

India 'loses 10m female births'

BBC ONLINE

More than 10m female births in India may have been lost to abortion and sex selection in the past 20 years, according to medical research.

Researchers in India and Canada for the Lancet journal said prenatal selection and selective abortion was causing the loss of 500,000 girls a year.

Their research was based on a national survey of 1.1m households in 1998.

The researchers said the "girl deficit" was more common among educated women but did not vary according to religion.

The unusual gender balance in India has been known about for sometime.

In most countries, women slightly outnumber men, but separate research for the year 2001 showed that for every 1,000 male babies born in India, there were just 933 girls.

The latest research is by Prabhat Jha of St Michael's Hospital at the University of Toronto, Canada, and Rajesh Kumar of the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Research in Chandigarh, India.

They found that there was an increasing tendency to select boys when previous children had been girls.

The sex ratio is so skewed in some states, men cannot find brides.

In cases where the preceding child was a girl, the ratio of girls to boys in the next birth was 759 to 1,000.

This fell even further when the two preceding children were both girls. Then the ratio for the third child born was just 719 girls to 1,000 boys.

However, for a child following the birth of a male child, the gender ratio was roughly equal.

Prabhat Jha said conservative estimates in the research suggested half a million girls were being lost each year.

"If this practice has been common for most of the past two decades since access to ultrasound became widespread, then a figure of 10m missing female births would not be unreasonable."

Sex selective abortions have been banned in India for more than a decade.

Experts in India say female foeticide is mostly linked to socio-economic factors.

Road accidents yesterday.

Police and witnesses said due to dense fog a Rangpur bound bus collided head-on with a lorry at Sherpur on the Dhaka-Bogra highway at about 8:30am leaving three persons dead on the spot and eight others injured.

The deceased are Monir Hossain, 35, an army person who was on his way to Rangpur from Comilla to celebrate Eid with his family, Mizanur, 20, who hailed from West Shimul Bari under Jhaldhaka upazila in Nilphamari and an unidentified person of 35 years of age. Identities of the injured could not be known immediately.

The injured were admitted to Sherpur Thana Health Complex and Mohammad Ali Hospital in Bogra.

In another incident Raja Chowdhury, 55, was killed when a bus ran him over at Gohali area under Shahajan upazilla at noon.

Imamul, 20, a helper to a truck driver was killed when he was ran over by a truck while standing beside his parked truck at Matidihali of the Sadar upazila at 4:00am.

Both bodies were sent to Mohammad Ali Hospital for autopsy.

Re-probe

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further investigation by the Investigation Officer Abdul Hamid, now officer-in-charge of Khulna Police Station.

Humayun Kabir Balu, editor of Dainik Janmabhumini and president of Khulna press club, was killed in bomb attack on June 27, 2004 in front of his office-cum-residence.

Eight extremists were named as accused of the murder in the FIR lodged with Khulna Police Station.

Trial of the case began under Khulna Speedy Trial Tribunal on October 25 last year and 11 out of 27 prosecution witnesses so far gave testimony.

Human bird flu

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disease among birds has already been confirmed, officials said.

Turkish laboratories identified four of the new cases as children from three northern provinces, confirming that the virus is steadily advancing from remote, rural eastern areas to the more urbanized west, with three H5N1 carriers already hospitalised in the capital Ankara.

The European Union sought to bolster its defences, announcing new import bans on six countries surrounding Turkey and confirming that EU experts were accompanying a World Health Organization (WHO) team currently assessing the situation in the worst-hit areas in the east.

The new cases bring to 12 the number of people currently under treatment, all but one of them small children and teenagers.

Two children from the same family died in eastern Turkey last week after playing with sick chickens, becoming the first human fatalities outside the virus' eastern Asian origins.

A third sibling also died but she tested negative for the bird flu virus.

Of the new cases, two siblings aged four and five, currently hospitalised in Ankara, have not yet shown any sign of illness, senior health ministry official Turan Buzgan told the Anatolia news agency.

A five-year-old boy from Corum, initially treated for pneumonia, was brought to the same hospital in Ankara and is now improving.

A 12-year-old is undergoing treatment in Samsun, on the Black Sea coast, Buzgan said.

The fifth patient, aged 18, was hospitalised in Van, where the three siblings perished last week and four other children infected with H5N1 are currently undergoing treatment.

As the emergency cull of fowl continued across the country, officials said the agriculture ministry was drafting legislation to ban outdoor poultry breeding, largely blamed for the spread of the virus, Anatolia reported.

Most of those infected come from impoverished rural areas, where people breed poultry in their homes and often take them indoors during the winter, providing ideal conditions for contamination.

Principal secy Kamal awaits 5th extension

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Principal Secretary to the prime minister Dr Kamal Siddiqui may get his contract renewed for the fifth term, as his fourth term contract expired yesterday.

Siddiqui is in Geneva at present, taking part in an international conference. Extension of his contractual service will be done on his return, sources said.

Rafiqul Islam, secretary of shipping, was given a one-year contract yesterday. A number of high officials were given contractual appointment in the last few days.

Criminal killed

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On information that Jamal had been staying in Rampura in disguise and frequented Kakoli area regularly, a team of Rab 4 layaid him in front of army club at 5:30pm Sunday, a Rab press release said.

During interrogation, Jamal told Rab men that his cohorts were hiding and preparing for an attack in a den at Baburtek in Damalkot area of Kafur.

Rab 4 team went to the area to arrest his accomplices and recover firearms at around 4:30am yesterday. As soon as they reached the spot, unknown criminals opened fire on the elite force suddenly, prompting them to retaliate, the press release said.

"Taking advantage of the suddenness of the incident and darkness, Jamal ran in an attempt to flee and fell in the line of fire," the release reads.

After the shootout, Rab team found Jamal lying bullet-hit and dead, while his accomplices fled.

A revolver, a pipe-gun, three cartridges of gun and four pistol and revolver bullets were recovered from the spot.

Jamal was also a robber and extortionist and used to kill people on instructions of top criminals Ibrahim and Taj, the press release said.

Sweepers lay

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an influential ruling party lawmaker allegedly manhandled a sweeper on Sunday morning for not cleaning the street in front of his house in Shahjahanpur, sources said.

Yesterday morning they laid siege to the residence of Mirza Abbas, who is also the local MP, and demanded justice.

The sweepers went back to join their work after two and a half hours, when the minister assured them of looking into the matter.

When contacted, Mirza Abbas told journalists that some sweepers came to him as they come every year before Eid.

A local BNP leader, however, said this time the sweepers came to Mirza Abbas to seek justice.

14-party

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High Court (HC) order.

"The CEC has showed his disrespect to the HC and is continuing the preparation of the controversial voter list," Jalil said adding that the CEC is acting as the main conspirator to hold the next parliamentary polls in favour of ruling BNP and Jamaat.

In protest against the 'autocratic' CEC, the opposition parties will march towards the Election Commission (EC) secretariat in a bid to lay siege to the EC on January 19, he said.

The 14-party meeting however cancelled the January 30 grand rally in Chittagong but kept the schedule for the grand rally in Sylhet on January 31 unchanged.

Presided over by AL presidium member Abdus Samad, the meeting was also attended by Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, AL Joint Secretary Obaidul Quader and Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon.

Bangabandhu

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Pakistanis jail the following day.

After a nine-month struggle for independence, the nation achieved victory on December 16, 1971 and the then Pakistani authorities were eventually compelled to free the founding father of Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the Awami League (AL) and its front organisations have drawn up elaborate programmes to observe the day. AL hoists the national flag and the party flag at the AL central office and at the Bangabandhu Bhaban in the city and party offices across the country at 6:00am.

A delegate of senior AL leaders will lay wreath at the tomb of Bangabandhu at Tungipara in Gopalganj today.

As part of two-day programme to celebrate the historic day, the AL yesterday organised a discussion meeting at the lakeside adjacent to Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital.

On the eve of Bangabandhu's homecoming day, leader of the opposition and AL chief Sheikh Hasina in a message urged people to step up the movement against the ruling BNP-Jamaat-led coalition. She accused the government of undermining the spirit of the Liberation War by patronising the war criminals and anti-liberation elements.

The statement said, "January 10 of 1972 is a historic day and Bangabandhu himself had described his homecoming as a journey from darkness to light."

Rush home mired

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Kushitia regions where mercury has dropped below 10 degrees Celsius. The lowest temperature was recorded at 8.3 degrees at Chuadanga yesterday.

Dhaka's lowest temperature was 12.7 degrees Celsius.

Sources at the flight information centre at Zia International Airport said arrivals and departures of six international flights were delayed and four domestic flights of different airlines were cancelled due to poor visibility between 3:00am and 9:00am yesterday.

As the sun remained invisible until noon in most places, motor vehicles had to move with their fog lights on. Doulatdia-Paturia ferry services were severely disrupted. Besides, a ship ran aground near Chittagong Port due to dense fog.

Our Manikganj correspondent reports: There was an eight-kelometre long traffic congestion at both Doulatdia and Paturia ferry terminals as the movement of ferries remained stopped for the whole night due to dense fog on Sunday and last night.

The disruption caused untold sufferings to thousands of home-bound people from 15 districts of the southwestern region. Five ferries loaded with 18 passenger buses were stranded for the whole night in the middle of the river Padma.

The passengers, especially female, old and minor, suffered from shortage of food and drinking water coupled with sanitation problems.

To avoid the disrupted ferry services on Doulatdia-Paturia

route, most bus operators have changed their route and started moving towards Jamuna Bridge to reach the southwestern districts via Paksey in Pabna, which takes a long time.

"The ferry service has already stopped today and long queues of vehicles are waiting to cross the river. So, we have directed our drivers to take a different route," a staff of Hanif Paribahan, a bus operator, told The Daily Star last night.

A UNB report says: The home ministry yesterday advised all vehicles bound for southwestern districts from the capital and the eastern region to use Jamuna Bridge and Lalon Shah Bridge as dense fog disrupted ferry services at Paturia and Mawa.

The launches that left Dhaka for Patuakhali, Barisal, Barguna, Bhola, Jhalakati, Khulna and Pirojpur on Sunday night reached their destinations eight to nine hours late. Dense fog disrupted movement of river craft in the rivers Dhaleshwari and Meghna.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) sources said around 50 launches could not come back at the Sadarghat in the capital in time which forced thousands of home-bound people to wait at Sadarghat for hours.

Our Rangpur correspondent quoting the civil surgeon and Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) sources reports that at least 200 children and elderly people in the district have been attacked with pneumonia, asthma and cold diarrhoea.

Ship stuck at Karnaphuli for silting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An ocean-going ship ran aground in the river Karnaphuli yesterday due to silting in the mouth of the river.

According to sources, the Bangladeshi flag carrier MV Bangaborti was supposed to enter the Karnaphuli channel from the outer anchorage to dock at the Chittagong port but it failed as it ran aground.

The Bangaborti with its 500-container load is waiting for the next high tide in the hope of freeing herself. The area where the ship got marooned was declared a safe zone by the port authorities, the ship captain said.

The Karnaphuli channel has become dangerous for ships as they run aground quite often. Several ocean-going ships last year had the same fate and waited for days to enter the channel. The shipping experts suggested regular dredging in the channel to keep the port operational.

US urges BNP, AL

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believe that your military knows that," said Steve Engelken, director of the office of Bangladesh and Pakistan Affairs, during an internet chat with some Bangladesh journalists.

"Democracy takes constant effort by all, if it is to be maintained. We call on both the major parties to act responsibly and put the interests of the nation ahead of everything," he said, adding: "Bangladesh's international friends, including the United States, support broad participation in the next general elections which should be free and fair."

He observed that the people of Bangladesh struggled hard for democracy and made sacrifices for it that a few Americans today can imagine. However, democracies require constant effort by the people if they are to be maintained.

"Bangladesh's international friends, including the United States, support your efforts to maintain democratic governance. It is, therefore, extremely important that the next elections enjoy broad participation and be free and fair," Engelken said.

On the question of formal cooperation between the USA and Bangladesh in dealing with rising militancy and terrorism like that of India and Pakistan, he said the Bush administration would consider it seriously if Bangladesh government so wanted.

"We maintain a regular dialogue with the government of Bangladesh on terrorism issues. If the Bangladesh government wanted to make these discussions more formal, we would consider that request seriously," he said.

About the government's anti-JMB operation, the US State Department official said, "Many known terrorist leaders still remain at large. We would hope the government will not rest until it has pursued all leads in this investigation and has arrested the ringleaders behind the recent bombings."

However, he noted, Bangladesh government has made significant progress in its investigation into the recent terrorist attacks. It is notable that some weeks have passed since the last bombing. It is too early, however, to say that Bangladesh has turned the corner.

Suicide bombers

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The ministry has been attacked by insurgents on several previous occasions, especially by Sunni Arab insurgents who accuse it of running Shia militia who oppress the minority Sunni Arab community. The ministry denies such charges.

In November, US troops found a bunker run by the Interior Ministry containing 170 prisoners, mostly Sunni Arabs. Many showed signs of abuse and torture.

Govt loans

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the country, it may not be able to meet the ministries need for foreign currencies always on time, said BB officials at the meeting.

But the NCBs declined the offer of ODs, as they will have to return the ODs in foreign currencies along with interests. They however proposed the central bank to sell the required amount of dollars to them.

The central bank also suggested a number of ways to procure dollars on a short-term basis to the energy ministry including borrowing from foreign banks. Besides, the BB suggested some alternative arrangements for collecting foreign currencies like taking loans from companies like the Dhabi group of Abudhabi in the Middle East.

Following the meeting Mahmudur Rahman told reporters that the SCB and the Hong Kong Sanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) have already proposed to lend \$500 million and one of the banks' proposals is being sent to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs. The interest rate on the loan will be LIBOR (London Interbank Offered Rate) + 1.97 percent.

Rahman however said the interest rate is not much higher than that of the IDB. IDB charges LIBOR + 1.75 percent as interest.

Since Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) owes Tk 5,000 crore to the Sonali Bank, the bank has suspended opening LCs for the corporation. "We are considering issuance of bonds and budgetary allocations to raise the money that the BPC owes to the Sonali Bank. We will meet the finance minister to discuss the issue after the Eid," Rahman said.

Ariel Sharon

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minister had begun breathing spontaneously in the first sign of activity in his brain since he was placed in the coma.

"We have started to reduce the amount of anaesthesia," Shlomo MorYosef told reporters.

"In the first stage, Mr Sharon has begun to breathe spontaneously although he is still connected to the ventilator. This is the first sign of some sort of activity in his brain."

Doctors say he could survive but have ruled out the chances of him returning as prime minister, leaving Israel staring into a political void expected to be felt far beyond the country's narrow borders in the wider Middle East.

Sharon has been comatose, in a critical situation, since Wednesday night when he suffered his second stroke in less than three weeks, leaving Israelis addicted to television and radio bulletins for hourly news of his health.

After days of uncertainty, doctors have appeared more confident they can save his life but are warning his condition will not allow him to absorb the stresses of leading the Jewish state.

One doctor at the Hadassah told AFP on condition of anonymity that he was running a risk of paralysis or other difficulties that will prevent him from ruling the country.

"We are in no doubt that we will be able to revive him... but he will probably not be able to resume his duties," the sources said.

Israelis and world leaders have already braced themselves for the end of the Sharon era, fearing his demise would spark new turmoil in a region struggling to find the path to peace after decades of conflict.

His plight has revived traumatic memories of the death of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin a decade ago, whose assassination by a Jewish extremist triggered a wave of violence and a collapse of the peace process.

His passing from politics will also leave stranded his new Kadima party that had been on course to emerge the largest player after an early general election fixed for March 28, although polls have so far given it strong leads.

With Sharon in intensive care, his stand-in Ehud Olmert has pledged business as usual.

Elder statesman Shimon Peres said he would endorse Olmert to lead Kadima into the next election, as did the former head of Israel's domestic security service, Avi Dichter.

Olmert, while respected, has none of the clout nor the power base that enabled Sharon to bulldoze his way through opposition to last year's pullout from the Gaza Strip, the defining moment of his five-year premiership.

Among the trickiest decisions of his acting premiership will be to rule whether to allow Arab residents of east Jerusalem to vote in this

month's Palestinian election.

Public security minister Gideon Ezra announced Monday that candidates for the Ramallah-based parliament would be allowed to campaign in east Jerusalem, occupied and then annexed in 1967.

However he told Israeli radio that the radical Hamas movement, behind the majority of anti-Israeli attacks in the last five years, would not be able to canvass for votes.

Ezra also did not confirm how or even whether voting could take place. Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas has threatened to scrap the whole ballot if east Jerusalem residents cannot take part in the democratic process.

Two prominent candidates, independent MP Hanan Ashrawi and presidential election runner-up Mustafa Barghouti, were last week forcibly stopped while canvassing in the Arab quarter of the Old City.

Speaking to AFP on Monday, however, Ashrawi minimised the impact of the latest Israeli decision.

"I was not personally informed but we reject the conditions imposed such as getting police permission or excluding candidates from Hamas," she said.

"We want a clear Israeli political decision on the entire electoral process in Jerusalem," she added.

Call money

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various bills, clear all advances and handle all these pressures on the last working day.

The central bank yesterday released Tk 1,600 crore under repurchase agreement (Repo) of which Sonali Bank alone took Tk 1,200 crore to maintain its SLR and CRR as the bank is facing serious liquidity crisis.

The central bank met the liquidity demand of all banks under Repo. But the banks that did not have securities could not avail this and they had to borrow money from other banks at high interest rates to maintain their SLR and CRR. "These banks were forced to face this situation because of their weak management," said a source.

On the other hand, some banks through 'syndication' created artificial crisis of funds that intensified liquidity crisis yesterday.

"Cash withdrawal by the depositors was not unusually high. Presently depositors can withdraw money using ATM cards and most of the private banks now offer this facility that eased pressure on cash withdrawal from banks before long holidays," said a banker.

Sonali Bank cleared cash of around Tk 60 crore from its local office yesterday and the amount was Tk 75 crore on Sunday.

The banks withdraw around Tk 100 crore to Tk 200 crore in normal situation but they withdrew Tk 650 crore on Sunday and the amount rose to Tk 800 crore yesterday.

Eid tomorrow

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and banners inscribed with Eid Mubarak and verses from the holy Quran and quotes from hadith. Major office buildings and road crossings in the capital will be illuminated on the Eid day.

The Dhaka City Corporation has taken steps to clear the garbage from the streets immediately after sacrifice of animals by city dwellers.

The national dailies have published special supplements highlighting the significance of Eid-ul-Azha while television channels will broadcast special programmes to entertain the viewers during Eid holidays.

The largest Eid congregation in the city will be held at Jatiya Eidgah Maidan in front of the Supreme Court. The city corporation has erected huge canopy at the Maidan and taken adequate measures for facilitating people to join the congregation.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, along with senior ministers and members of the cabinet, will offer his Eid prayers at the Jatiya Eidgah Maidan.

Eid congregations will also take place at all major mosques, including the Baitul Mokarram National Mosque, eidgahs and open spaces in the city.

City dwellers are now busy in buying sacrificial animals from 14

makeshift cattle markets in the city.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khalesia Zia, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in separate messages yesterday greeted the nation on the eve of Eid-ul-Azha. They sought divine blessings for the people's peace, progress and betterment in life.

The government offices that will remain closed for five days including three Eid holidays beginning from today will reopen on Sunday.

To celebrate the Eid with their near and dear ones, a large number of people have already left the capital for village homes while many more are expected to leave today.

In port city Chittagong, two major Eid congregations will be held at Jamiatul Falah mosque and Chittagong M A Aziz Stadium. The main congregation at Jamiatul Falah mosque will be held at 8:00am.

In Sylhet, the main Eid congregation will be held at historic Shahi Eidgah at 8:30am.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: The main Eid congregation in the divisional headquarter will be held at Hemenay Uddin Eidgah Maidan at 8:30am. Eid congregations will also take place at Baitul Mokarram mosque, Jame Kashai mosque and Ebadullah mosque in the morning.

the parliamentary defence committee, was quoting as saying by the Mehr news agency.

The Revolutionary Guards Corps was set up in the wake of the 1979 revolution to defend the Islamic republic from "internal and external threats". It is now one of Iran's most powerful institutions and counts an estimated 350,000 men.

Iranian media said the Hercules plane involved in December's crash - bought from the United States before the Islamic revolution and starved of spare parts -- had been ordered to fly despite warnings from its pilot.

Defence Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar had faced possible impeachment over the crash but the motion was subsequently taken off the parliamentary agenda.

Since the revolution, clerical-ruled Iran has been subject to tough US sanctions, hindering the purchase of critical spare parts for all US-made planes in its air force, civilian flag carrier Iran Air and domestic airlines.