

Child cardiac

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cardiac treatment, especially surgery.

Those who are able to pay for the surgery do not undergo surgery timely as the lone specialised cardiac centre in the capital, with only 250 beds, does not have a separate paediatric surgery unit.

"It takes a long time to get the turn for surgery which forces parents to go to expensive private clinics. As there is no separate OT (operating theatre), it sometimes takes three months for surgeries for Arterial Septal Defects and Ventricular Septal Defects," doctor said.

If there were separate department for paediatric surgery and an OT, the number of surgeries would increase, experts said adding that 90 percent of the paediatric cardiac patients need to have surgeries. That is why it is important to have a paediatric surgery department like those in the developed countries.

"There are no professors or associate professors specialised in paediatric cardiac surgery despite the posts being there in the hospital. It is not possible to run a separate unit with an assistant professor. The professors and associate professors of geriatric surgery engaged themselves in paediatric cardiac surgery even though paediatric and geriatric cardiac surgery are quite different," experts said.

"Surgical equipment, screening, surgery, anaesthetic management, ICU (intensive care unit), post-operative management are totally different for paediatric surgery," said Prof Shajal Banarjee of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU). He said anatomy, physiology and the volume of their body fluid is different from those of adults.

Though a separate department for paediatric surgery is a crying need, lack of manpower hinders the process. At the same time, unwillingness of the geriatric surgeons is also one of the main obstacles to initiate a department for paediatric surgery, sources said.

"Giving excuses that the operation may not be successful, surgery of many paediatric cardiac patients is not performed leaving the patients in vulnerable state," they said.

In developed countries heart screening allows doctors to diagnose a child's heart condition and take steps required almost instantly. Most cardiac patients under 12 suffer from congenital disorder and if they are operated on before the age of five

they get better very well, experts say.

There are only four to five paediatric surgeons in the country for around eight crore children aged under 18. The upazila health complexes do not have any facility for paediatric cardiac surgery.

Patients from all corners of the country through the NICVD to get treatment which overwhelms the hospital and often they are forced to send patients back as the hospital cannot cope with the pressure.

"Every day around 30 patients with paediatric cardiac problems come to the outdoor department of the hospital. Half of them cannot get admission to the hospital," hospital sources said adding that the paediatric medicine department started in 2003.

The delays in cardiac surgery sometimes result in mental and physical disability of children. They often suffer from pneumonia and other cold related diseases continuously.

Paediatric Cardiology care is virtually non-existent outside Dhaka city and it takes a long time to diagnose their cardiac problems. They are often given antibiotics for pneumonia repeatedly, deteriorating the problem.

Although the number of paediatric cardiac patients is increasing in the country, facilities have not increased much and there is no national database in this regard. The number of patients with congenital heart disease is around 7-10 percent and most of them need surgery.

"Heart diseases have gone down in the country due to increased awareness but around 8-10 per thousand have congenital heart diseases," Dr NN Fatema, paediatric interventional cardiologist, told The Daily Star.

Of the congenital cardiac patients, cardiac surgery is a must for 30 percent and the rest can be cured through medicine or interventional therapy," she said adding that it is very unfortunate that 25 percent paediatric cardiac patients cannot have surgery due to lack of manpower.

"A large number of people should be trained in this discipline and a specialised paediatric cardiac hospital is important in this regard. At the same time, child specialists should be provided with training on paediatric cardiology so that they diagnose and refer the patients to experts," she suggested.

Govt decision

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have been taken much earlier. I now worry over getting back the artefacts that had been sent already and wonder what will happen to the two stolen artefacts," said Shamsuzzaman Khan, former director general of National Museum.

"From the beginning, we tried to reach the government, but the government did not allow us time," he added.

"The way the acting ambassador of France reacted to the protest against sending of the artefacts is condemnable," he said adding, "We did not expect such remark from a man of such position and from such a country enriched with culture and heritage."

Prof Rafiqun Nabi commenting on the government's decision said, "Acting on this decision, we should not relax yet since more artefacts are still in France. We will have to get them back as soon as possible."

The government should take the issue of getting back the shipped out artefacts very seriously, he added.

Prof Shah Sufi Mustafizur Rahman, chairman of Department of Archaeology at Jahangirnagar University, said, "The government should initiate an investigation to identify the persons involved in the process of sending the precious relics for the exhibition abroad. Otherwise, such incident will continue to recur."

Shishir Bhattacharya of Institute of Fine Arts at Dhaka University praised the government for cancelling further shipments of the artefacts to France. He strongly said that the artefacts that had already been sent to France must be brought back immediately.

"We are concerned about the priceless artefacts that had already been sent in 10 boxes to Guimet Museum in Paris. Those boxes must have been unwrapped by this time and we are afraid any thing might happen to them."

He also demanded investigation into the relic theft at Zia International Airport and punishment to the perpetrators of the crime.

Hasina

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High Court order. Earlier on December 9, the High Court had stayed the trial proceedings of the case for three months following a writ petition filed by Hasina's lawyers challenging shifting of the court for trial of a particular case, and its operation at two places at a time.

Hasina was arrested on July 16 in connection with the case filed with Gulshan Police Station on June 13 by Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of a power company.

Her younger sister Sheikh Rahana, who lives in London, and detained cousin and former health minister Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim are the two other accused in the case.

Trial of the case began on December 3 at the makeshift Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court after the government in a gazette notification allowed it on "security ground".

On the first day of trial, defence lawyers challenged legality of the government order for the trial under special arrangements.

They decided to file the writ petition with the HC saying the government cannot issue such an order to a court when the judiciary is separated from the executive.

AL wings asked

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the local government polls, he said adding that they expect the government would show its commitment towards holding a free and fair election.

Sources said that the AL high-ups would observe the government action following their demands and will then decide about their next course of action.

At the moment, many senior leaders are against any kind of agitation to press home their demands fearing negative consequences like that of the movements in the past.

"What have we achieved after five years' movements during the four-party coalition government?" a senior AL leader said adding, "If we have to go for agitation, then we will have to think about it very carefully."

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of AL leaders said that the release of Hasina before parliamentary elections would be at the top of their agenda next year.

The party is divided into two groups over the issue, party insiders said.

While one group is for boycotting election before Hasina's release, the other faction think that they would have to contest the polls so that they can come to power and get the party president released.

The party high-ups, however, will maintain a moderate position regarding the issue as well as the movement, sources added.

"Our main demand is holding of a free and fair election. But to make it so, Sheikh Hasina have to be released," AL Organising Secretary Mahmudur Rahman Manna told The Daily Star.

Int'l smuggling

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Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), which plays a vital role in the investigation, focused on the suspects for their probe.

Additional Director General of Rab Colonel Gulzar Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star last evening, "Our prime suspects now are the 15 arrested people. It is impossible for the heist to have taken place without them not noticing."

"We are trying to recover the stolen artefacts besides finding out the culprits," Gulzar said.

Rab sources said none of them yet confessed to them of having any link to the heist but investigators discovered anomalies in the statements of a number of arrestees and initial investigation is going ahead based on these.

Although the investigation is still in its initial stage, the investigators have made the primary analysis of the whole situation.

An investigator seeking anonymity said artefacts are not common commercial commodities and the thieves cannot sell them instantly and get benefit. There has to be a number of people behind the theft and they must have links with groups involved in smuggling artefacts.

He said a number of smuggler groups exist at the airport. Investigators are trying to identify such groups and determine

whether they were involved in the heist. They are also trying to find out if international smuggling groups were involved, he said.

A Rab official said it would have been difficult to carry the artefacts by hand as they weigh 64kg. He believed vehicle or vehicles were used to make off with the artefacts.

Sources said Gate-8, known as the hanger gate, of the airport was close to the crime scene. According to the existing system, officials on duty at the gate are responsible for maintaining the register of vehicles entering and exiting through the gate. One Rab official said they have primary information that the register was not being properly maintained.

"We have information that some vehicles managed to use the gate without being registered. So, we are also taking a look into the matter and trying to identify the people responsible," said a Rab official.

He said, "We will also try to find out whether the vehicles that entered without registration at that time did it intentionally or unintentionally. We observed that the cargo handling area at ZIA is not well protected. Earlier, we alerted the civil aviation authority several times about the grey areas in the security system."

"The existing system at the area is complicated. So, investigators need to understand the system first, which is time-consuming," the Rab official said.

Although investigators are considering the heist as a planned one, they are not ruling out the possibility of someone taking advantage of an opportunity to make off with the artefacts.

"Had somebody opportunistically stole the artefacts, the person must have had some knowledge about the value and demand of the precious relics and had links with networks dealing with such things," said an investigator.

Those who have been opposing the decision of sending the artefacts for exhibition at Guimet Museum in France might be in it to foil the government's move, said a Rab official. "We are also examining this possibility," he said.

Amid tight security, two 1,500-year-old terracotta Vishnu statues bound for an exhibition in Paris were stolen from the custody of Air France at Zia International Airport (ZIA) between late Friday night and Saturday noon.

Named "Vishnu" and "Bust of Vishnu", the statues are from Gupta era of the 17th century. Since being discovered in a dig at Mahasthangarh of Bogra, they had been kept at the National Museum.

Despite protest from art connoisseurs, the government was sending the statues along with 143 other artefacts to the Guimet Museum in the French capital under a deed signed with France. In the first phase, it sent 42 relics on December 1.

Tigers

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A decent performance in the domestic circuit and his lone Twenty20 international in South Africa brought Zunaed to the national fold and he top-scored (83) for the Tigers in the first practice match in Hamilton against the Northern Knights to earn a place in the side for the first match ahead of veteran Javed.

Bangladesh lost two limited-overs practice matches while the other one was washed out, but their four-wicket success in the Twenty20 charity match has definitely boosted the confidence of Mohammad Ashraful's boys to make an impression in the first ODI on the tour down under.

Bangladesh's only other success against the Black Caps came when the Tigers won a World Cup build-up game in the West Indies by two wickets but the overall record speaks for New Zealand who have won all the previous eight ODIs.

Daniel Vettori's side, a difficult one to beat at home, will try to put behind their recent poor showings during tours of South Africa and Australia.

Over 200 Bangladeshi

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both sides have different views on the matter," he added.

The envoy said there were about 350,000 Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia, mainly engaged in the plantation and manufacturing sectors.

As Christians celebrated Christmas, a charity group provided some chicken curry with rice for the hungry and pale-looking Muslim migrant workers.

Many of the poor migrants paid thousands of dollars to agents to find them work in Malaysia where they hoped to make their fortunes.

One 28-year-old Bangladeshi who gave his name as Hossain said he came to Malaysia in September.

"I paid the agent 12,000 ringgit (3,600 dollars) and I sold my father's land and cows to gather the money," he told AFP.

"My agent got me a job with a company that manufactured computer hard discs. According to the contract, I should be paid 800 ringgit a month but they only gave me 380 ringgit."

"When I questioned them, they threatened me and refused to give me back my passport. All I want now is my passport and to find another job. Fearing my safety, I came to the embassy with 300

ringgit and now I don't have anything left," he said.

Another worker, Nazir Hossain, 32, said he had been in Malaysia for the past six months and was being underpaid.

"I was working in a shipping company but I was not satisfied with the treatment. I was not paid the right amount they promised. Instead they gave me only 400 ringgit a month."

Siddiq Miah, 42, gave a similar tale.

"I paid the agent in Bangladesh 12,000 ringgit to arrange a job for me, and he promised me a job in a factory but when I came here they refused to hire me on health grounds," he said.

"My mother, wife and children barely have enough to eat without my salary. I want my agent to return my passport so that I can go home," he said.

Malaysia, Southeast Asia's third largest economy, has an estimated 2.6 million legal and illegal foreign workers.

They are critical to the nation's key manufacturing and agriculture sectors, and many household rely on foreign domestic workers mainly from Indonesia, Philippines and India.

Christmas

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Glittering stars were placed on the roofs of many Christian houses, symbolising the mythical star that had guided the Magi, the three wise men from east, to the newborn Jesus in Bethlehem.

The Christians believe Jesus, son of God, took birth as a man and sacrificed his life for the salvation of the mankind.

Several sessions of special prayers were held in the churches on the Christmas Eve and yesterday morning. Christmas carols, hymns and other musical and entertainment shows were also staged before and after the prayer sessions.

The Christians arranged feasts at homes and hotels with scrumptious Christmas cakes dominating the courses to share the joy and happiness of the holy festival with relatives, friends and neighbour.

The day was a national holiday.

To ensure peaceful celebration of Christmas, security in the capital and other places of the country was beefed up with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police on alert at different strategic points.

Dhaka Sheraton Hotel arranged a Christmas bash for children at its ballroom where the kids sang Christmas carols with old Santa ringing bells and doling out Christmas gifts.

Fun activities and games like pin the nose, chocolate writing, Christmas maze, Christmas carol musical chair and click with Santa took place among merriment. An attractive raffle draw was held later.

The largest Mass was held at Tejgaon Church in the capital. At least 5,000 people joined the ceremony. Father Kamal Koraria of the Christian Relations Centres said.

Special Christmas prayers were held at the St Mary's Cathedral in Karkir where verses from the holy Bible were recited. At Ramna Cathedral, Bishop Gomes led the prayers with a huge congregation.

President Iajuddin Ahmed hosted a reception at Bangabhaban for the members of the Christian community on the occasion.

Suicide bombers

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scene reported that among those killed was Haj Farhan al-Baharawi, the provincial head of the Brigades of 20th Revolution, a former Sunni insurgent group turned ally of the US military.

A doctor from Baquba hospital confirmed the casualties.

Baquba police Lieutenant Colonel Najim al-Sumaidaie said the funeral procession was marking the death of two members of the Brigades of 20th Revolution who were killed on Monday by the US military.

"The two were killed by mistake and the funeral was being held today when the suicide bomber attacked," Sumaidaie said.

The latest bombings highlighted al-Qaeda's fight back against the mushrooming number of groups across Iraq that oppose it.

Around 80,000 Sunni Arabs who were former rebels and fought the US military alongside al-Qaeda have now turned on the Islamist group in several volatile Sunni regions of Iraq.

al-Qaeda in Iraq has vowed to launch attacks against groups such as Al-Sahwa -- or the Awakening -- in a bid to draw them back into the anti-American insurgency.

The US military pays around 300 dollars to each member of these Awakening councils, which have been a key factor in reducing violence across Iraq in the past few months.

Insurgents have also stepped up attacks in northern Iraq after being pushed out of western and central regions following a series of military assaults.

US and Iraqi forces are currently involved in a massive military sweep in the northern provinces of Salaheddin -- which includes Baiji -- Nineveh and Kirkuk.

Power shortfall

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Noorpur in Pabna said this season he would have to spend Tk 12,000 to run diesel pumps for his two hectares of land.

Mohammed Ismail, 38, son of Mohammed Moslem Uddin of Nazimpur under Nachal upazila of Chapainawabganj said he would have to spend Tk 8,250 per hectare for irrigation with diesel run pumps. He said if the electricity supply was normal, he would be able to do the job spending Tk 6,000 per hectare.

Masudul Hossain, son of late Mohiuddin Ashraf of Baliadangi in Dinajpur claimed he spent Tk 9,000-10,400 per 1.5 hectare last year under government establishment "Barindra Unnayan Kartripakha" which uses electric pumps only. He apprehends he would have to spend at least Tk 9,000 more per 1.5 hectare this season to run diesel pumps. He would not get back the deposit he made to the establishment, according to the terms and conditions of the Barindra Unnayan Kartripakha.

Enamul alleged that Tajul and his parents hung her body from the ceiling after torturing her to death.

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New year braces

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towards the much-hyped party reform, although indoor politics has been allowed in the capital for almost four months now.

The overwhelming majority of them did not even apply to the government yet seeking permissions to hold national councils to amend their constitutions and to elect new leaderships.

Leaders of both BNP and AL, who had been seemingly moving heaven and earth screaming party reforms at the top of their lungs, apparently failed to gain the required support for their moves, leading astray the government's apparent blessings for their reformalist tendencies.

Only the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) on November 15 applied to the government for permission to hold its national congress to elect the party's new leadership for ensuring the practice of democracy within the organisation.

But the caretaker government has yet to give its approval for holding the national congress, prompting CPB leaders to question the government's sincerity for democratic practices within political parties.

Officials of the home ministry said they forwarded copies of the application submitted by CPB to the Office of the Chief Adviser and to intelligence agencies concerned, seeking their opinions on the matter.

If the government allows CPB to hold its congress, the party will have permission to hold meetings across the country for taking preparations for it.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said they had plans to complete electing the smaller unit committees by this month, upazila level conferences by January, the district level ones by February, and the national congress in March.

"We have prepared the draft documents for the congress, but our leaders across the country are not being able to discuss the drafts in party forums due to the restrictions on political activities," Selim said adding that the government's sincerity for ensuring democratic practices within political parties is being questioned due to its activities in the name of bringing political reforms.

"On the one hand, the government is speaking for democracy within the parties, while on the other, it is not allowing us to continue democratic practices within CPB," he alleged.

Selim also said CPB's national congress was due in May this year, but the party could not hold it due to the state of emergency. Now, CPB wants to hold the congress to continue the practice of democracy within itself, he asserted.

The caretaker government itself also did not initiate any step to bring political reforms, rather it ignored the political parties' demand for opening a national dialogue on the matter. It however detained a large number of political bigwigs including two former premiers, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, on charges of corruption, to 'clean the field of politics'.

Political analysts observe a tense relation between the non-partisan caretaker government and the political parties, which is getting tenser fast, a relationship that cannot be considered as conducive to holding a free, fair and credible election, by any stretch of the imagination, let alone restoring a stable democratic process.

About the statements of political leaders threatening launching of agitations, they said it will be difficult for the political parties to launch any agitation against the current regime since the parties are suffering acutely from a lack of

unity among themselves. Besides, the situation is still under control of the interim administration, although the people have been growing increasingly annoyed with the government's failure to curb the skyrocketing prices of essentials.

So, everything might not go as smoothly as thought, with many unexpected events popping up in the coming days, the analysts observed.

The issue of party reforms has been discussed since the declaration of the state of emergency on January 11 this year, gaining momentum in June when now expelled BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan disclosed to the public a set of reform proposals including one for removing Khaleda Zia from the helm of the party.

AL Presidium members Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, and Suranjit Sengupta also separately made public their own reform proposals including a proposal for curtailing some arbitrary power of the party chief.

Meanwhile, former premier also AL President Sheikh Hasina was detained on July 16, followed by the arrest of another former prime minister also BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on September 3.

Before their arrest, the chiefs of BNP and AL tried hard to gather support of respective grassroots level leaders as the party high commands had already been divided over the issue of party reforms. Moreover detentions of Hasina and Khaleda followed by the expulsion of Bhuiyan from BNP changed the entire ball game for the two most major parties of the country.

BNP got divided over the issue of party reforms in October while AL is still remaining united despite rifts within itself over running the party in absence of Hasina.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta said the state of emergency must be lifted by January to ensure a free and fair election.

About reforming the party, he said the central committee will decide the next course of actions on the matter.

Leaders of Saifur-led BNP that had earlier failed to bring reforms to the party are now trying to gather support from the grassroots level, discarding the reform agenda for now.

"The unity of the party will get top priority now, I hope the party will remain united in future too," Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, a member of the BNP standing committee who has been a comrade-in-arms of Mannan Bhuiyan regarding party reforms, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Jatiya Party (Ershad) Presidium Member GM Quader however said the political scenario might remain the same in the coming days since none of the parties is in a position to launch any agitation, let alone realising a demand.

"There is a lack of unity in the parties and inter-party relations are also not in a good shape," he pointed out.

The political leaders however observed that the country might face another political crisis in the coming days, which will be impossible to tackle without the sacrificial tendencies of all quarters.

Thaksin vows

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PPP leader Samak Sundaravej, who is likely to be the next premier, campaigned to bring Thaksin back to Thailand and there has been speculation a new PPP-led government would lift the ban on his involvement in politics.

Unofficial returns from Sunday's election gave the PPP 232 of the 480 seats in parliament, just short of the absolute majority needed to govern alone.

Party leaders have been trying to build a ruling coalition with smaller parties and have confidently predicted they will be forming the next government.

"PPP needs to secure at least 280 seats to make a strong coalition government," said Ukrist Pathmanand, a professor of political science at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

Yongyut Tiypairat, the party's deputy leader, said Tuesday that a PPP-led coalition would hold at least 280 of the 480 seats in parliament, but declined to give further details.

"Government stability is crucial, and it's better that I do not disclose the name of parties until the Election Commission completes its process," Yongyut told reporters in Bangkok.

The Democrat Party, which came in second with 165 seats, has already refused to join a PPP-led government. The remaining 83 seats were split among five smaller parties.

The English-daily Bangkok Post, quoting a PPP source, said Tuesday the pro-Thaksin party had convinced three parties -- Chart Thai, Puea Pandin and Matchima Party -- into helping it form a government.

Artefacts returned

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assigned to prepare a comprehensive report on the theft and review the agreement signed with France with regard to the exhibition.

After the meeting, a highly placed source said the government would send a letter to the museum authorities informing them of the circumstances that led to cancellation of the shipment.

Besides, measures would be taken to bring back the 42 items that were dispatched to France on December 1.

Despite protests from citizens and art connoisseurs, the government was sending the two Gupta era idols along with 143 other artefacts to the Guimet Museum.

Sculpted around 1500 years ago, "Vishnu" and "Bust of Vishnu" were stolen from the cargo village area at the Zia sometime