

40,000 children suffer from treatable blindness

Says research

NAIMUL HAQ

For the first time in his life Jalil, a thirteen-year-old boy, would be able to attend a school by mid-June. Ever since his birth, he has been visually impaired, which is why he could not enroll in school.

Thanks to a group of dedicated eye specialists and social workers who made it possible for Jalil to get back his eyesight.

Jalil and his sixteen year old sister Hanifa of village Char Kamalpur under Iswardi upazila in Pabna along with eight other poor children, also from the same upazila, were operated at Bangladesh Eye Hospital (BEH) in the city yesterday.

The surgery on the visually impaired poor children marked the launching of a joint mission to perform about 200 cataract operations a year on children most of whom remain sightless without being treated.

In fact, BEH's mission opens the door for children to undergo surgery for the first time in the country at private level.

According to a leading researcher on childhood blindness Dr M A Muhiit, founder of Child Sight Foundation (CSF), there are an estimated 40,000 children in the

country with the treatable disorder that largely occurs at birth.

His two-year (2001-2003) research for the UK-based International Centre for Eye Health (ICEH) also revealed that about 32 percent of all the childhood blindness are preventable.

The CSF originated from TRIP (turn research into project) concept with the support of ICEH, has been a partner with BEH to find out children suffering from such treatable disorders from villages.

The CSF would bring and arrange to send visually impaired children to BEH for surgery on a regular basis.

"As almost all the sufferers are very poor, they can hardly afford to seek treatment. Our vision and mission is to find out these children and correct their blindness free of cost," said Shehab Chowdhury, project manager of CSF.

In fact, Hanifa and Jalil were refused admission at the city's Islamia Eye Hospital as they do not have facilities and specialists to treat children suffering from eyesight disorders.

Mid Hannan Sarder, father of Jalil, said, "I have spent a lot of money on my children for their treatment. Last year, I had come to Islamia Eye Hospital but they refused."

"Many children are deprived of

surgery facilities. My aim is to provide support to these children who could get back eyesight. Through today's (Thursday) launching programme, I want to treat as many poor children as possible," Dr Mahubur Rahman Chowdhury, chairman of BEH told The Daily Star.

To this effect BEH and Bank Asia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) yesterday.

President and Managing Director of Bank Asia Syed Anisul Huq and Dr Mahubur Rahman signed the documents.

Dr Kazi Shabbir Anwar, a leading paediatric ophthalmologist, and Dr Niaz Rahman, an eye (retina) surgeon, were also present.

Under the agreement, BEH would provide all possible institutional support to perform, on an average, 20 surgeries a month while the Bank Asia would sponsor the cost of the surgeries as part of their commitment to such social causes.

Around Tk 10,000 is needed to treat each patient including the cost of the lens and eyeglass, three-day stay in hospital and medicines.

Dr Mahubur Rahman also offered his residence at Jhigatola to accommodate the increasing numbers of the poor children coming for surgeries.

Memo not to pass immunity bill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Alliance against World Bank Immunity yesterday submitted a memorandum to the Speaker of the parliament urging the government today not to pass the immunity bill as it would go against the constitution.

The organisation yesterday also declared from a rally that it would chalk out countrywide massive agitation programmes if the government pass the bill giving blanket immunity to the World Bank (WB).

"Once the immunity to WB is given, no individuals or organisations would be able to sue the WB even if the basic constitutional rights are adversely affected by the WB activities," the memorandum said.

The bill, likely to be named 'The International Financial Organisations (Amendment) Act, 2004' is expected to be placed for enactment in the running parliament session that started yesterday.

Prior to submitting the memorandum, the alliance against WB Immunity, a forum of about 50 organisations, held a rally at Shahabghat yesterday noon while it was heading towards the Speaker's office.

Later, a five-member delegation of the alliance went to the Speaker Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar and submitted the memorandum in presence of the deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui.

Speakers at the rally said the immunity would harm people's basic right to go for legal action against WB affecting our sovereignty.

If the government gives the immunity, WB will use Bangladesh as an example in creating pressures on other poor nations to give it immunity, they said.

Among other leaders of the alliance, Aminur Rasul, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Sharif A Kafi and Ahmed Shavpon addressed the rally.

The leaders have declared programmes from the rally, urging every citizen to take part, that include a citizens' protest rally tomorrow at LGED auditorium in Agargaon at 10:00am and demonstration rallies from May 15 to 18 at Shahabghat at 3:00pm everyday in protest against the immunity to WB.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) also expressed concern over the government's initiative to give immunity to the WB or IMF.

"The blueprint that the government is designing by giving immunity to the WB is a conspiracy to sell the country to the empirical power and we must resist it through united movements," CPB President Manjurul Hossain Khan said at the party's central committee meeting at its office.

National Committee to protect Oil-Gas and Electricity-Port and Gonosanghotti Andolon also protested the government's initiative to give immunity to the WB.

Gonosanghotti Andolon will stage an agitation rally in the city today.

Obituary

Portrait of Khan Shabab Murshid

Khan Shabab Murshid, the only son of economist Dr KAS (Firdous) Murshid and artist Shameem Subrana, passed away at Phnom Penh in Cambodia on May 10, says a press release.

Khan Shabab Murshid is the grandson of Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid, an eminent educationist and late Nurjahan Begum.

The body of Khan Shabab Murshid will be flown in Dhaka at 12:00 noon today (Friday) and taken to his grandfather's residence at Gulshan Road 121, House 21, Apt. C4.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at Azaad Masjid (Gulshan) after Asr prayers today.

Qulqhwani of Khan Shabab Murshid will be held at the Gulshan residence after Asr prayers tomorrow (Saturday).

Relatives, friends and well-wishers have been requested to attend the janaza and Qulqhwani and pray for the salvation of his departed soul.

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US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca called on Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence in the city yesterday.

JS WOMEN'S RESERVE SEATS

Govt changes policy to avoid direct election

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

The government has changed the National Policy for the Development of Women excluding the much-talked-about direct election to reserve seats for women in parliament.

In the change made in May 2004, there is no context about the direct election. Rather it said, "Different steps, including an increase of the reserve seats for women, will be taken for their greater participation in parliament."

The women and children affairs ministry changed the policy without any consultation with the rights organisations in the face of the repeated demand for direct election to the reserve seats for women in the Jatiya Sangsad.

While at the time of declaring the policy in March 1997, it was stated in the last section of the paragraph eight that "initiatives will be taken to go for direct election to the extended reserve seats for women before the ending of the tenure of parliament in 2001."

The change in the section has created uncertainty about the direct election to reserve seats for women in parliament.

When asked about the change, Secretary of the Women and Children Affairs Ministry Mohammad Abdur Rashid Sarkar said the government has changed its policy, so this change has occurred.

He could not tell anything more about this change saying that he was not aware of it.

Meanwhile, different women's rights organisations, at a press conference, yesterday expressed deep concern over the change in the policy.

The women leaders said The National Policy for the Development of Women was initiated to ensure women's equal rights in education, health, food, security and economic activities.

They said the women community took the policy as a step towards their political empowerment.

"But the change, neglecting the demands of different women's rights organisations, is a setback for them. It is totally undemocratic, uneven and vague as it was made without any discussion with the rights organisations," said Co-ordinator of Nari Progoti Sangha Shahnaz Shumi while reading out a written statement.

"The government submitted a report to the United Nation's CEDAW committee in July 2004. There was a commitment in the report for quick direct election to the reserve seats for women in parliament. But there is nothing about the direct election in the amendment," said General Secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad Ayesha Khanam.

The parishad sent a letter to the ministry protesting the change in the policy, she added.

On behalf of the Social Resistance Committee, 30 rights organisations organised the press conference demanding discussions with the women's rights organisations before making any change in the policy.

They also demanded direct election to the women's reserve seats in the JS after raising the total seats to one hundred.

Mahila Parishad President Hena Das and Vice-president Mamta Begum, Executive Director of Karmojibi Nari Rokeya Rafique Baby, Vice-president of Mahila Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Makhduma Nargis and Advocate Rowshan Jahan were also present at the press conference.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks at the Bangladesh Nationalist Party Parliamentary Party (BNPPP) meeting at the Sangsad Bhavan in the city yesterday.

Japan to continue efforts for UNSC membership

Ambassador tells seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Japanese Ambassador Matsushiro Horiguchi said that his country would work untrigingly to secure a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council.

"We believe it is appropriate and just for us (Japan) to demand a permanent membership in the Security Council as it will be the best interest of the UN and the international community as a whole," said Horiguchi while he was addressing a seminar at a city hotel.

Japan Study Centre (JSC) programme under Dhaka University organised the seminar on 'Japan's role in Asia and the United Nations'.

"In order to respond effectively to the various challenges that the world is now facing today, the UN needs to be reformed so that it reflects the current global realities," said the Japanese ambassador.

Horiguchi said 166 member countries of the UN voiced the need for reforms in Security Council and 113 favoured expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent categories of the UN Security Council.

He said Japan is now contributing 20 percent of the UN's regular budget, which is more than the four permanent Security Council members—the UK, France, Russia and China combined.

Speaking as chief guest, University Grants Commission Chairman Prof M Asaduzzaman said Japan deserves to be a permanent member of the reformed UN Security Council.

Prof Dr Aatur Rahman, founding director of the JSC, in his paper said that Japan's intent to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council could be seen in the changed global security context.

its membership in the reformed Security Council could contribute effectively to the global peace and security, he added.

Prof. Rahman said the centre of gravity in terms of economic power is moving from the west to the east gradually where Japan played the leadership role.

Speaking as special guest, Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz said the world will be much more secure than today if Japan becomes permanent member of the Security Council.

He said Japan's demand for a permanent membership in the Security Council is very legitimate as it has been playing a significant role as a development partner of many developing countries, including Bangladesh.

Later, certificates were distributed among the students of first and second batch of JSC.

SAVAR FACTORY COLLAPSE Garment workers lay siege to court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Garment workers laid siege to the Dhaka District Court yesterday, demanding stern punishment of the owner of the collapsed Spectrum garments factory in Savar, while elsewhere across the city other workers' rights groups expressed their outrage over the tragic accident.

Around one hundred garment workers, organized by Jatiya Garments Sramik Jote and Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation, brought out a procession at 11:15pm from the Mukhtangon, marching through Nur Hossain Square, Gulistan, Bangsal and Nababpur road. Chanting slogans against the owner of the factory, they eventually reached the court premises at noon, where a large contingent of police held them back from entering the court.

They blamed the government and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) for failing to look after the victims' families and injured workers, and also insisted the government impose the death penalty on the factory owner.

"It is good news that the owner was captured, but we demand that the government impose the highest punishment," said Amirul Huq Amin, general secretary of Jatiya Garment Sramik Federation.

He added, "Now many workers can not work or join any garment factory as their hands, legs and other parts of their bodies are paralysed. But the government and owners have not taken any steps to provide them proper treatment."

In other actions, Garment Sramik and Shilpa Raksha Jatiya Mancha submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner demanding the highest punishment for the collapsed factory.

In the memorandum, the leader of the Jatiya Mancha demanded Tk 5 lakh as compensation for each of the families of the dead, saying that Tk 1 lakh is not enough, and also demanded Tk 3 lakh for each of the handicapped workers and Tk 1 lakh for each of the injured workers.

Yet another organisation, Shadhin Bangla Garments Sramik-Karmachary Federation, also formed a human chain in front of the High Court, demanding the highest punishment of the owner of the collapsed factory.

They threatened the government with tougher agitations if the owner of the collapsed factory is released.

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Death anniversary

Today is the second death anniversary of Captain (Retd) MN Islam and his wife Shova Islam, says a press release.

On the occasion, Quirankhwani, milad mahfil and doa will be held at their village home mosque in Mymensingh after Juma prayers.

Begum Lutfunnessa

Today is the third death anniversary of Begum Lutfunnessa, wife of late Tofazzul Hossain and mother of architect Rabul Hossain, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil will be held at her residence and Kushtia Jame Masjid after Juma prayers.

Qulqhwani

Qulqhwani of M A Halim, former joint secretary of finance ministry and father of Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote General Secretary Tarana Halam, at his residence at Road No-3, House 24-A, Dhanmondi in the city after Asr prayers today, says a press release.

Abdul Malek Akhand

Qulqhwani of Abdul Malek Akhand, a former navy official, will be held at his 75, North Road, Dhanmondi residence in the city after Asr prayers today, says a press release.

Relatives, friends and admirers have been requested to attend the qulqhwani and pray for the departed soul.

Malek died on Tuesday at his residence at the age of 70.

He left behind his wife and 2 children to mourn his death.

Chehlum

Chehlum of Haji Adam Ali Khan, a Pirojpur district Awami League leader and father of former DUJ leader Obaidul Haque Khan, will be held today, says a press release.

On the occasion, a Qurankhwani and milad mahfil will be held at his village home at Mothbaria and South Monipur Mosque in the city after Juma prayers today.



Mahila Parishad President Hena Das hands over a crest to noted litterateur Sarder Fazlul Karim at a ceremony organised on the occasion of celebrating his 80th birth anniversary at TSC Cafeteria in the city yesterday.

BCL activist beaten up at DU hall

DU CORRESPONDENT

An activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) was beaten up severely by her party leader at the Bangladesh-Kuwait Moitri Hall of Dhaka University on Wednesday night.

Sources said hall unit BCL President Sharmin Jahan beat up Hafsa Hai, a second year student of Philosophy and resident of room no 406, as she refused to join the party procession on the campus in the day.

Talking to the reporters, Hafsa alleged that Sharmin had been threatening her not to disclose the incident.

"I have made complaints to the proctor and the hall provost demanding punishment of Sharmin," she said, adding, "I have been feeling insecure after her threats."

When asked, Sharmin said she did not beat up Hafsa, but admitted that she had an altercation with her.

WEATHER TODAY

Mild heat wave may continue

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka, Khulna and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Noakhali and Comilla till 6:00pm today.

Mild heat wave, which is sweeping over Khulna and Rajshahi divisions and the regions of Faridpur, Madaripur and Dhaka may continue, Met Office said predicting nearly unchanged day temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 38.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and lowest 19.2 degree Celsius at Sitakundu.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:33pm today and rises at 5:17am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	35.2	26.6	69	76
Chittagong	34.7	23.9	75	61
Rajshahi	38.0	26.6	73	59
Khulna	35.6	28.2	81	73
Barisal	35.4	28.3	77	62
Sylhet	31.2	19.5	73	64
Cox's Bazar	34.8	27.4	77	79

DAILY STAR-MUTUAL BANK SCHOOL DEBATE 'Fair and healthy debate to strengthen human quality'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Speakers at a function here yesterday emphasised the need for fair and healthy debates to strengthen human quality and establish the power of logic in order to help build a better society.

They were speaking at the inaugural session of The Daily Star-Mutual Trust Bank 5th Inter School English Debate Competition.

East West University Professor Abdul Mannan formally inaugurated the weekend event at Shilpakala Academy, which was organised by Drishti, an educational and cultural organisation of the port city.

"Debate flourishes the inherent strength of human being," said Professor Mannan, the former vice-chancellor (VC) of Chittagong University.

He said a logical society, if we can build one, might play a pivotal role to root out many evils such as terrorism, violence and corruption.

"And it's the younger generation who can actually make the impossible happen," he added.

Speaking as the chief guest, Premier University VC Professor Anwarul Azim Arif said, "We have long been engaged in debates on different issues since the independence but those were proved as no good for the country."

Now, what we need most is a logical society to move forward by leaving aside petty differences and interests, he added.

Drishy Debate Club Chairperson Safia Rahman presided over the session while Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) former president Engineer Ali Ahmad addressed it as special guest.

Four debates were held on the first day in which Summer Fields School, Bangladesh Elementary School, Bay View School and Oxbridge International School have emerged victorious in their respective meets.

Engineer Ali Ahmad, Alliance Francaise Executive Dr Gurupal Palit and Premier University Professor Nadia Rahman presided over the debate sessions while the judges were Ashraf Karim Ronny and Mainul Hossain Sohel.

DHAKA TODAY

Tagore songs

Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts organises a session of Tagore songs to mark the 144th birth anniversary of poet Rabindranath Tagore. Venue: Bafu Auditorium, Wishehat. Time: 10:00am.

Discussion

A discussion and cultural function will be held to mark the 79th birth anniversary of noted litterateur Dr Shamsuddin Abul Kalam. Venue: National Museum, Shahabghat. Time: 4.45pm.

Ex-cadets' meeting

The biennial election and general meeting of Bangladesh Ex-cadets Association will be held with Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed as chief guest. Venue: RAOWA Club, Mohakhali. Time: 2:00pm.

Get-together

Central Kachi-Kanchar Mela organises a get-together to mark the Mother's Day. Venue: Kachi-Kancha Bhaban, Segun Bagicha. Time: 10:30am.

Rally

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon organises a rally demanding the cancellation of Indian River Linking Project. Venue: Shahabghat Crossing. Time: 10:00am.

Painting exhibition

A solo exhibition of paintings by