

# Polio 'to die out by end of year'

BBC ONLINE

The World Health Organisation says it is optimistic that polio can be eradicated globally by the end of 2004.

The claim follows the resumption of vaccination campaigns in parts of northern Nigeria.

However the WHO says significant obstacles remain, not least a shortage of funds.

Vaccination campaigns resumed at the weekend in the Nigerian states of Kaduna and Kano, after the programme had been suspended in 2003.

Vaccinations were halted after local Muslim leaders claimed the vaccines were unsafe - and during the suspension the disease spread from Nigeria to other African nations.

Between now and the end of the year,

the WHO aims to run national immunisation projects in 22 African countries.

Campaigns are also continuing in the other endemic region, South Asia, with the aim of eradicating the virus globally by the end of the year.

However the initiative faces a funding shortfall running to several hundred million dollars, and unless further more money is donated quickly, some of these campaigns may not take place.

This is a critical period for the polio eradication initiative, which commenced in 1988.

Spectacular successes were achieved rapidly in the early years, but it is proving much more difficult to finish the job.

However, if it is not finished, polio will re-emerge as a major global disease.

# Iraq amnesty plan won't cover killers

AP, Baghdad

A long-awaited amnesty plan intended to help end the 15-month-old insurgency in Iraq will not cover fighters who have killed anyone, a government official said Wednesday.

The government originally proposed the amnesty as part of a carrot-and-stick package to end the violence; the insurgents would be forgiven for their past crimes, but those who continued killing could be executed under a planned death penalty law.

But the amnesty, which was expected to have been announced soon after the interim Iraqi government took office June 28, has been delayed repeatedly, and subsequent drafts have narrowed the list of those eligible. Officials still were uncertain about when it might take effect.

"The amnesty covers those Iraqis who have not committed killings, who have been deceived into joining the resistance and who are now convinced that they made a mistake. We welcome them," said Georges Sada, spokesman for Prime Minister Ayad Allawi.

"Anyone who committed the crime of murder will not be covered by the amnesty."

Iraqi officials had said the amnesty might extend to those who killed U.S. and other coalition troops. U.S. officials said an early draft contained ambiguous language on that issue, but later drafts ruled it out.

Sada said the debate over the amnesty had nothing to do with U.S. pressure and that killers were never to have been covered by the amnesty.

"We have sovereignty. We don't go and ask the Americans how to act every time," he said. "Nobody at all has pressured us."

Sada said the amnesty plan was "fully completed" but still needed to be signed by Allawi, who returned Tuesday from a Middle East tour.

# 70 hurt in Zimbabwe train crash

REUTERS, Harare

Two commuter trains have crashed in morning rush hour at the Zimbabwean capital Harare's main station, injuring 70 people including 10 seriously, government officials say.

Deputy Transport Minister Andrew Langa said yesterday it appeared human error was to blame for the accident. There were no immediate reports of any deaths.

A Reuters witness saw at least four carriages lying on their side at Harare Station.

"Two commuter trains using the same track as they approached the railway station collided into each other," Langa told Reuters at the scene shortly after the collision.

"The one which was behind did not slow down for the one in front. At this stage we are attributing this to human error," Langa said. "At the moment we have no reports of deaths."

A man at the scene told Reuters: "I saw one of the trains crash into the other. People were waiting."

The crash stirred memories of Zimbabwe's last major rail disaster in February 2003, when more than 40 people were killed and over 60 injured when a passenger train on its way to the northwestern resort town of Victoria Falls collided with a goods train and caught fire, burning some bodies beyond recognition.

Officials also blamed human error for that accident.

Police cordoned off the site of Wednesday's crash to allow ambulances to ferry the injured to three hospitals in the city.

Hospital sources said many of those hurt suffered head injuries or broken limbs.

One of the three seriously injured had internal bleeding and needed major surgery, and another was hurt while jumping from one of the trains when the

## Family to take Santosh Gupta back home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Family members of noted journalist, writer and columnist Santosh Gupta has decided to take him back home today.

"We are now waiting for our sister Aditi Gupta, who is due to return from Germany by 6:00am today. Then we will take my father back home", the journalist's youngest son, Priyatosh Gupta told The Daily Star yesterday adding that family members would later decide on his funeral.

Santosh, who is fighting for life at the intensive care unit (ICU) of BIRDEM hospital since Saturday last, was still in coma till yesterday afternoon.

Doctors are unable to feel his pulse in the hands and legs. They are forced to feed him artificially through a channel in his chest, Priyatosh said.

Santosh was admitted to the hospital after he fell ill while taking a morning walk. He suffered from brain haemorrhage from ruptured veins, Priyatosh quoted medical reports as saying.

Dhaka University Teachers Association President Prof AAMS Arefin Siddiqui with some other colleagues yesterday visited the hospital to see the columnist.

Santosh is working with Daily Sangbad as the senior assistant editor. Father of two sons and a daughter, Santosh was born on January 9 in 1925 at Runshi village in Jhalokathi. He started his career in journalism in 1957 at the then Dainik Azad and worked at Daily Purbakon before joining Daily Sangbad in 1965.

He actively participated in the Liberation War. He was the assistant secretary of the information department of the then Bangladesh government in exile.

## BSF shootings hurt one

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

One person was injured as Border Security Force (BSF) yesterday opened fire on Bangladeshi nationals in the frontier village of Anantapur in Fulbari upzila in Kurigram.

A tense situation is prevailing in the bordering areas as Bangladesh Rifles and BSF personnel took face to face position.

Commanding Officer of BDR 24 Battalion Major Zohadder visited the frontier village in Kashipur union yesterday afternoon after the shooting that occurred near the demarcation pillar No. 947/1F.

BDR sources said up to seven Bangladeshi alleged smugglers from India were crossing the no man's land with goods. The BSF chased them and fired 10 gunshots at them when they entered Bangladesh, villagers said.

Ziarul Haque, 26, son of Sirazul Haque of Anantapur, received two bullets in his head. He was rushed to Fulbari Health Complex and to Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

## 5 Khulna cops

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policemen were charged with neglect of duty and having link with criminals. KMP sources said SI Zahidur maintained close link with extremists and drug traders since joining Sonadanga Police Station three months back. SI Abul used to receive bribes threatening drug addicts with implication of murder cases, they alleged.

## AL calls

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confined more than 100 AL and BCL leaders and activists before releasing them at 6:30pm, according to locals. Earlier, M Shah Alam, first class magistrate of the Cognizance Court, Gopalganj, sent a petition of the brother of slain BCL leader Rakib Hossain Tusher to Gopalganj police and ordered the officer-in-charge (OC) to submit a report by August 31 after investigation, according to sources.

Tusher's brother Jewel Khan had earlier gone to file an FIR (first information report) after his brother's death, but Gopalganj police refused to accept his FIR, sources said.

Protesting the court's decision, Gopalganj District Bar Association members boycotted the court and brought out a procession demanding to treat the petition as an FIR as the OC of Gopalganj Police Station is one of six accused persons in the case, sources added.

They also demanded immediate removal of the district deputy commissioner, superintendent of police and the OC concerned.



PHOTO: STAR

A man tries to comfort his baby boy after his wife joins a long queue for relief in Belayet Hossain High School in Aricha. Devastating monsoon flooding swamped wide swathes of the district on the Padma bank.

## HC declares caretaker EC delegation

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The bench said the immediate past chief justice is appointed as chief advisor to the caretaker government because of his neutral role and the provision for such appointment is an outcome of people's confidence.

Experience shows that party government influences the state machinery to swing the election results in its favour, but the administration can remain neutral during the term of the non-partisan caretaker government, it further observed.

The three-member bench maintained that the amendment is not inconsistent with the constitution's basic structure, rather it helped institutionalise and strengthen democracy, which is the basic feature of the constitution. Free and fair election is the heartbeat of democracy, which the caretaker government ensures.

The government as an institution and the Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami as major political parties were the respondents to the writ petition. Attorney General AF Hassan Ariff appeared for the government, Barrister Amir-UL Islam for the AL and Barrister Abdur Razzak for Jamaat.

No lawyer appeared for the BNP during the hearing.

Advocate MI Farooqui and Advocate Ruhul Quddus Babu stood for the petitioner. Barrister Rafiqul Haq and Advocate Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan were the 'amicus curiae'.

## Post-flood life hurtles

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and rebuild infrastructure ahead of the UN global appeal for Bangladesh, expected by early next week.

"We are still working out the exact numbers in all sectors, but it is already clear that the country will need a lot of support to get back to its feet," UN Resident Coordinator Douglas C Coutts told newsmen, emerging from the meeting at the IDB Bhaban.

The relief workers have been scrambling to rush medical supplies, food and water purification tablets to villagers marooned by the floods.

The government is working with donor agencies to distribute aid and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and the United Nations Children's Fund have launched international appeals for more than 16 million dollars, AFP said.

But many flood victims, especially those in remote rural areas, have still

had little or no help and many are suffering from diarrhoea and skin diseases.

The UN, meanwhile, said Bangladesh would take at least a year to recover from the flooding.

Tens of millions of people now faced grave food insecurity, waterborne diseases, a badly mangled infrastructure and extremely poor prospects for the next rice crop.

Millions are still languishing in flood shelters or highways in many affected districts, including Dhaka, expecting immediate relief with children being the worst victims of the situation.

Riverbank erosion engulfing infrastructure worsened the situation for many and prevented them returning home.

(BSS and AFP contributed to this report)

## Oil prices hit

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Some wider impact has already been felt. US consumer spending in June fell at the fastest rate since September 2001, according to US government data released on Tuesday. High oil prices contributed to the fall as consumers cut back on new vehicle purchases.

US stocks were expected to open lower yesterday after Asian stock markets declined on investor fears that oil prices will hurt corporate profits.

However, the evidence of further damage to world economies remains patchy. US consumer confidence climbed last week, and figures from US automakers show vehicle sales in the world's largest energy consumer registered robust gains in July.

But analysts warned that rising prices are set to damage expanding economies which rely on oil imports, such as India, Asia's fourth-largest economy, which imports 70 percent of its crude oil requirements.

Oil's latest boost was triggered on Tuesday when the head of the OPEC producers' cartel said there was no spare oil immediately available to cool red-hot prices.

OPEC President Purnomo Yusgiantoro said that Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest exporter, had spare production capacity but could not raise output immediately.

"The oil price is very high, it's crazy. There is no additional supply," Purnomo told reporters in Jakarta.

### FEAR FACTOR

Fears of a major glitch in the supply chain at a time when global oil demand is growing at the fastest pace in more than two decades were heightened by attacks on an oil pipeline in Iraq.

Saboteurs on Tuesday blew up an oil pipeline that supplies Iraq's main refinery and feeds in to the main northern export line, itself already closed for two months.

Iraqi exports of about 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) were severely disrupted in May and June because of sabotage on key pipelines in the south of the country feeding the main oil terminal Basra.

"OPEC's spare capacity is at a historic low level," said Tony Numan, the manager at Mitsubishi Corp's international petroleum business.

"Even if something that could disrupt oil exports, like the Iraq war and Venezuela's strike, happens again, OPEC can't boost production immediately to offset it this time."

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, excluding Iraq, lifted output in July to near the highest level in 25 years at 27.57 million bpd as record-high prices enabled members to pump close to full tilt, a Reuters survey showed.

Saudi Arabia, which made up most of the July increase, has said it would produce 9.5 million bpd in August, just one million bpd below the country's full capacity.

Oil traders are also nervous that strong demand is preventing global stocks from building ahead of peak winter demand.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) was due to release its weekly oil stocks report at 10:30am EDT. The data is expected to show declines in national crude and gasoline inventories although distillate stocks are forecast to rise.

The weekly report is closely monitored as a barometer for demand in the world's biggest oil consumer.

Analysts said the oil price hikes threatened to drive up global interest rates and put the brakes on a global economic recovery.

"There is enough oil geographically at the moment, but the supply chain is tight and there is little room for disruption -- hence the concerns over troubles at Russian oil company Yukos," analysts at Standard Chartered said.

Oil prices were now "looking very dangerous" for global financial markets, warned Anais Faraj, global equity strategist at Nomura Securities.

"The key risk now is that central bankers feel obliged to carry on raising rates in the face of an oil shock."

## 14 Iraqis killed

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(0635 GMT) in the Mamoun neighbourhood, killing a man and a woman and injuring two people," said Captain Hamad Hassan Abdullah.

The device detonated when a US patrol passed along the road, Abdullah said. The US military said none of its personnel were hurt in the blast.

A doctor at Mosul's general hospital said pieces of shrapnel had been removed from the two wounded people, who were in a stable condition.

### HOSTAGES FREED

Four Jordanian hostages were freed by Iraqi gunmen who raided their captors' hideout, one of the released captives said yesterday, while a video from kidnappers said two Turkish hostages had also been released.

The news provided a moment of respite in the hostage crisis confronting Iraq's interim government, but fighting between police and insurgents in Mosul that killed at least 12 people underscored the scale of the security challenge they face.

One of the Jordanian hostages said he had been released with three other Jordanian truck drivers after a group of Iraqis stormed a house in the city of Falluja late on Tuesday and freed them without firing a shot.

"When the brave people of Falluja knew that we were held hostage they raided the house and rescued us last night. We are all safe," one of the hostages, Ahmad Hassan Abu Jafaar, told Reuters in Baghdad by telephone.

"We're expecting to go back to Jordan today."

A group calling itself the Death Squad of Iraqi Resistance said last Thursday it was holding the Jordanians

to put pressure on their transport company to stop cooperation with U.S. forces. Jafaar said the kidnappers had wanted money.

The Iraqi rescuers were sent by a council of local elders formed last month to battle crime and kidnapping in Falluja, where the interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi in Baghdad exercises only minimal authority.

Insurgents aiming to disrupt supplies delivered to U.S. forces from neighboring countries have seized foreign drivers in the past few months, threatening to kill them unless their employers stop operating in Iraq or pay ransoms.

Relatives of the Jordanians, who were seized nine days ago, said they were staying with a local leader in Falluja.

"They are now staying in the home of Haji Ibrahim Mohammad in the town of Falluja. They spent the night in his house after their release last night from their kidnappers," said Mohammad Hassan Abu Jafaar, Jafaar's brother.

Al Jazeera television reported that a group linked to Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi -- who Washington accuses of being an al Qaeda ally -- had released two Turkish drivers because their firm agreed to stop working in Iraq. (Reuters and AFP)

## 16,000km road

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international assistance may not come before four months, but the government should start the rehabilitation works as soon as possible to normalise the network.

## ANN website takes

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"We hope it will become a crucial reference point for those seeking reliable and authoritative news about Asia," said Pana Janviroj, a member of ANN's executive board and editor of The Nation, where the ANN office is based.

He said the website, which was established nearly four years ago, had succeeded in providing a link for members to share its resources.

The 14 members of the news-sharing network, which has a combined readership of 50 million people, are leading newspapers in 12 countries. They are The Daily Star, China

Daily (Beijing and Hong Kong editions), The Statesman, The Jakarta Post, Daily Yomiuri and Yomiuri Shimbun, Sin Chew Daily, The Star, The Philippine Daily Inquirer, the Straits Times, The Korea Herald, The Island, The Nation and Vietnam News.

Since the network's inception in 1999, the ANN has attempted to optimise coverage of major news events in the region and promoted accurate reporting of Asia.

The network's idea came out in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, which showed a pressing need for events to be reported as seen through the eyes of Asians.

## Economy needs

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donors, NGOs and the government is imperative to ensure an effective assistance programme, a donor representative at the meeting told The Daily Star.

Coutts and Siddiqur Rahman Chowdhury, secretary of food and disaster management ministry, described the extent of the flood-damage to donors, but the exact damage to each sector will be quantified before the appeal next week.

The UN appeal will incorporate assessments done by the UN itself, the government, the donors and the NGOs. "The donors, the UN and the government are assessing the flood damage separately and we will consider all these assessments to jointly present a figure that is required for post-flood rehabilitation," Chowdhury told reporters after the meeting.

"As the floodwaters recede, the full extent of the damage and the consequent challenges of rebuilding houses, roads, schools and public services are emerging," the UN press release stated.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf told reporters last week the government expects the national economy to incur damage close to Tk 30 to 40 thousand and crore due to the floods.

The UN is already running its flood-relief operations through its existing agencies, said Coutts, but the post-flood rehabilitation plan would involve schools, government agencies and NGOs alongside the UN agencies.

The UN agencies would also monitor the post-flood rehabilitation and report it to donors to maintain donor confidence, Coutts added.

## Beximco Holdings

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retain them in prison if and until the debt remains unmet.

After hearing, the court passed an order for the defendants to appear before it in the next hearing of the case on August 15.

In the petition, the plaintiff said Beximco Group through 112 accounts in fictitious names kept with IFIC Bank's Motijheel and Moulvibazar branches in the capital availed of Tk 118 crore in loans. The bank approached the authorities of Beximco Group several times in vain.

However, on pressure from the Bangladesh Bank (BB), the board of Beximco Investment Company, now Beximco Holdings, at a meeting on December 12, 1993 took responsibility of the outstanding dues and resolved that, on behalf of the company, the four directors would guarantee repayment of the debt liabilities.

On appeal for rescheduling and offer of securities belonging to one of the group's subsidiaries, Beximco Property Development and Management Ltd, IFIC Bank in consultation with and approval of the central bank rescheduled payment of the loans in 1998 on certain conditions.

According to the rescheduling agreement, Beximco Holdings was required to pay back Tk 1 crore every month from January 1998 to December 2000. The monthly repayment installment was fixed at Tk 2

crore for the period between January 2001 and December 2002, and at Tk 4 crore between January 2003 and December 2004.

The defaulters paid back Tk 13 crore between January 1998 and January 1999, Tk 1 crore monthly from February 1999 to December 2000 and Tk 2 crore a month since January 2001 to January 2002. The company then stopped repayment except a single instalment of Tk 40 lakh on April 29, 2002.

IFIC again took the issue to the central bank and Beximco once again appealed for rescheduling, which the BB rejected.

IFIC in several letters requested the defendants to repay the loans, with no response from them. The bank on April 18 last served legal notice on the company and the four guarantors of the default loans giving them three-month time to repay the Tk 137-crore outstanding debt.

The deadline of the legal notice expired on July 18. IFIC then lodged the case under the Bankruptcy Act 1997.

When contacted yesterday, A S F Rahman told The Daily Star his lawyer would take appropriate legal measures on the issue. He refused to make further comments on the case and advised to talk to his lawyer and public relations officers. But, they could not be contacted despite repeated attempts.