

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.

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 Matir 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 tranquiliser 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 Dr 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.

"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

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

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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 Shahidul Karim, 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.

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 Hosein.

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 Tk 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 Masinnagar today and milad and doa mahfil will be held at her residence after Magrib prayers tomorrow.

Qukhwani



Qukhwani of Hossain Ali Hawlader, father of Abdul Malek Howlader, a lawyer 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.

BANGLADESH MUKTIJODDHA SANGSAD

FFs demand action against corrupt leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

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 stamping out corruption.

Parishad President Ishaq 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 Mukti Joddha 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 Nurul Mia and Parishad Vice-president MA Shahid Bablu also spoke.

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 Shafullah was formed in this regard and it has already begun to collect 38 types of information from 290 educational institutions, 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 institutions 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 liaison or deputation.

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

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
Barisal	29.0	26.7	97	96
Sylhet	28.0	25.4	94	98
Cox's Bazar	29.2	25.7	98	96