

Politics chokes

FROM PAGE 1 suspended as more than 80,000 of them across the country are not getting their salaries for months.

It has blocked contraceptive distribution, routine immunisation, safe delivery and to some extent primary healthcare services.

The two-room, corrugated iron-roofed CCs were supposed to provide the services under a package known as the essential service package.

The CCs were also expected to act as the 'basic centre' for all rural childbirth and phase out traditional home delivery at the hands of untrained birth attendants that contributes to the death of 20,000 women during delivery.

A health ministry source said: "The CCs were supposed to be run by two paramedics—a health assistant and a family welfare visitor (FWW) or sub-assistant community medical officer (SACMO). A general physician from the nearest upazila health complex was supposed to visit them on weekly basis."

Each CC was supposed to be supplied with 17 drugs including antibiotics, antiseptics, painkillers, digestive pills, anti-worm tablets and cough syrups of Tk 50,000.

But no CC received the supply as the ministry did not allocate the fund for them.

Dr Mahbubur Rahman, director of Primary Healthcare, said: "As the CCs are not functioning, primary healthcare services are not reaching out to many villages."

A senior official of the family planning directorate said, "We have had a lot of problems with the CCs. Many people who donated land for them demanded immediate operation of the health units in their area, but we could not supply them with the required things."

The CCs, built by the two main constructing agencies of the state—Construction, Maintenance and Management Unit (CMMU) and the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) on donated land in the fiscal 1999-2001, were located in the centre of each union to offer easy access to people.

But a health ministry official said poor construction was one of the main reasons for not using the clinics.

Health Secretary Sarwar Kamal said: "About 85 percent of the CCs are lying unused and sadly many of them have also suffered damage."

Asked what the government was planning to do with the CCs, he said, "We have decided to run and manage the CCs by experienced NGOs. Initially 250 of them would be put to service and the programme may be expanded basing on experience."

"It would be a public-private partnership to promote local level supervision and ownership. Eventually, people would choose which is the best bet for them," Kamal added.

Fossils reveal

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widfires. "It's amazing that there should be an accumulation of vegetation, either as litter or as living vegetation drying out - to provide fuel for a fire," co-author Professor Dianne Edwards of Cardiff University told BBC News Online.

"And even more amazing that a lightning strike set it off." The team used a technique known as reflected-light microscopy on a collection of well-preserved plants recovered from dig at Ludford Lane.

The fossils have been preserved in three-dimensions, rather than being compressed. This is unique amongst Silurian plant remains.

Charcoal has a high optical reflectance due to chemical changes that occur when organic material burns. The results confirmed that this was the case for the Silurian plants.

The researchers also found other evidence that the fossils were charred such as shrinkage of the epidemics, that covers the surface of the plant.

In Geology, the University of Cardiff team propose that the exceptional three-dimensional preservation of the plants is due to their charring in a wildfire.

However, comparisons with the reflectance values of experimentally charred plants show most of the

Ludford Lane specimens were only partially turned to charcoal.

This indicates that they were burnt by either a short-lived, low temperature fire or a smouldering fire that was only intense enough to partially char them.

This agrees well with proposed compositions for the Silurian atmosphere.

Oxygen levels are supposed to have been lower in Silurian times; about 18% compared with present-day levels of roughly 21%.

Lower levels of oxygen in the atmosphere, combined with a restricted fuel source, may have produced less intense wildfires and therefore less reflective charcoal.

Professor Edwards said that the fire may have been similar to a modern heathland fire.

"The climate of the time would have had some extremely dry seasons as well as wet seasons. There would have been aridity and presumably plants would have dried out," she explained.

"Or there could have been accumulations of plants that had been in floods and that could have formed a fuel."

The researchers also found a charred coprolite - fossilised faeces - amongst the Ludford Lane specimens, that probably came from a millipede.

Money made

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26 and has since been waiting at the jail gate to receive his two brothers-in-law.

Pallabi police arrested his relatives Selim and Rafiq, who came to the capital on a visit after appearing in the SSC examinations, but fell victim to "the mindless arrests".

"I had to spend Tk 3,500 after my son, Mintu, was arrested on April 23. I gave Khligaon police Tk 100 to get information on him," said Abdul Jalil, an auto-rickshaw driver.

"I don't have any money to pay the jail staff now for his release," he said, adding he had to spend a large amount of the money on lawyers or on court formalities.

Jail officials said they released 350 prisoners until 8:00pm yesterday, with 100 more on a list for immediate release. They said more than 2,500 others will be released in the next few days.

The jail staff and police constables are taking Tk 50 to Tk 100 from each relative only to give information on the prisoners, arrested ahead of the main opposition Awami League's April 30 deadline for unseating the government.

"I paid Tk 300 in the last four days to a broker only to know the condition of my 13-year-old brother Arif," said Ripon of Mirpur. A class VIII student, Arif was picked up from in front of his house at Mirpur Section No. 10 on April 23 when he was returning

Submarine cable

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technology and e-governance to strengthen the foundations of an accountable democratic government as the benefit of joining the network.

"During the rule of the previous government, internet connection was limited to eight districts, but the coalition government expanded it to 164 upazilas of 64 districts and will extend it more," the prime minister said in reply to a question of a ruling BNP lawmaker.

Weekly 2000 journos stabbed, mugged in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An unknown gang stabbed and robbed a Weekly 2000 correspondent of money at Nandankanan in Chittagong on Tuesday.

The gang of four aboard a CNG autorickshaw waylaid Sumi Khan, the port city correspondent of the weekly, on Bouddha Mandir Road at about 10:00pm when she was going to the bus counter of SA Paribahan in Kazir Dewri by rickshaw.

The gang tried to force her into their autorickshaw. As she resisted, they stabbed her in the forehead before snatching her handbag with Tk 6,500, the journalist said in an FIR (first information report) filed with Kotwali Police Station.

Police could not arrest anyone until 6:30pm yesterday.

"You have gone too far and the consequences will only be more dangerous if you continue to write in such an aggressive manner," Sumi said quoting one of the attackers as saying.

Chittagong Union of Journalists in a statement condemned the attack and demanded immediate arrest of the culprits.

Hartal fizzles out

FROM PAGE 1 Danik Bangla crossings and at Muktacong.

Movement of vehicles was thin during the hartal period. Shops and business establishments remained closed and classes were not held at educational institutions.

Security was stepped up with heavy deployment of police at strategic points and on the main roads.

Police cordoned off the area around the AL central office at Bangabandhu Avenue. A procession brought out by party leaders in support of the hartal marched within the barricaded area.

AL leaders including Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Suranjit Sengupta, Amir Hossain Amy and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya were seen sitting in front of the party office during the hartal hours.

Tofail and Maya also addressed a rally at the spot, declaring the hartal a success and demanding immediate resignation of the government.

At around 11:40am, AL Organising Secretary Akhtaruzzaman, central leaders Asaduzzaman Noor and Mahmudur Rahman Manna addressed a rally at Danik Bangla Crossing and brought out a silent

procession. But police immediately swooped on the procession and nabbed five AL and Jubo Mohila League (JML) workers.

Police became more aggressive as JML activists hurled brickbats at them. Akhtaruzzaman, Noor and Manna later managed release of the activists nabbed by police. They tried to convince police that their procession would march peacefully.

As the procession started again, police prevented it from going towards Bangabandhu Avenue.

Noor then told journalists, "This only shows the present move to bring down the government has unnerved it."

Police then asked the procession to move through Bijnaynagar peacefully. The AL workers then started chanting anti-government slogans and police charged used batons to disperse them.

Asked about the police swoop on processions, SM Mohiuddin, officer-in-charge of Mofajheel Police Station, said, "It might be their right to protest but they cannot take away the citizen's right to move on the streets freely."

AL lawmakers led a procession from Dhanmondi to Manik Mian

Avenue amid heavy police deployment in the area and returned to Russell Square to stage a sit-in there throughout the hartal hours.

Senior party leaders who joined the sit-in included Abdus Samad Azad, Mohammad Nasim, Abdur Razzaq and Abdus Shahid.

In the evening, police crowded in front of Nasim's Dhanmondi residence, allegedly after tapping suspicious telephonic conversation with JML leaders, and picked up three women leaders, including Nasrin, when they stepped out of the gate. Police took them to an undisclosed destination for interrogation.

At around 11:00am, police swooped on JSD-Inu procession in front of the party office in Motijheel. They assaulted an activist.

Police dispersed the party leaders including Nazmul Haq Pradhan and workers taking part in the procession.

Elsewhere in the country, several AL activists were injured in clashes between police and the activists in Comilla and three activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League were injured in clashes with the police in Sylhet.

Biman

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who have since Sunday stopped flying F28 aircraft to the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu citing technical problems encountered due to freezing conditions over the Himalayan region.

Referring to these pilots as having been born to beggars, Haq said their ambition to fly DC-10s was a fantasy, which sparked yesterday's boycott of domestic flights.

Haq could not be reached for the official version of the matter. However, another Biman official claimed that the newspaper misquoted Haq.

The pilots called off the boycott at 6:00pm yesterday following assurance from Biman's Managing Director Akhtar Hossain Khan that he would take action against Haq and make sure that he withdraws the comment.

The Daily Star tried several times to reach Khan by phone for his comments, but he was not available.

Meanwhile, pilots of F28s yesterday also withdrew their boycott of flights to Kathmandu on assurance from Biman's management that the planes will be taken off the Dhaka-Kathmandu route should any further trouble is reported.

A Biman press statement said flight BG 701 to Kathmandu carrying 77 passengers left at 1:05pm while another flight BG 702 arrived from Kathmandu at 5:30pm with 71 passengers.

DMCH

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The construction of the burns unit was completed in November last year and it was handed over to the DMCH. It started treating patients from last week.

Up to 10 burn patients are being admitted to the DMCH a day and most of them are being treated in different wards of the hospital due to lack of space at the burns department, sources said.

Other than offering treatment, the specialised hospital will also provide training for young plastic surgeons, said Dr Samanta Lal Sen, head of DMCH's burns unit.

"It will also offer postgraduate degrees in burns and plastic surgery," he said adding 10 students will be enrolled under the department every academic session.

"It will be a centre of excellence, where experienced plastic surgeons from abroad will come and share their expertise with our young generation," Dr Sen added.

The six-storey hospital will be built on top of the existing building and house all possible support for burn patients.

Shattered dreams

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Complex, pointing at the community clinic that stands idle, but was supposed to provide a package of healthcare services to a population of 6,000 in the union.

"We have no drugs, no manpower and no piece of furniture for the clinic," Ali added.

Mosamat Jahura Khatun and her neighbours who donated the land to the government for the clinic said dejectedly, "We feel cheated by the government."

During a visit, this correspondent found the clinic locked and in a state of dilapidation. The plaster of the building was crumbling while the tubewell rusted. No-one visits the clinic that had been built with an ambition to serve the locals six days a week with the basic healthcare services as announced by the government.

Across the Gazipur district, 140 community clinics like this one had been constructed. Most of those have been lying deserted for years due to lack of logistics and manpower, the civil surgeon's (CS) office told The Daily Star.

"We are afraid even to meet members of the community groups as many of them have accused health officials of pilfering the allocated drugs and the furniture," said an official of the Gazipur CS's office.

Finance ministry

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all. One finance ministry official said, "At the end, if this committee is not formed, officials of the two ministries will sit together to decide on how to allocate the subsidy."

The agriculture ministry is pushing for long-term subsidy in fertiliser, irrigation and seeds, while the finance ministry has agreed to subsidise seeds, but not irrigation and fertiliser.

A report of the agriculture ministry shows the pitfalls of not subsidising fertiliser. In the free market of fertiliser, the price of urea fertiliser rose by 2.1 percent in February 2004 from February 2003. Over the same time, the price of potash rose by 31.83 percent, TSP by 17.97 percent and DAP by 7.36 percent.

This disproportionate price hike has led the farmers to refrain from using potash, TSP and DAP and to use urea excessively, causing huge damage to farmlands. Such practice can be prevented by subsidising the import price of potash, TSP and DAP fertilisers, for which the agriculture ministry proposes a subsidy of Tk 602 crore.

"Due to the policy of privatisation and free market economy, the government started withdrawing subsidy in all agriculture inputs excepting urea in the mid-eighties," the report notes.

"As per the GATT Agreement on Agriculture, all nations excepting the least developed countries were supposed to withdraw agriculture subsidy. But in reality the situation is the reverse. Low-income country Bangladesh has withdrawn subsidy while others did not..." Furthermore these countries have gradually increased subsidy. This situation calls for reviewing the situation in the light of increased agriculture production and poverty reduction."

The agriculture ministry also demands subsidy for diesel, which fuels irrigation. But the finance minister refuses the request saying it will be misused.

Economists however hold quite different views.

Dr Uttam Kumar Dev, a research fellow at the Centre for Policy

Dialogue, notes, "In Bangladesh, the cost of rice irrigation is 51 dollars per hectare, which is 32 dollars in India and only 18 dollars in Thailand. Because of this high irrigation cost, our agriculture production cost is so high."

"Ninety percent of the total irrigation projects of the country depend on diesel. But it really is dear. So, it needs subsidy. Only, as diesel has multiple usage, the government should ensure that the subsidy is used for agriculture only," Dev suggested.

He advocated for increasing subsidy and investment in the agriculture sector and said, "The WTO's rule allows countries to provide 10 percent of the value of agriculture product as domestic support. But, Bangladesh is currently allotting only 0.4 to 0.5 percent of that value."

Dev also said, if the government could ensure quality seeds, the agriculture production would rise by 2.2 million tonnes a year.

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Director General Dr Quazi Shahabuddin in this regard suggested a comprehensive long-term government policy so that the farmers get maximum benefits from the agriculture subsidy.

Referring to the government's recent waiver of interest on default agriculture loans up to Tk 5,000 and some other farm subsidies, he observed that these were all temporary measures. "A comprehensive plan will benefit both the farmers and the consumers."

BIDS Research Director Dr Asaduzzaman said there should be short-term, mid-term and long-term subsidy and investment policies.

He also observed that the agriculture extension, marketing and technological development were in need of more investments. "Agriculture is not just crops but also livestock and fisheries," he pointed out, "so, the investment should go in all these sectors."

Govt plans

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Police arrested about 15,000 people in eight days of clampdown in Dhaka from April 18 under the ordinance ahead of the AL's April 30 deadline for unseating the government.

After the meeting, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed said: "Some innocent people might have been harassed, but the arrests served the greater interest of the nation."

"We have evidence that the opposition wanted to topple the government in a unconstitutional way," he said, adding the police operation could foil the opposition plot.

"No government can sit idle when an opposition leader threatens to unseat the government through an armed struggle," he replied to a question.

The LGRD minister told the meeting, held after a gap of seven months, that law and order recently improved, but the government wanted further improvements.

"If we can bring the culprits to book, law and order would be better," Bhuiyan said.

"We are planning to increase the number of police and providing them with logistics and facilities to improve the situation."

He underscored the importance of intense monitoring of the law-enforcers.

On the largest ever arms seizure in Chittagong, he said, "A committee working on the arms haul will submit the report very soon."

Moudud said a draft proposal for providing the police with better logistics would be worked out in the next meeting of the committee.

The minister stressed the need for forming permanent independent investigation cells to follow criminal cases. Thirty such pilot cells work-

ing with as many police stations have set good examples, he said.

Moudud said the meeting decided in principle to set up a police intelligence force to watch the activities of police and would adopt the proposal in the next meeting.

Moudud also stressed the need for efficient and non-political public prosecutors to reduce the sufferings of people.

Proshika

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during the last three days of police remand, Rob added.

Rob and three other Proshika staff were arrested on April 20 near the NGO's office in Pallabi under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure which mandates police to arrest anyone on suspicion.

The High Court however on Tuesday issued a rule on the government, directing it to explain why Rob, arrested under the said section, was placed on remand, which the law prohibits.

Rob was produced before the CMM's Court at 11:00am on completion of a three-day police remand and later was taken to the chamber of Metropolitan Magistrate Shafiq Anwar for recording his statements. But Rob refused to give statements.

Later, he was taken to an unspecified place and after an hour was brought to the magistrate's chamber where he gave statements for three hours without any break.

Magistrate Jagannath Das Khokan, after hearing both sides, took the petition into cognisance and ordered that Rob be sent to Dhaka Central Jail.

2 cops, 1 Ansar

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the bomb attack on outlaws. Police Commissioner Sheikh Sajjad Ali and senior KMP officials visited the spot and the injured at the KMCH.

SI Moshirur Rahman of Khanjahan Ali Police Station filed an FIR (first information report) naming none as accused. No-one has been arrested so far.

On April 10, Havildar Akram Hossain of special armed forces was killed in a bomb attack under Sonadanga Police Station. Janajuddho faction of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) claimed responsibility for the attack.

The very next day, outlaws carried out another bomb attack on Moolapota Police box, but no-one was injured.

Earlier in January, a member of an extremist outfit was killed and a BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) captain severely injured in a shootout between joint forces and outlaws at Bejiradanga under Phultala Police Station.

The PBCP (Janajuddho) has recently leafleted different parts of the southwestern region giving death threats to police in retaliation for the death of PBCP cadres killed by police. Journalists are also on the hit-list for "serving the purpose of police", said the leaflets.

Poverty-cut

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"Solid improvement in the macro-economic fundamentals and structural reforms that are boosting investment activity, such as the modernisation of the textile industry, underpin this outlook," the ADB said.

It said economic prospects in Afghanistan are promising and annual growth of 15 percent in the medium term is feasible although this will require the "commitment of the international community to meet the country's investment and security needs."

Sri Lanka's growth is projected to be 5.0 percent this year and 5.5 percent in 2005 but much will depend on the economic policies of the new government and the future of the peace talks with Tamil rebels.

Nepal's growth is forecast to be 4.0 percent this year and 5.0 percent next year but much will depend on the security situation in the country, the ADB said.

In Bhutan strong growth is projected at 7.0 percent this year and 8.0 percent next year.

"A major hydropower project to be commissioned in September 2005 will provide a large step-up in export and budget revenues," the report said.

Cheated job-seekers

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Commenting on the manner in which the passage of the youths to Iraq was orchestrated, a source at the Consular and Welfare Directorate said on condition of anonymity, "It's astonishing that a group of people could travel to the war-ravaged Iraq without being noticed by the immigration authorities."

"It's clear that a well-networked syndicate is behind the racketeering."

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Secretary Dailil Uddin Mandal said: "We could not initiate any step in this regard, as none of the victims filed a formal complaint with us. But we are investigating the roles of the recruiting and travelling agents concerned."

Daili also said when interrogated at the airport, the repatriated youths told some officials of the ministry that they went abroad just to have a tour.

The travelling agents, Kazi Air, which also is a recruiting agent, and Grenadine International, which is yet to be traced, cannot dodge their responsibility in the incident, the secretary said.

Kazi Mofizur Rahman, owner of Kazi Air, claimed his agency just sold 10 air tickets and had nothing else to do with the matter.

112 killed in Thai clashes

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mosque after police removed the last of the bodies, wrapped in blood-stained shrouds.

No group claimed responsibility for the highly coordinated assault by possibly hundreds of young militants, although past violence has been blamed on separatists seeking to carve a homeland in the Muslim-majority south of this predominantly Buddhist country.

Soldiers and police -- tipped off in advance -- were waiting for the poorly armed assailants. Some had guns but most carried only machetes, said Lt. Gen. Proong Machaphand, the chief of police for the south.

"The security officers have been patiently working with local people and gathering intelligence. We waited for the right time to achieve this success," he said.

Many parts of the region have been under martial law for months. Security was tightened yesterday along the border with neighbouring Malaysia, which has in the past denied allegations of harbouring militants.

The violence erupted at 5:00am (2200 GMT Tuesday) when the insurgents attacked more than 15 police bases, village defence posts and district offices in Yala, Pattani and Songkhla provinces in a bid to steal weapons.

It was the worst bloodshed seen in the south where almost daily attacks by gunmen have left nearly 160 people dead this year, including Wednesday's toll.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said the raids were linked to a Jan. 4 attack on a military camp in nearby Narathiwat province, which triggered an upsurge of violence in the area this year. Four soldiers were killed and hundreds of guns stolen in that raid.

Thaksin denied the attackers had connections to international terrorists.

"Most of the insurgents are youths from the southern provinces," he said. "Their acts are not linked with international terrorists."

He said the attackers intended "to rob guns from defence volunteers and district offices, but our troops were well prepared for that."

"They arrived at the target point with brand new motorcycles. This proves they got financial support from influential figures, including politicians and drug gangsters," he said.

Elsewhere in the troubled region, trucks disgorged dozens of soldiers in combat gear to reinforce the already extremely tight security presence. Authorities sealed off roads leading to the attacked checkpoints and police stations.

Jailil now to play