

Country highly vulnerable to HIV/Aids

Health minister tells meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country is highly vulnerable to HIV/Aids, said Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain at a meeting yesterday.

He said, "We are in a high risk zone and among the high risk group."

The meeting was organised jointly by the Care Bangladesh and the ntv, a private TV channel, at the Spectra Convention Centre in the city to share experience on the opportunities and challenges of media communications on HIV/Aids.

The minister said being surrounded by countries like India, Myanmar, Thailand and China where the prevalence rate of HIV/Aids is very high, Bangladesh is highly exposed to the spread of the deadly disease.

"India is the world's second largest country in terms of the prevalence of HIV/Aids," he added.

Dr Hossain underscored the need for safe blood transmission, preventive measures while having commercial sex, and raising awareness about the nature of the disease through wide dissemination of information to prevent the spread of HIV/Aids.

He said according to a government estimate, a total of 465 cases of Aids have so far been reported in the country, while a non-government estimate says a total of 13 thousand adults are infected with HIV.

Though the prevalence rate of HIV/Aids is less than one percent in Bangladesh at present, the challenge in arresting its spread is enormous, said Gareth Aicken, senior programme manager of DFID.

One reason behind the rapid spread is that a large number of Bangladeshi migrant workers work in the countries with high prevalence of HIV/Aids, Aicken added.

Dr Fatima Parveen Chowdhury, line director of National Aids/STD Programme (NASP), said mass media has a crucial role to play in preventing the spread of HIV/Aids.

Information Minister M Shamsul Islam, Prothom Alo Editor Matur Rahman, ntv Managing Director Enayetur Rahman and Vaidyanathan K of Care Bangladesh also spoke.

Clippings from a 13-episopde video production titled 'Aids Protirodher Bikalpo Nei' (there is no alternative to prevention of AIDS) were presented at the meeting.