

Take care with mobile phones: Health report

REUTERS, London

No hard evidence exists to show mobile phones damage health but users - especially children - should take care, UK scientists said in a survey Tuesday.

Britain's National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), an independent advisory group, said there have been reports of adverse health effects but some have not yet been independently confirmed and are of variable quality.

"We are still recommending a precautionary approach because there is still no hard evidence that the health of the public in general has been adversely affected by the use of mobile phone technologies," NRPB chairman Sir William Stewart told a news conference.

But Stewart added that he did not think he could put his hand on his heart and say mobile phones are totally safe because the technology is relatively new and is evolving so rapidly it is outstripping the analysis of any potential impact on health.

Some research suggests radio frequency fields could interfere with biological systems but it has not been possible to carry out long-term studies.

The Mobile Operators Association in Britain, which represents operators on health and planning, welcomed the report.

"The key point of the NRPB advice is that there is no hard information linking the use of mobile telephony with adverse health effects," said its executive director Mike Dolan in a statement.

CHILDREN MAY BE MORE VULNERABLE

Children might be more vulnerable because their nervous system is still developing, they have a greater absorption of energy in the tissues of the head and they would have a longer lifetime exposure than adults, according to the report.

Stewart recommended children use mobile phones for as short a time as possible. They should text instead and use a phone with a low SAR value. Specific Absorption Rate (SAR) is the measure of the rate of energy absorption in body tissue.

"We have got to be cautious. We can't say there will be no effects," he added.

Mobile phones have become a \$100 billion a year industry. About 650 million are expected to be sold to consumers this year and over 1.5 billion people around the world use one.

Third generation, 3G phones, which emit higher rates of radiation than earlier models are now marketed in Britain and elsewhere.

The report also called for the monitoring of base stations, including new 3G stations and Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA), used by police.

Stewart said studies suggesting mobile phones can cause non-malignant brain tumors, cognitive impairment or DNA damage should be not be dismissed but more research is needed.

"The general public, the man in the street, must be able to get information easily and he must be able to get it readily," he added.

CPB won't form alliance with AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday decided not to go for one political platform or one political alliance with the main opposition Awami League (AL) as the two parties are not like-minded.

In a day-long meeting at the party's central office with its chief Manjurul Hossain Khan in the chair, CPB central committee also decided to continue their efforts to establish an alternative left democratic force against the rightist politics of both the BNP and AL.

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"It's our previous decision that we will never form any political alliance on a common platform with the AL. There are basic differences in the policies of two parties," Manjurul Hossain Khan told The Daily Star after the meeting.

He, however, said his party will continue to remain in the ongoing simultaneous movement with other parties as part of the left leaning 11-party alliance.

"We will do whatever possible to advance the movement to resist the rise of fundamentalism and protest the misuse of the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government," he said.

The CPB, unhappy with some recent happenings including Prime Minister's Parliamentary Affairs Secretary Salauddin Qader Chowdhury's visit to Suhda Sadan and hartals called by AL's front organisations, did not join last two meetings of the opposition parties on January 4 and 5.

Gas field

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of Sunamganj in consultation with local lawmaker Kollimuddin Milon will arrange distribution of preliminary compensation among the listed families in two days. Another list is also being made, said an official.

DC Jafar Siddique told The Daily Star that Niko and Petrobangla officials had discussed the matter and the funds for preliminary compensation from Niko will be available by tomorrow and distribution will begin the next day.

The probe committee formed by the Department of Environment will submit its report on January 16, an official said.

Two officials from Niko's Canadian insurance company accompanied the Niko expert to the gas field yesterday. They will prepare a preliminary report on the extent of losses caused by the drilling well explosion and the consequent fire.

Police and BDR have been deployed around the site.

10 hurt

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Five other injured, Saiful, 16, Nasir, 10, Hossain, 25, Bishnu, 40, Shukur Ali and Shanti Begum, 8, were given first aid at the hospital.

Police arrested two persons - Sagar, 30, of Chakpara and Azizul, 19, of Ganaibarua villages - after the incident.

22 BDR

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Khalahati under Parbatipur upazila of Dinajpur to attend the winter training programme.

The injured were admitted to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital. The commanding officer of Panchagarh Battalion and senior BDR officials visited the spot.

Student strike observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six opposition-backed student organisations yesterday observed a countrywide strike at educational institutions to press home their three-point demand including arrest and punishment of the killers of Rajshahi University (RU) teacher Prof Yunus.

The other demands of the combine led by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) are ensuring security of teachers and freeing educational institutions from crime.

No class was held at the public universities including Dhaka University (DU), Rajshahi University (RU) and Chittagong University (CU), the leaders of the combine claimed.

The alliance brought out processions and held rallies at these universities.

The leaders at a rally chaired by BCL President Liaqat Sikder at the DU blasted the government for not making any move to arrest Prof Yunus' killers.

BCL General Secretary Nazrul Islam Babu said intellectuals including teachers, journalists and free-thinkers have been killed one by one during the BNP-Jamaat rule.

The strike passed off peacefully at the RU where the university unit BCL held a procession, reports our RU correspondent.

The admission test for the 2004-05 academic session was out of the strike and held peacefully.

Our CU correspondent adds: The CU unit BCL held a rally at Shoolshahar Railway Station in support of the strike.

Meantime, the CU Teachers' Association in a statement yesterday condemned the death threat to Dr Kamal Hossain by religious bigots.

Raj Punnah

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and elsewhere in the country have already arrived at Bandarbanj to attend the festival.

Raj Punnah is an annual function of the Bomang tribe through which the headmen of the indigenous people, and businessmen deposit taxes they collect from people throughout the year.

On the first day of festival, the headmen and businessmen put two bottles of local wine and a cock in front of the king and seek his blessings.

The Bomang people put on display various traditional elements of their culture and food items, and organise colourful cultural programmes at the folk fair that also attract tourists from home and abroad.

Celebration of the festival started in 1875 during the period of ninth Bomang King Sa Neun Nu (1875-1901). The festival has been extinct in two other hilly districts - Ranganamati and Khagrachhari.

Bangladesh Betar's Bandarbanj centre will broadcast the programme.

Two criminals

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yesterday morning.

As Babar's cohorts opened fire to free him from the Rab, Rab members returned fire. Babar fell in the line of fire and died on the spot. Babar sources said.

The team seized three guns, one LG, 10 bullets of AK-47 rifle and four cartridges from the area.

Babar was accused in 20 cases including six murders.

In Cox's Bazar, Belal Uddin, 36, son of Naser Hossain of Maizephona village in Shaharbil, was killed in 'crossfire' between police and his accomplices at Omkhal Char in Chakaria upazila Tuesday night.

Belal was earlier arrested from Chakaria upazila headquarters that day. He was accused in five cases for murders and committing robberies.

Police said they took Belal to Omkhal Char to seize his firearms when his accomplices opened fire on them at around 10:00pm. Police returned fire and a bullet hit Belal during the gunfight, leaving him dead on the spot, they claimed.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presides over the 22nd meeting of the Board of Governors of Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority at the International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

SC orders for continuation of the stay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday ordered for continuation of the stay order of the Court of District and Sessions Judge, Dhaka until disposal of the appeal against an assistant judge court's orders on the government to appoint an administrator to the BGMEA.

The SC stayed Sunday's High Court (HC) stay orders that had stayed the commerce ministry's appointment of Dr Ayub Miah as the administrator on January 6.

The four-member full bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain passed the orders yesterday following a petition filed by MA Masud, a member of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association, challenging the HC stay orders on the appointment.

Earlier, Syed Azad Sobhani of the Court of Second Assistant Judge, Dhaka on January 3 directed the ministry to appoint the administrator following a case filed by Masud on November 30 last year.

According to yesterday's SC orders, the lower court's stay orders on the appointment of the administrator will be stayed until disposal of the appeal of the BGMEA pending with the Court of Dhaka District and Sessions Judge. However, yesterday the court extended the stay orders until January 24.

After an order of the Court of Second Assistant Judge directing the government to appoint an administrator on January 3, the government appointed an administrator on January 6. Challenging the govern-

ment appointment, the BGMEA filed a writ petition with the HC on Sunday and the court stayed the government orders and issued a rule.

A petition along with a leave to appeal petition against the HC orders was filed on Tuesday by Masud who secured a lower court verdict for appointment of the administrator in its 2003 election dispute case.

Advocate Khondker Mahbubuddin Ahmed appeared for petitioner MA Masud, while BGMEA counsels Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq and Dr M Zahir opposed the petition.

Moving the petition seeking vacation of the HC orders, Mahbubuddin submitted that the government had appointed the administrator in line with the assistant judge court's orders.

He argued that the executive committee of the largest trade organisation of the country could not legally function neither could it hold the election because of the dispute over polls. His client filed the title suit pending with the district judge's court. Before the process is complete, the BGMEA is not entitled to seek redress from the HC, he maintained.

Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq and Dr Zahir contended that they had challenged the legality of the government's appointment of the administrator. The manner in which the appointment was made was illegal. The government did not form reasonable grounds to act against the executive committee. Moreover, the petitioner who is not even a BGMEA voter has no locus standi to file the case.

The BGMEA issue is highly political and the move was intended to foil the BGMEA election scheduled for February 17, they further contended.

32 army men axed

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The Armed Forces Division (AFD) of the PMO sent the inquiry reports to the environment ministry and Bangladesh Ansar asking them to bring their staffs involved in the smuggling to book.

The ministry, immediately after getting the AFD letter, has suspended the 15 forest staff found guilty of the crime and initiated a departmental process to sack them.

The ministry also has launched its own investigation into the incident, said a high official, adding corruption and criminal cases would be filed against the offenders.

Sources at Bangladesh Ansar said they also have completed the process to dismiss the 35 Ansars that collaborated with the army and forest men in the timber smuggling.

According to the AFD report, the forest men coaxed the army personnel into helping them in the smuggling with allurements of fat financial gains. The foresters also induced the Ansars to join the gang.

The combined clique then smuggled out and sold a huge quantity of timber of the forest range and split the ill-gained money among themselves.

Environment Minister Tariqul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday his ministry has been conducting an all-out drive to end smuggling of timber and other forest resources. It has also formed a taskforce comprising officials of the armed forces, district administrations concerned, forest officials and law enforcing agencies to co-ordinate the drive.

Islam said his ministry is also taking the help of the AFD, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and intelligence agencies to trace the smugglers.

He claimed, though smuggling has not been routed completely, its extent has come down significantly due to the ministry's efforts.

Sources said the AFD, as per the request of the environment ministry, has instructed its forces to guard the forests adjacent to the cantonments and besides to check timber smuggling. Besides, BDR and intelligence agencies have also been tasked to resist smuggling of forest resources.

According to sources, the environment ministry so far has suspended about 60 forest officials and employees for their involvement in timber and wood smuggling.

Govt to sell rice after

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already opened letters of credit (LCs) for importing more than 10 lakh tonnes of rice in the first half of the current fiscal year.

Rice imports in the previous fiscal year were around eight lakh tonnes, he mentioned.

The retail prices of coarse rice varied only Tk 0.20 a kg in the last month. Quoting the government's market report, he further said that the prices are a bit higher in the capital than in the northern districts.

The latest Aman harvest that ended in December was 15 percent short of its target because of the massive floods in August-September last year, sources mentioned.

Pest attacks and downpours on transplanted Aman also caused lower yields of rice in eight northern districts. Many farmers did not even get one-third of their normal yield.

The prices of 80kg-bags of coarse

rice have gone up from Tk 1,200 to between Tk 1,275 and Tk 1,300 in the northern districts, according to our Rangpur correspondent.

A source said the government silos have a stock of over 6.49 lakh tonnes of food grains, enough to start the OMS.

The silos have about 5.06 lakh tonnes of rice and 1.42 lakh tonnes of wheat, the source said, adding, the government has a plan to import 2.5 lakh tonnes of food grains this year.

The government started the OMS before the Eid-ul-Fitr especially for the flood-affected poor people. Around 30,000 tonnes of rice were sold through the month-long OMS during September-October last year.

The government had appointed over 13,000 private dealers, who bought rice from government godowns at Tk 12 a kg and sold at Tk 13.

Nasa to launch comet-busting spacecraft

AP, Cape Canaveral, Fla.

For the first time ever, NASA is setting off on a collision course with a comet, in hopes of blasting a huge hole in the celestial snowball and gazing upon the original ingredients of the solar system preserved inside.

Reshuffle in police

UNB, Dhaka

In a major reshuffle of the police hierarchy yesterday, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) SM Mizanur Rahman was made Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner (current charge).

Besides, five superintendents (SPs) of police were promoted to additional deputy inspector general (ADIG) while seven SPs were given transfers and postings in the shakeup.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Farooque Ahmed was elevated to additional DIG and posted as additional DMP commissioner.

Police Superintendent of Comilla MD Moniruzzaman was also promoted to additional DIG and transferred as additional CMP commissioner.

Assistant Inspector General (AIG) AKM Shahidul Hoque was promoted to additional DIG and posted as commandant, Rangpur Police Training Center.

Superintendent of Police (SP), Narsingdi, Mokhelesur Rahman was promoted to additional DIG and made Rab director while Special SP of the Special Branch (SB) Fatema Begum was elevated to additional DIG and posted as commandant of Special branch Training School, Dhaka.

Manikganj Police Superintendent (SP) Aurangzeb Mahub was posted as SP of Comilla and SP Abu Bakar Sidique Majumder was given posting as SP of Manikganj.

Special Police Superintendent (SB) Delwar Hossain Mia was transferred to Dinajpur as SP and Commandant of the Range Reserve Force (RRF), Rajshahi, Meer Rezaul Alam was given the charge of SP, Narsingdi. Additional SP of Comilla Mohammad Allah Box was given the charge of AIG at police headquarters while Additional Deputy Police Commissioner of DMP Shoeb Ahmad was made SP, Telecom, Dhaka.

Police superintendent Md Mokhelesur Rahman, earlier made OSD, was posted as Commandant, RRE, Barisal.

GP donates

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tribution will be used to restore education and other immediate needs of the children in the two tsunami-hit countries.

Referring to the role of Unicef Bangladesh in tsunami relief operation, Gierring said several experienced officials from Unicef Bangladesh have been deputed to work in Sri Lanka and the Maldives to help relief and rehabilitation works.

Expressing gratitude to its subscribers who had generated the generous contribution, GrameenPhone Managing Director Erik As said his company took this initiative to express solidarity with the tsunami-hit people, especially children.

GrameenPhone Ltd. generated the contribution from the SMS (Short Message Service) trafficked on December 31, 2004 and January 1, 2005.

US happy, stops GSP

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formal letter stopping the process of withdrawing the GSP facilities was received by the Bangladesh ambassador to the US on January 3.

Elections have already been held in 34 out of 208 units in the EPZs since the government's decision was taken to allow trade union as per the condition set by the US for the import of Bangladeshi goods.

As the Bezpa governing body meeting discussed the present situation in different export-processing zones of the country, Zakir Hossain said the entire site of the Chittagong Steel Mills is now under the Bezpa and the process of allotting industrial plots will begin "immediately".

The premises of former Chittagong Steel Mills and the area of Chittagong CSD have been transformed into Karnaphuli EPZ.

The official also informed that the area of now-defunct Adamjee Jute Mills will be formally handed over to the Bezpa in a week and investment is expected to come within the next three to six months.

Industrial units to be set up in the two new EPZs are likely to create employment opportunity for about one lakh workers.

Besides positive response from foreign investors, a number of local entrepreneurs have shown interest in setting up industries in the Adamjee Mills area now turned into EPZ, the Bezpa chief apprised the meeting.

The Bezpa is looking for relocation of industries from outside the country in the potential EPZ to create employment opportunity for skilled and semi-skilled workers available in Bangladesh.

The prime minister, during the meeting, directed all concerned to "speed up" the implementation of Karnaphuli and Adamjee export-processing zones for employment generation.

The governing body meeting yesterday agreed in principle to set up a modern integrated water-treatment plant to supply water to the industrial units of Chittagong and Karnaphuli EPZs.

As planned, the plant will initially have the capacity of producing 81 million gallons of water per day, which will be increased to 400 million gallons in the future.

The meeting also discussed, among other issues, the present status of foreign and local investment, backward-linkage industries and national exports.

The United States is the single-largest importer of Bangladeshi products, accounting for nearly 35 percent of the country's total annual exports worth nearly \$7.6 billion.

The export target for 2004-05 fiscal year has been fixed at \$1400 million against last fiscal year's exports worth \$1363 from the Bezpa enterprises.

Bezpa has sanctioned 26 indus-

Metamorphosis

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range in price from Tk 2,000 to Tk45 lakh - cannot detect the new forgeries. This is because they only check whether the paper itself is genuine. "They cannot identify the new fake notes as the fake notes use genuine paper," said a senior official of National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd.

Only the machines priced at between Tk 40 lakh and Tk 45 lakh each can detect the new fake notes but most of the banks do not have such machines.

"It is not easy to purchase such costly machines for every branch," the official said.

Every year, the circulation of counterfeit notes increases ahead of the two Eids as there is a rise in transactions of Tk 500 notes for Eid-related expenses, said another banker.

"It is not a new problem but the issue has not been addressed properly," he said.

Law enforcing agencies deal with the issue of forged notes in the same way as they deal with other crimes. They have arrested a number of alleged racketeers but there has been little headway in the trials and no-one has yet been sentenced.

Making or circulating fake notes is a criminal offence for which a person may be sentenced to death under the Bangladesh Bank Penal Code and the Special Powers Act, 1974.