

# 20,000 intravenous drug users in country

Health minister tells multi-sectoral meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a multi-sectoral meeting yesterday called for raising awareness among the intravenous drug users (IDUs) to prevent spread of HIV.

The IDUs are most vulnerable to HIV infection, they said.

There are about 20,000 IDUs in the country and 3,000 of them are in Dhaka alone, said Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain as chief guest.

It is a great danger signal for the country because the IDUs may act as a bridging population by spreading HIV to sex workers and their clients, he added.

The South South Centre, Bangladesh organised the meeting on 'Advocacy at Policy Level for HIV Risk Reduction' in the city.

The minister said combating the HIV requires support from the ministries concerned as it is a multi-

societal problem, and the health ministry can take the lead role in coordination in this regard.

According to the recent National HIV and Behavioural Surveillance, the HIV prevalence rate among the IDUs is 4 percent, up from 1.7 percent in 2002, he said.

Although the latest survey indicate the HIV prevalence among the IDUs is static at 4 percent, it is near about the concentrated level (5 percent) of epidemic, according to WHO and UNAIDS.

According to the government statistics, Dr Mosharraf said, there are 363 HIV patients in the country. Fifty-seven of them developed AIDS and 30 have died.

Referring to the WHO statistics indicating that there are at least 13,000 HIV patients in Bangladesh, he said the WHO figure was based on data while

the government one's was based on case report. "I believe there are lot of unreported cases," he said.

Speakers at the meeting said a massive advocacy programme for the IDUs is a must to prevent the spread of HIV infection.

Inspector General of Police Shahul Haque, Secretary of health ministry AFM Sarwar Kamal, attended the meeting as special guests while Dr Robert Kelly, country director, Family Health International, Bangladesh delivered the welcome speech.

Jalaluddin Ahmed, director of South South Centre, chaired the inaugural session.

Later, an open discussion was also held. Major General Dr ASM Matir Rahaman, chairperson, technical committee of the National AIDS Committee, moderated the discussion.

# \$1.2b Padma bridge to have rail track

BSS, Dhaka

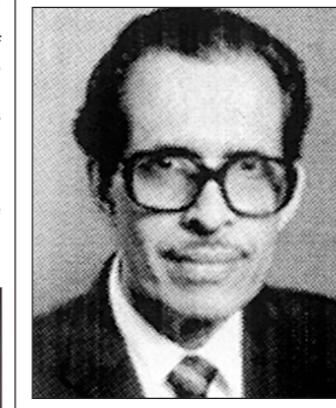
Communications Minister Nazmul Huda yesterday said the government would construct the proposed four-lane Padma Bridge at an estimated cost of 1.2 billion US dollars keeping provision of the rail track to connect the southwestern region and the Mongla Port with the capital city.

He said the 6.01-kilometer long and 25-meter width Padma Bridge, which is one-kilometer longer than the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB), will play a vital role in accelerating economic activities, reducing poverty and generating job opportunities for the people.

Executive Director of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority (JMPA) AKM Shamsuddin, Chief Engineer of the JMBA Khandaker Azadur Rahman and team leader of the JICA study team M Shibuya also spoke.

Huda emphatically said the construction work for the Padma Bridge would start during the tenure of the present alliance government.

Regarding the fund for implementation of the mega project, he said the JICA has been carrying out the feasibility study on the bridge. Besides the Japanese government, international organisations like World Bank, Asian Development Bank and private investors from home and abroad would extend support for the implementation of the project.



## Brig (Retd) Malik gets Rotary SEED Award

UNB, Dhaka

Brig (Retd) Prof Abdul Malik was named as the recipient of Rotary SEED Award for 2003-04 for his outstanding contribution to prevention and treatment of cardiovascular diseases.

Leaders of the Rotary Club of Metropolitan Dhaka (RCMD) announced his name at a press conference in the city yesterday.

The award carries Tk 100,000, a gold medal and a citation.

SEED stands for Science, Education and Economic Development. This is an annual award given by RCMD Foundation every year to a living Bangladeshi citizen for his/her outstanding and original contributions to the fields of science, education and economic development.

The award will be formally handed over to Prof Malik at a function in Dhaka on Saturday, said the club's immediate past president Neaz Ahmed.

Neaz said RCMD has recognised Prof Malik as a pioneer in prevention and control of cardiovascular diseases, cardiac surgery, research and education in Bangladesh.

Prof Malik is the founder president of Bangladesh Cardiac Society, secretary general of National Heart Foundation of Bangladesh and honorary adviser to National Centre for Control of Rheumatic Fever and Heart Diseases.

He is the ninth recipient of the award since its introduction in 1995. The previous winners included Dr Muhammad Yunus, Prof M Shafullah, Fazle Hasan Abed and Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed.

RCMD leaders Nazma Khan, Kazi Kamaluddin Ekram, Fazle Rabbi, Dr Anwar Hossain and Farid Hossain were present at the press conference.

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