

INT'L CONGRESS ON AIDS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Lack of political will key obstacle to preventing AIDS

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN, from Colombo

Lack of political will and commitment contributes significantly to stigmatising and ostracising the HIV-positive people, preventing the social cohesion required in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Experts, practitioners and donors made this comment at the 8th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific yesterday, being held in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo.

At the conference, Bangladesh was reported to have the highest incidences of trafficked women who are highly vulnerable to HIV.

"The lack of political will and commitment to do something about HIV is a significant factor in contributing to stigma. If political and

social leaders show no concern for HIV, then why should their people?" asked Noerine Kaleeba, chair of Actionaid's International Board, at the opening plenary session.

"By discussing HIV openly, sensitively and rationally, leaders can make people sit up and listen," she said.

Otherwise, the people affected with HIV face a kind of 'social death' whereby an individual or affected family are ostracised by the community and cannot access various services, she added.

HIV/AIDS-related stigma is one of the key obstacles to accessing care for persons and families affected by this pandemic as many of them do not know their status either due to lack of facilities, lack of appropriate information or due to fear of stigma,

Kaleeba said. Bangladesh has many suspected unreported cases because of social stigma in both rural and urban communities, she said.

Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA Purnima Mane told a plenary session, "Going beyond the silence into action is the only way we can face the future generations knowing that we are doing our best to ensure an AIDS-free generation."

She emphasised the urgency for all countries to make universal access to sexual and reproductive health and to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support a priority. "The greatest impact can be achieved when we link prevention with treatment and care," she said.

A UN Development Programme study on 'Human Trafficking and

HIV' unveiled at the conference found that a large number of trafficked women in South Asia also run the risk of contracting HIV. "The highest reported incidence of this double burden is in Nepal, Bangladesh and India."

The study identified gender inequality, violence and lack of economic opportunities for women, especially young women, as major factors increasing their vulnerability to both trafficking and HIV.

The study recommends better coordination in national efforts to integrate trafficking and HIV interventions into key sectors, and to create laws and policies regarding the two issues.



TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman speaks at a discussion on 'Corruption in Rajuk plan approval process: Measures to be taken' at Biam auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right is Md Akhter Mahmud and on his left is Azizul Haque. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) organised the event.

PHOTO: STAR

Journos harassed despite showing ID cards

UNB, Dhaka

Several journalists complained of "harassment" by the law enforcers despite showing ID cards last night while returning home from their offices amid curfew.

They said joint-force personnel halted a private car of a daily carrying several newsmen at different points in the city and asked them to show their identity cards.

Despite having valid cards, the law enforcers, at one stage, reportedly beat up Aminul Haq Royal, a reporter of Bangladesh Today, at Dainik Bangla crossing.

Jahangir Alam, a staff reporter of the United News of Bangladesh (UNB), was made to get down from the car at Mirpur-10 crossing. Indecent words were hurled at him.

In Plaisay area, Rashed Ali, a reporter of a Bangla daily, was also reportedly beaten up by some Rab patrols enforcing curfew.

Private TV channel CSB reported that their mediators were detained in Mohammadpur area although they showed ID cards.

Earlier, a DMP release said identity card holders of officers and employees of all government, semi-government and autonomous institutions would be considered as curfew pass during curfew hours.

Attack on journos condemned

Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) yesterday condemned the attack on the journalists on duty in the last few days, says a press release.

In a statement the leaders of BFUJ and DUJ demanded immediate punishment of those who attacked the journalists during the violence between the students and riot police.

Ishfaq Hossain, reporter of The Daily Shamakal, Arif Ali Himu and Abul Kalam Ratan, both correspondents of The Daily Star in Rajshahi, Sharun Sarkar and Azhar Uddin of The Daily Prothom Alo were injured while performing their professional duties.

BFUJ President Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Secretary General Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan and DUJ President Altaf Mahmud and General Secretary Omar Farook in the statement also condemned attack on vehicles of several television channels in different places of the country.

The journalists are neither friend nor foe to anyone, said the leaders, adding that the journalist society would not sit idle if they were hindered to perform their professional duties.

Tougher US immigration leads to 'reverse brain-drain'

AFP, Washington

The huge backlog in US immigration visas is leading to a "reverse brain-drain" that will force skilled workers to return to their home country, a report released yesterday concludes.

The study by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation found that more than one million potential immigrants, including scientists, engineers, doctors and researchers, are competing for 120,000 permanent US resident visas each year.

The report said some applicants must wait several years, in part because the number of employment visas issued to immigrants from any single country is fewer than 10,000 per year.

"The United States benefits from having foreign-born innovators create their ideas in this country," said Vivek Wadhwa, a Harvard Law School fellow and co-author of the report.

"Their departures would be detrimental to US economic well-being."

The study by researchers at Duke, New York and Harvard universities is the third in a series of studies focusing on immigrants' contributions to the US economy.

In this study, "Intellectual Property, the Immigration Backlog, and a Reverse Brain-Drain," the researchers concluded that the number of skilled workers waiting for visas is significantly larger than the number that can be admitted to the United States.

Business suffers

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shutters closed.

Very poor transactions at all private and government commercial banks were witnessed when rumour-struck general public were seen on the city roads rushing to safety.

A high official of a leading private bank said very few monetary transactions, withdrawals or deposits, took place at most branches of his bank.

UNDP representative Dur Afsan Chowdhury speaks at a discussion titled 'Reforms in Local Government: Perspective Women's Empowerment' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On her left is Mashuda Khatun Shefali, Aeyasha Khanom and Prof Muzaffer Ahmad. Nari Uddug Kendra organised the discussion.

Asian air fares bounce back on increased travel demand

AFP, Bangalore

the competition, the preference for economy or premium services and the most popular destinations.

"There was great variety between fare types with full first class and full business class fares both increasing by four percent and full economy decreasing by 15 percent," American Express said.

In India, where competition has increased from low-cost carriers that proliferated in the last four years, average airfares in the second quarter were down one percent.

In China, full and discount economy fares saw the strongest increase for the quarter, largely driven by routes to the Americas that rose 18 percent and 19 percent, respectively.

In Hong Kong, the biggest increases were of six percent and five percent in full first class fares and full business class fares, American Express said.

Singapore was the only market to remain flat for the quarter when averaged across all fares, American Express said.

In response to a number of misleading advertisements from visa agents, the British High Commission (HC) yesterday clarified the entitlements, terms and conditions of the Working Holidaymakers Scheme.

According to a press release issued by the high commission, people who are in the age group of 17-30 years are eligible under the scheme to go to the UK for a maximum of two years holiday, and can work there only for half of their stay to pay for their holiday.

Under the scheme, applicants cannot go to the UK if their main reason is going there to work, or to work for more than half of their time in the UK.

It is also not possible to stay for more than two years and qualify for British citizenship after a working holiday.

The press release also added it is not true that any agency can guarantee applicants Working Holidaymaker visa for the UK and that once in the UK it is possible to stay for a long period, working throughout, and eventually qualify for British citizenship.

Head of Immigration Services Jon Verney said agents who deliberately make false claims are not helping applicants, they are actually deceiving them in order to attract business.

He said giving misleading information to visa applicants about the entitlements of the scheme could easily land the applicants in trouble.

They may find themselves in breach of UK immigration rules, and at risk of being detained and returned to Bangladesh, Verney added.

"The UK welcomes genuine applicants. We want to help protect potential applicants from misinformation," he said.

Full information on the eligibility for Working Holidaymaker Scheme and its terms and conditions can be obtained from VFS, British High Commission, and from the British High Commission website, www.ukinbangladesh.org.

Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at a few places over Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country during the period, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 35.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessor and lowest 25.0 degree Celsius at Mymensingh and Rangamati.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:25pm today and rises at 5:37am 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	34.0	26.4	79	65
Chittagong	30.5	25.4	84	79
Rajshahi	34.5	27.4	86	--
Khulna	34.5	26.5	77	73
Barisal	33.7	26.5	75	74
Sylhet	32.1	25.4	97	73
Cox's Bazar	32.6	26.5	75	80

City/Town

Temperature in celsius

Max

Min

Morning

Evening

Humidity in percentage

79

65

84

79

86

--

77

73

75

74

97

73

75

80

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FFI coordinator Glen Maberly said previous experience showed food producers can help if they fortify foods with minerals.

Lack of vitamins and minerals have left millions of Asians vulnerable to disease, and about one million children younger than five die annually because of this, the Flour Fortification Initiative (FFI) network said here.

Globally, an estimated 50,000 young women during pregnancy and

child birth also perish and 200,000 cases of serious birth defects are recorded each year because of the problem, it said.

In contrast, the total public investment needed to address the problem only comes to between four and five billion dollars, it said.

The group pointed out that birth defects had gone down in developed nations such as the United States, Canada and Chile where producers were required by law to inject vitamins and minerals into food.

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