Tripura prepared for the second phase of voting in the world's largest democracy.

Thousands of police and paramilitary troops were deployed and air surveillance ordered in Tripura, which votes on Thursday. India says tribal insurgents fighting New Delhi's rule and who have vowed to disrupt the election are based in camps in Bangladesh. Dhaka denies the charge.

"The threat from insurgents to the election remains," said state police chief Gyanshyam Murari Srivastava. "We are adding dozens more security posts near the border as a second line of defence."

India kicked off its five-phase election on Tuesday with sporadic

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JS body against cluster villages near Sundarbans

BSS, Dhaka

A parliamentary standing committee yesterday opposed setting up any cluster village in the adjacent areas of the Sundarbans.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Environment and Forest at a meeting at Jatiya Sangsad (JS) Bhaban strongly recommended the ministry concerned not to build any cluster village around the world's largest mangrove forest, meeting sources said.

The JS body, in its eighth meeting, also reviewed the reports of forest department officials on top-

dying trees and forest fire.

It formed a three-member sub-committee headed by Kalim Uddin Ahmed to probe into corruption charges against forest officials. Hafiz Uddin Ahmed and M Shahidul Islam became other members of the sub-committee.

Among others, Environment and Forest Minister Shajahan Siraj, Kalim Uddin Ahmed, Hafiz Uddin Ahmed and M Shahidul Islam, were present at the meeting while Jafrul Islam Chowdhury, state minister for environment and forest, attended it on special invitation.