

MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS

Govt seeks media help to make people aware

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government seeks help from the media to make people aware of the 'mysterious illness' by disseminating scientific knowledge while the experts said there nothing to be panicked as the ailment does not leave any long-term effects.

Following the 'mass psychogenic illness' or 'mass hysteria' that recently affected a few hundred students, mostly the adolescent females, the Ministry of Health yesterday arranged a press conference where leading experts in this field were present.

Emphasising schoolteachers and health workers' working together to tackle the problem, the experts said the same thing had happened in many developed and developing countries in the past and there is nothing to be worried about it.

The media can play an important role by creating awareness among the people on how they could cope with the ailment and what they should do, Health Adviser Maj Gen (retd) ASM Matiur Rahman said at the press briefing at the health ministry

auditorium.

"The illness leaves no long-term complication, and the patients and their guardians need counselling.

At the same time nutritious food and proper health care for the patient is important. Mild tranquilliser can be used to ease the tension," he said.

"The symptoms of mass hysteria – headache, vomiting or nausea, losing consciousness, blurred vision, convulsion, restlessness, pain in chest, abdomen and even in whole body and breathing problem may increase if the affected children get excessive attention. But it is not that they are acting. The symptoms appear as the expression of their mental state," he said.

"In mass hysteria which is also known as psychogenic illness, similar type of physical symptoms spread radically among the contemporary children. But no specific disease was identified after the patients' physical check-up. Still now no one has died due to this illness," said the adviser.

However, the illness normally starts from environmental factors such as smell, fright of infection or

rumour and spreads rapidly among the nearby children from hearing or seeing the affected one, he said.

"It can also spread through the news provided by the media and the children who have low stress tolerance get affected first," he said adding that if the affected child can be provided with counselling by keeping him or her separated from other children, accentuation of the illness will reduce.

Psychiatrist Dr Anwara Syed Haque said the female children are mostly affected with the illness for some biological and social factors.

"During the adolescent period, children's personality is not developed enough and sometimes they may not be able to cope with the adverse social situations. It can also influence others of the same age group," she said.

Explaining different steps taken by the government to control the mass psychogenic illness that began on July 11 in Narsinghdi, the health adviser said Directorate General of Health and the Control Room has been instructed for non-stop information collection regard-

ing the issue.

Bureau of Health Education and Directorate General of Health have also been requested to circulate awareness messages, he said, adding that mass psychogenic illness was first reported in the country in 2005 among the school children in Mujibnagar upazila of Meherpur district.

Among others, neurologist Prof Din Mohammad, Prof Mahmudur Rahman of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), Dr Abdullah Al Mamun, Principal and Head of the Department of Medicine of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) Prof MAFaiz were present at the briefing.

All the 'mass hysteria' affected students who were admitted to DMCH have been released, as their condition is stable now.

Meanwhile, our Barisal correspondent reported that seven more students of Muladi upazila in Barisal fell ill with mass hysteria symptoms yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Justice Fazlul Karim speaks at a seminar titled 'Justice system for children in Bangladesh', at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left is MA Hye Howlader and on his right is Justice M Imman Ali.

84,000 incidents of violence against children take place a yr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 84,000 incidents of violence against children are taking place every year in the absence of 'safety' or 'child-friendly environment' in society, which usually cast a long-term negative impact on children, according to statistics provided by Save the Children, UK.

Non-implementation of the laws concerning child rights, carelessness of judges regarding the child act, discrepancy in general and special laws asserting the age of children and lack of awareness on the part of magistrates, police and probation officers about the issue are major causes behind the violence against children, experts said at a seminar in the city yesterday.

Save the Children, UK organised the dissemination seminar titled 'Justice system for children in Bangladesh', at Cirdap auditorium.

The speakers also stressed the need to launch awareness campaign involving people of different levels, including magistrates, to improve the juvenile justice system.

"We must keep it in mind that children are yet to develop their own mindset and do not know what is correct or offence. So the purpose of law is to protect the children and create a child-friendly environment for those exposed to criminal activities," said justice M Imman Ali.

"The children are not meant to be sent to jail and even many of our magistrates are not aware of child rights. Awareness programme involving the people concerned, including magistrates, should be arranged to benefit our children and protect them from abuse or ill treatment," he added.

Prof Dr Borhan Uddin Khan presented the keynote paper titled

'Justice system for children in Bangladesh and the Role of State and Non-state actors' in the seminar chaired by MA Hye Howlader, secretary, ministry of social welfare.

Justice Fazlul Karim, Advocate Dr Shahdeen Malik, Dr Sumaya Khair, Dr Ismat Shamim and Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Jalal Ahmed also took part in the seminar.

The experts said the major obstacles to ensuring child rights are inconsistency in interpretation of the Children Act 1974, non-existence of national data on various aspects of children and their protection, lack of coordination between policemen and probation officers, faults of parents/guardians, faults in the social system and police officials wrongly mentioning the age of accused children in the first information report.

Formulate policy soon to revive jute sector

Political, NGO leaders urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different organisations yesterday expressed concern whether the government policy of shutting down the jute mills and retrenching workers would bring back the 'golden days of golden fibre'.

Bodies concerned observed that due to shrinking policy of the government workers are dying of hunger, starving family members are rushing towards the gruel kitchens opened by civil society, and the academic career of hundreds of students have become uncertain.

While the demand for jute is rising in the global market for its eco-friendly nature, and the number of industries is increasing in India following suggestions of the World Bank and the graph of jute export from Bangladesh saw a new height according to the export promotion bureau, it is not clear why the government has gone for such suicidal attempt, observed different quarters.

Their reactions came following

the govt declaration on July 18 to shut down four state-owned jute mills, 84 jute purchasing centres and retrench 14000 workers from 22 mills as part of its three-year reform programme which would require Tk 1367 crore to revive the country's jute sector.

Terming the govt roadmap a 'shrinking policy', Ain O Salish Kendra said though successive governments in the last two and a half decades adopted the same policy with no visible result, the present government has expressed the hope that with this road map they would revive the sector.

Citing the examples of privatisation of state-owned jute mills in 1981-82 and signing of the treaty 'Jute Sector Adjustment Credit' on February 17, 1994, a press release of the ASK said, "Though these steps were taken to turn the jute sector profit-oriented, in reality 31 jute mills were closed down in 1981 and another six in 1994.

"Even during the era of former government the same 'shrinking policy' was followed to rescue the sick sector and as a result the largest jute mill in the world 'Adamjee Jute Mills' was shut down on January 24, 2002," it added.

So there is no room to expect something better from this strategy, ASK said, adding, if the money that is required to implement the roadmap could be invested rationally the loss-incurring jute sector may earn profit.

Meanwhile, People's Commission - Jute and Jute Industry said earlier also the decisions to revive jute sector ended up with closing down jute mills one after another leaving the mill workers without jobs and realising their arrears.

"Jute which is inseparable part of our culture should be treated with proper care", the commission demanded adding, the culprits that caused the destruction of this sector should be punished and an independent jute policy should be formulated immediately.

Workers Party of Bangladesh President Khondokar Ali Abbas and General Secretary Saiful Haque in a press statement termed the government initiative to revive the jute sector by retrenching workers 'insensible and destructive', while Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu and Syed Jafar Sajjad said the comment of the adviser was nothing but a 'tall-talk'.

Communist Party of Bangladesh President Monjurul Ahsan Khan and General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim demanded immediate retreat from the proposed roadmap that thinks retrenching of mill workers is the panacea to revive the jute sector.

Pat Suta Bostrokol Sramik Karmochari Songram Parishad, Odhikar, Samajtantrik Sramik Front and Bangladesh Songjukto Garment Sramik Federation have also expressed concern over the decision of the government.

However, Pat O Pat Shilpa Rakkha O Unnayon Jatiyo Somonnoy Committee has hailed the government decision of disbursing Tk 200 crore for purchasing jute and made some recommendations that included initiatives to resolve the problems of jute workers in Khulna region, opening up of closed jute mills and rendering help through effective banking and other services.

All docs of Ctg Maa O Shishu Hospital fired

CU CORRESPONDENT

All medical officers on strike at Chittagong Maa O Shishu General Hospital were fired from their jobs yesterday as they failed to resume work by the deadline given by the hospital's executive committee (EC).

"Since the doctors didn't join [their work] by the deadline, they had automatically been sacked," said Dr ASM Fazlul Karim, president of the committee.

He also said preparations were underway to recruit new medical officers on an ad hoc basis to the vacant posts immediately.

Around 44 medical officers of the hospital had enforced an indefinite strike since Tuesday demanding regularisation of jobs, implementation of service rules and reformation of the executive committee by including representatives from the doctors, nurses and other staff.

Following a meeting on Wednesday, the EC served a notice to the agitating medical officers asking them to resume work by 2:30pm on Thursday (today) with the warning that they would be fired if they fail to comply, explained EC president Dr Karim.

One of the agitating doctors, Dr Enamul Haque Chowdhury, however, said they did not receive any letter from the authorities, but a negotiation meeting with the authorities was scheduled for yesterday evening.

The doctors' strike that continued for the third consecutive day (yesterday) caused terrible sufferings to patients in the hospital, said sources.

Edn ministry to introduce database

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education ministry is going to introduce a database that will have detailed information of all the teachers and officials of government colleges, teachers' training colleges and education boards to speed up the administrative works.

A four-member team led by Education Ministry Joint Secretary M Shafiuallah was formed in this regard and it has already begun to collect 38 types of information from 290 educational institutes, a press release of education ministry said yesterday.

In the database, all teachers and officials will have an individual identity number and one can easily get to know about any of them within seconds using his ID number.

Details of 290 government educational institutes will also be available in the database, the release added.

The database will be available at the web addresses of education ministry, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) and Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), education ministry sources said.

Around 13211 teachers and employees are now working at 252 government colleges, 14 teachers' training colleges, five higher secondary teachers' training institutes, 16 commercial colleges, three government madrasas and eight education boards, the release added.

The four-member team has already collected details of a total of 12741 teachers while information on the rest 470 people was not available since they are abroad for higher education, on training courses or working in lien or deputation.

President returns home

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed returned from Singapore last night after a five-day visit for medical checkup.

A regular flight of Singapore Airlines, carrying the President and his entourage, arrived at Zia International Airport at 10:20pm.

Information and Law Adviser Barrister Mainul Hossain, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam, Air Chief Air Vice-Marshal Fakhrul Azam, Navy Chief Rear Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam and Lieutenant General Jahangir Alam on behalf of the Army chief and high officials received the president at the airport.

"He underwent medical checkup at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore as per previous schedule, as advised by his Singaporean physicians," said a Bangabhaban official.

Reception to Sanjida Khatun today

Citibank NA Bangladesh will accord a reception to eminent cultural personality Sanjida Khatun under its 'Gunjon Sambardhona' initiative at Radisson Water Garden Hotel in the city today, says a press release.

On the occasion, a special programme titled 'Borshar Gaan-e-Gunjon Sambardhona' will also be held. Mita Haque, Khurshid Alam and haheen Samad will perform.

BANGLADESH MUKTIJODDHA SANGSAD FFs demand action against corrupt leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muktijoddha Gono Parishad, a platform of freedom fighters, yesterday demanded removal of 'corrupt' and 'incompetent' leaders from Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad who undermined the dignity of freedom fighters in the last 20 years through unbridled corruption and politicisation.

At a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity, they said the corrupt leaders of Muktiyoddha Sangsad plundered crores of taka by embezzling freedom fighters' allowance, and listing non-freedom fighters as freedom fighters in exchange of money.

Gono Parishad leaders demanded election of honest, competent and actual freedom fighters through a free and fair election in Muktiyoddha Sangsad to restore the lost glory and dignity of freedom fighters.

In a written statement, Sadek Ahmed Khan, secretary general of

the parishad, said successive corrupt rules and dishonest politicisations destroyed all the values and achievements of the liberation war.

He said politicians in the last 36 years engaged themselves in plundering state assets instead of paying heed to peoples' problem that resulted an anarchic situation in the country.

Giving a strong support to present government's anti-corruption drive, he said anybody found corrupt, whatever powerful he or she may be, should be brought to justice, their assets should be confiscated and they should be barred from contesting the general election.

He also demanded immediate arrest and trial of those who are responsible for making the country five-time champion in corruption.

"Politics and corruption are not synonymous, and the anti-corruption drive should be aimed at punishing the corrupt people," Sadek said urging people to extend

their cooperation in stumping out corruption.

Parishad President Ishtiaq Aziz Ulfat said though the government has taken many bold steps to remove corruption from many institutions they are yet to take any action against the Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad which was crippled due to corrupt and politicised leadership.

"We want the freedom fighters' organisation to be run by honest, competent and actual freedom fighters as widespread corruption and politicisation in the last 20 years denigrated the dignity of the freedom fighters," he added.

He called for taking immediate action against all corrupts, plunderers, illegal grabbers and godfathers ignoring their identity by putting them on trial and giving them exemplary punishment.

Language veteran Abdul Matin, war-maimed Nuru Mia and Parishad Vice-president MA Shahid Bablu also spoke.

Duta demands release of Hasina

Asks Mainul to quit

DU CORRESPONDENT

The teachers of Dhaka University will observe a half-day work abstention on Sunday and wear black badges on Saturday protesting the arrest of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina.

It was decided at a general meeting of the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) yesterday. The meeting also demanded unconditional release of Hasina and urged the government to stop harassment of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Duta General Secretary Anwar Hossain briefed journalists about the programmes after the meeting at the Dhaka University Club.

He said about 200 teachers attended the meeting and demanded resignation of Law Adviser Barrister Mainul Hossain.

The examinations scheduled for Sunday will be exempted from the strike, he said.

"The meeting also called upon the caretaker government to hand over power to the people's representatives through holding polls immediately," he said. The meeting denounced the move to drive Hasina and Khaleda out of politics, he added.

He said Duta will announce tougher programmes if the government does not pay heed to their demands.

2 money exchange employees robbed of Tk 6 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A gang of muggers robbed two employees of a money exchanger of about Tk 6 lakh after stabbing them at Purana Paltan in the city last night.

Five employees of Maximco Money Exchange, including the two, were going to the residence of their employer in the same area on foot at around 8:00pm when the gang of seven muggers equipped with machetes attacked them and took away two shopping bags containing the money.

During the attack, three employees ran away but came back later to rush their injured colleagues to the hospital.

The injured employees – Abdul Haq, 35, and Shahidul Islam, 28, -- were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Abdul Haq told reporters at the hospital that he or Shahidul Islam does not know the exact amount of money they were carrying to their employer Mosharrar Hossain's house. The amount could be Tk 6 lakh to 7 lakh, he added.

On receiving information, the police rushed to the spot but failed to arrest anybody.

MASS SUICIDE

Mobi brought to Dhaka for better treatment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Merajunnahar Mobi, who became mentally disordered after all her family members committed suicide by jumping under a running train in Mymensingh on July 11, was sent to National Mental Health Institute in Dhaka yesterday.

Mobi, who has been living in Brahmanbaria since her marriage, became mentally unstable after hearing the news of suicide. As her condition deteriorated, local people took her to a private clinic.

She has nobody to look after her as she along with her 14-month daughter has long been living separately in a rented house following feuds with her husband. She earned a living by giving private tuition.

A group of people came to her aid and sent her to Dhaka for better treatment.

Death anniversary



The first death anniversary of Rebeka Wali, wife of freedom fighter and former lawmaker late ATM Wali Ashraf, will be observed tomorrow, says a press release.

On the occasion, prayers will be offered at her graveyard at Banchharampur Masimnagar today and milad and doa mahfil will be held at her residence after Maghrib prayers tomorrow.

Qulkhwani



Qulkhwani of Hossain Ali Haqlader, father of Abdul M Alek Howlader, adviser to Mathbaria Kalyan Samity, will be held at his residence in Mathbaria today, says a press release.

On the occasion, milad and doa mahfil will be held at 11 mosques at Patakata, Angulkata and Chitra villages after Juma prayers.

Hossain Ali passed away in Mathbaria on July 15.

21ST WORLD JAMBOREE 153 Bangladeshi scouts to participate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 153-member team of Bangladesh Scouts will participate in the 21st World Jamboree which will be held in London on July 27-August 8 to mark the 100 years of Scouting.

The first group of Bangladesh Scouts comprising 58 members has already left for London on July 14.

Dhaka Metro Scouts, who will be sending 28 of its members, hosted a reception in honor of its scouts at the Nizam Hall of Dhaka Metro Scouts on Wednesday.

Mohammad Fazlur Rahman, chief national commissioner of Bangladesh Scouts, joined the event as the chief guest.

A total of 40000 scouts from across the globe will participate in the event.

DHAKA TODAY

Workshop

Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine (BAAIGM) organises a workshop on 'Healthy ageing and media'. Venue: Prabeen Bhaban auditorium, Agargaon. Time: 9:30am.

Career fair

Department of Career and Professional Development Services (CPDS) organises the 4th National Career Fair. Venue: Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre. Time: 9:30am.

WEATHER TODAY

Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at most places over all the six divisions of the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy to heavy rainfalls are also likely at places during the period, Met office said.

It also said that day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

Highest temperature 32.6 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Syedpur and lowest 25.2 degree Celsius at Dhaka.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:47pm today and rises at 5:22am 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	29.7	25.2	91	87
Chittagong	26.5	25.8	96	100
Rajshahi	30.2	25.5	99	93
Khulna	29.0	27.7	95	95
Barisalash	29.0	26.7	97	96
Sylhet	28.0	25.4	94	98
Cox's Bazar	29.2	25.7	98	96