

Illegal blood banks mushrooming

MIZANUR KHAN

Over 100 blood banks are operating in the city without permission of the government at risk to public health, as the health directorate apparently shut its eyes to the mushrooming business.

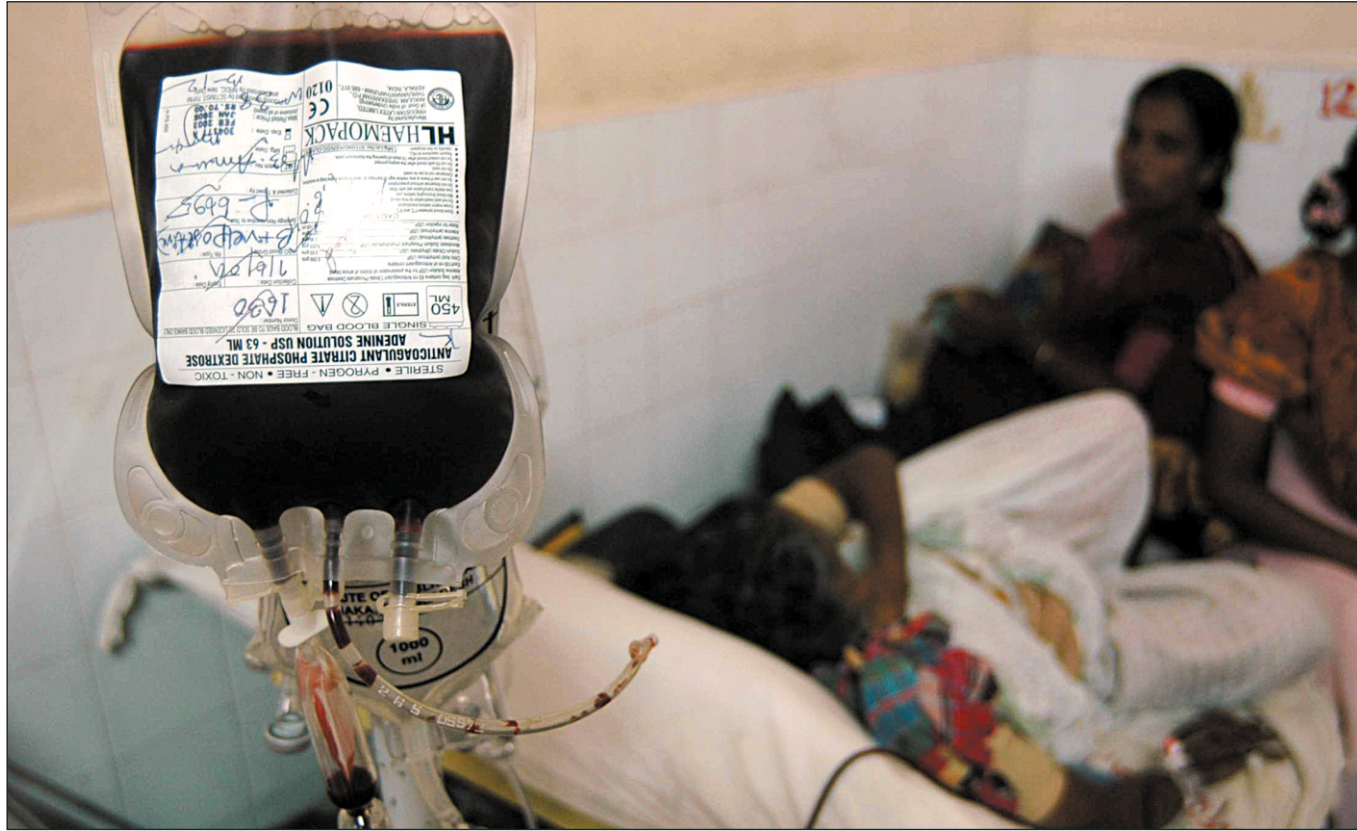
"Private blood banks are growing around hospitals and clinics and government control over blood sales came to nought," said a health directorate official, who would not give his name.

Sources alleged dishonest businesspeople, most of them retired doctors of blood collection centres in government hospitals, run the illegal blood banks in underhand dealings with high officials of the directorate.

People in times of emergency rush to the blood banks, which sell substandard blood. As government hospitals lack effective collection units, patients rely on the private centres that usually collect blood from professional donors.

"About 70 percent of the patients at the emergency departments of hospitals are given unsafe blood from professional donors," a doctor at

About 70 percent of the patients at the emergency departments of hospitals are given unsafe blood from professional donors



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) said.

A conservative study says voluntary donors provide about 50,000 bags against an annual demand for 250,000 in the city, with the rest coming from people who sell two or three bags of blood a month to scrape a living.

Sandhani, a medical students' organisation that organises blood donation camps, collected 40,000 bags last year. Other non-profit organisations such as Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, Lions Club and Rotary International collected 20,000 bags the same year.

"Most professional donors are drug addicts and their blood contains inadequate blood cells and harmful virus like hepatitis B," said Dr Ziaul Islam Khandokar, organiser of a voluntary blood donation programme under Quantum Foundation.

He says his organisation collects and supplies blood after five tests such as HIV, HBsAg, (hepatitis B virus), HCV (hepatitis C virus) and VDRL (test for syphilis) and malaria.

Sandhani, Red Crescent, Lions International and Quantum Foundation collect blood from voluntary donors and supply it to the patients. "We

take Tk 100 a bag and Tk 350 in service charge," Dr Khandokar said.

Private blood banks do not have screening facility and their owners say they usually do not carry out screening. They said screening costs about Tk 450 a bag, while they give professional donors only Tk 90 a bag.

"If anyone goes for all tests, the price of a blood bag will cross Tk 700 up from the current price Tk 200," said Mohammad Sharif, owner of Mukti Blood Centre on Green Road.

The DMCH blood centre has insufficient collection from voluntary donors. "The DMCH needs about 100 bags a day, but the blood centre can provide only 40 bags," said Medical Technologist KG Mortuza.

"Most bags delivered through the blood bank come from Sandhani or the relatives of patients. Collection at government blood banks is poor," he said.

In emergency, brokers take advantage of the situation and lead the relatives of patients to private blood banks, which sell blood at higher prices and charge high for blood grouping and cross matching.

"It was late night and I could not manage blood for my husband. I rushed to a private bank in Lalbagh and bought two bags of blood at Tk 1,200," said Rezina Khatun, attending to her husband at the DMCH.

Private blood banks in Lalbagh and Chankharpu, close to the DMCH, buy a bag of 450ml blood at Tk 90 and sell it at Tk 350.

"A, B and O negative blood is costlier than positive groups. It becomes dearer at midnight," said Mohammad Babul, an office assistant of Donor Life Save Blood in Chankharpu.

Director of Hospital at Health Directorate Dr Abdur Rashid says there is no registered private blood bank in the city, as the organisation does not license such business.

"We are working on a policy for blood banks and hope to submit its draft to the health ministry by next month," Dr Rashid said.

He said a few unauthorised blood banks near the DMCH, Suhrawardy Hospital, Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital in Mohakhlai sell blood illegally. "We have formed a team to look into the illegal business. We will take action after receiving the report."

Novo Theatre not yet ready to take off

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Dhaka Modern Novo Theatre runs the risk of missing another deadline, as it is not yet ready to open to visitors this month because of lack of machinery.

The science and information and communication technology ministry says it will have to depend on the arrival of Japanese machinery for the Novo Theatre to run.

A project official said the letter of credit was opened and it will take at least 15 more days for the equipment to arrive from Japan and many more days for the Novo Theatre to run.

The launch of the Novo Theatre has become uncertain because of technical problems with machinery, officials working on the project said.

The secretary of the ministry, Dr Omar Faruque, and Project Director Dr Khadija Begum declined to give details on the issue.

Although official news

agency BSS reported on the inauguration of Novo Theatre by June, the ministry could not confirm it.

"BSS did not talk to us about the inauguration. We are trying to launch it as early as possible," Dr Omar Faruque said.

Dr Khadija said: "We cannot say anything about it until July."

On the fund of an additional Tk 3 crore for machinery, the secretary said the government is ready to bear the additional cost.

The initial plan was to have a three-month trial run of the machinery before inauguration of the theatre, but the Japanese experts will have hardly any time for trial if it starts by July.

In a meeting with the Public Works Department (PWD) on May 20, the ministry said some minor changes should be carried out before the handover of the Novo Theatre from the PWD to the ministry.

The delay in the project and fund allocation also hampered the work of Novo

Theatre. A PWD official said the ministry is yet to pay Tk 3 crore for the construction, carried on five acres near Bijoy Sarani in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

"The ministry is shifting the blame onto the PWD for the delay, but the real problem is machinery," a PWD engineer said.

"This is a prestigious project for the government and the ministry as well and it will generate a huge income," the secretary said.

India has about 25 such theatres and Pakistan 8. GOTO India that is also maintaining the Science City of Kolkata will be in charge of maintaining the Novo Theatre for a year after the Japanese experts leave this year.

The project proposal of the Novo Theatre was laid out in 1995 and the Awami League government changed the name of the project to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre and asked for tender in 1996. The construction of the main building began on July 17, 2000.

After the BNP came back to power in 2001, the project was renamed Dhaka Modern Novo Theatre and the construction restarted in July 2002.

The Novo Theatre, designed to create interest in people, especially children, about astronomy and space science, has a 350-seat planetarium where people will be able to view moving images of the planets and stars and has an auditorium of 170 seats.

A three-storey building has been constructed for administrative work and there will also be exhibitions to enhance knowledge of space and other disciplines of science.

To maintain the equilibrium with nature, three water retention bodies, fountains, a flower garden, garden lights and soothing landscape were also built in the theatre area. The total cost of the project was estimated at Tk 120.321 crore, approved by the Executive Committee of National Economic Council.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

CRUSH PROGRAMME



AKMI MOUSIN



The Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) yesterday destroyed a huge quantity of foreign liquor, beer, phensidyl, marijuana, heroin and other illegal drugs, seized during raids in the city, at its warehouse at Gandaria.