

BAR ON REAGENT

Tests go haywire as substandard chemicals used

NAIMUL HAQ

A restriction on import of 12 categories of lab chemicals prompted widespread use of low-grade substances in private diagnostic laboratories and hospitals, leading to false and inaccurate diagnoses.

Brokers have allegedly been smuggling in adulterated chemicals to supply them to the wholesalers in Hatkhola and BMA Bhaban on Topkhana Road since the restriction was slapped in March after over 100 people died from drinking methanol for addiction about four years ago in Gaibandha and Narsingdi.

The majority of diagnoses, mostly biochemistry and histopathological tests, are highly likely to give incorrect or false conclusions, including microscopic examinations to confirm biopsy of tissues as in the case of cancer.

The concern came to a head after a series of wrong diagnostic

tests was detected. A patient in a leading diagnostic centre in Dhanmondi tested positive for urine infection and the same person got a negative test result from a research laboratory after he went there to reconfirm the test.

A biopsy test for suspected cancer at a diagnostic centre was positive, but a second examination confirmed that the patient had tissue damage, not cancer. Another patient at a Dhanmondi laboratory tested positive for thyroid cancer, but a second test showed a negative result.

"We use ethanol, methanol, acetone and toluene for chemical reaction called staining in biochemistry and histo-pathology laboratories. If low-grade chemicals are used with reagents, the possibility of getting a false outcome is almost 99 percent which is a dangerous practice," said a biochemist of a research laboratory.

According to the Import Policy

2003-06, only pharmaceutical companies and a few other relevant users like research laboratories can import ethanol, methanol, acetone, diethyl ether, potassium permanganate, chromic acid, carbolic acid, acetic anhydride, toluene and other chemicals. But commercial use is prohibited.

On the issue, Dr ABM Haroon, managing director of Samorita Hospital, said, "I wrote to the Drug Administration to allow limited import for all diagnostic centres in Dhaka but did not get any response."

"We also face similar problems and have no option but to use whatever chemicals are available," an official of the Popular Diagnostic said.

A lab technician, asking not to be named, told The Daily Star: "We use low concentration diluted chemicals. Biochemists or pathologists

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PHOTO: STAR

RAIDING RAIN: A woman duty officer at Demra Police Station in Dhaka positions herself strategically on a chair in rain-swamped workplace yesterday. Daylong torrential monsoon rains submerged low-lying areas in the capital.

Rain pelts Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Much of the city was reeling from water after daylong driving rains virtually clogged the drainage system yesterday.

The capital experienced 49 mm of rainfall that caused waterlogging in several places. Lanes and by-lanes went under water as the drainage system was cramped with dumped rubbish.

Some parts of the city came to a standstill for a couple of hours with hundreds of vehicles stranded in the roads.

A Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority) expert says the 260km network of storm sewers in Dhaka is in 'a bad shape' as city dwellers and sweepers and cleaners of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) dump rubbish onto roads.

"The major problem is the amount of solid rubbish and dust dumped into storm sewers," a Wasa official said.

Whenever the DCC street cleaners sweep the streets, they dump all rubbish into the drains through the 'catch pits'. The catch pits as a result get blocked and the flow of rainwater into the drains is hindered.

Much of the country experienced torrential rains in the last two days.

"The monsoon arrived in Bangladesh several days ago. The rain may subside tomorrow, as the monsoon wind will drift away," said Arzumand Habib, deputy director of the meteorological department.

The rainfall was recorded at 120mm in Noakhali, yesterday's highest in Bangladesh, 113mm in Cox's Bazar, 44mm in Chandpur and 20mm in Mymensingh.

Anthrax found in dead elephant

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Deadly anthrax virus has been found in the carcass of an elephant in Lama upazila, officials confirmed yesterday.

Experts at Chittagong Veterinary College confirmed the existence of anthrax in the elephant. Prof Dr Nitish Das said he found anthrax spore positive in the elephant's body after a blood test.

The elephant was lying dead since June 10 in Yangcha spreading stinky smell. It was sent for a laboratory test later. Local administration yesterday admitted the elephant was carrying the virus.

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Cop held on charge of extortion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police constable claiming himself to be a detective was arrested on Thursday evening for his attempt to extort money from a businessperson.

Constable Emdadul Haque Milan went to the house of Masud Khan Majlish at Salimullah Road and identified himself as an officer of Detective Branch (DB) of police. He demanded Tk 30,000 from

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Candidacy was not a cause for OIC defeat

Morshed says it was victory for the organisation's democracy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan has dismissed accusations by opposition parties and former diplomats that the nomination of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury as candidate for the post of secretary general of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) was the reason why Bangladesh lost the post to Turkey.

"Most representatives at the conference hailed our candidate as the best among the three after he made his speech," Morshed told reporters at Zia International

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M Morshed Khan

CNG AUTORICKSHAW SCAM

JS body itself to probe as PM wants report

Prime minister prods the committee into action; sub-committee still in slumber

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A parliamentary body plans to open a probe into the alleged autorickshaw scam on its own as its sub-committee assigned with the task dragged its feet and the prime minister prodded the parent committee for investigation report.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia asked Syed Manjur Hossain, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the communications

ministry, to submit the probe report on alleged corruption in the import and distribution of compressed natural gas (CNG)-fired autorickshaw.

Khaleda's directive came when Manjur along with some standing committee chairmen called on her on June 9.

"The sub-committee has repeatedly failed to come up with

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Mayors want more power, single authority

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five of the country's six city corporation mayors have decided to demand and press for more power and an immediate end to dual administration in their metropolises.

The mayors of Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal took the decision at a 150-minute closed door meeting in Dhaka Thursday night, with Shaikh Tayebur Rahman of Khulna presiding as the eldest among the five.

Mayor Mohiuddin Ahmed of Chittagong could not attend the meeting as he is out of the country

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African catfish poses threat to ecosystem

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Carnivorous alien species African catfish is spreading out in the natural ecosystem, posing a great threat to local and indigenous fish species of the country.

Experts expressed their concern as a 20-kg large catfish was caught on Thursday from the sewerage line in Panthapath in the city. The sewerage system has become a shelter for the catfish, witnesses said.

"As Bangladesh is a flood-prone country, the government should have taken a clear-cut policy before introducing such carnivorous species. If the catfish spread out in our rivers and other wetland areas,

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Probes into sensational cases fizzle out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Probes into three sensational cases in recent times -- arson attack on a double-decker bus at Sheraton Hotel crossing, assassination of frontline opposition lawmaker Ahsanullah Master and attempt on writer Humayun Azad's life -- appear to have been thrown into wilderness.

The government was quick to put the blame on the opposition activists, but its law-enforcement agencies so far have failed to prove its claim. The opposition hit back to say that the ruling coalition lacks the political will to unearth the motive behind the occurrences and catch the culprits and the masterminds.

The investigators keep claiming

that much has been done to arrest the people behind the grisly incidents, yet they have failed to dig out the clue let alone arrest the people responsible.

ARSON ATTACK ON BRTC BUS

The Department of Explosives has failed to identify the object used in the June 4 arson attack on a BRTC double-decker at Sheraton Hotel crossing that left 10 people killed and at least 15 injured. In the June 7 report, it said 'a liquid chemical' mixed with low-power explosives like gunpowder or guncotton was used to set the bus on fire.

In their last major 'breakthrough', the Detective Branch (DB) of Police on Wednesday arrested Jahangir of Nilkhet area whom police identified as a profes-

sional bomb-maker and supplier. "We've taken him on a five-day remand and are interrogating him to see whether he is anyway involved in the act," investigation officer of the case, DB Inspector Saud Hasan told The Daily Star yesterday.

The DB police arrested Awami League (AL) activist and contractor Abdul Mannan from his home at Free School Street in Kanthalbagan on June 8 on suspicion.

The DB also arrested Dinesh Chandra Sarker, peon of AL's youth wing Jubo League's office, on June 6 reportedly acting on the information of Shakhawat Tipu, a youth caught while trying to set fire to a taxicab at North-South Road in

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Schoolboy escapes abduction attempt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Traffic police on Thursday rescued a schoolboy and arrested two abductors in front of Motijheel Railway Hospital.

Shifat bin-Salam alias Evan, a student of class seven at Motijheel Ideal School and College, was returning home by a rickshaw after his classes.

Anwar alias Manwar and Mohammad Sujon and three others stopped the rickshaw in front of the hospital. They tried to pick Evan but he slipped from their grasp and ran off to report the incident to a constable of traffic police.

The constable and locals chased the kidnappers and held Anwar and Sujon, while the others managed to flee. Traffic police later handed them over to Motijheel police.

Evan's family members alleged the youths earlier demanded money as toll from his father, a businessperson, and tried to abduct him as his father did not pay them.



PHOTO: STAR

Shifat bin-Salam, a student of class VII at Motijheel Ideal School and College, poses for photos after he escaped an abduction attempt and traffic police caught two abductors on Thursday.