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TRANSKOM ELECTRONICS
Sadar Road, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1206, Bangladesh

Sick inmates suffer as jails lack docs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The injured and ailing general prisoners are denied of essential health services as the country's prisons severely lack doctors and pathological equipment.

The VIP prisoners have access to health care both in and outside jails but thousands of their fellow inmates are vulnerable to various chronic diseases because of the sorry state of medical facilities in jails.

Of the 67 prisons in the country, excepting the two special jails for Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, only 12 have hospitals with one or no doctor while the rest 55 neither have hospitals nor doctors.

These 12 prison hospitals, however, do not have any specialist and apparatus to carry out pathological tests. And, interestingly, the prison directorate is yet to have an ambulance to carry its patients.

Many prison officials themselves call these hospitals "first aid centres" that offer treatment only for minor diseases like fever, dysentery and skin infection, a common disease in all the overcrowded jails.

Prison officials said they have only 16 doctors against 77 posts to look after about 90,000 inmates at the 69 jails including the two special jails in Dhaka and one women's jail at Kashimpur.

Of them, three male and one female doctor are appointed at the Dhaka Central Jail, the largest prison accommodating 10,400 prisoners, while one doctor is assigned to attend Hasina and Khaleda.

"Not only the general prisoners, everyone in the jails suffer because of the shortage of doctors and other health care facilities," said Maj Shamsul Haider Siddiqui, deputy inspector general (DIG) of prisons.

While admitting their failure to

provide proper treatment in jails, he denied the allegation that sick prisoners are not attended.

According to jail officials, many prisoners come to the jails with injuries in hands, legs and other parts of the body, but treatment for such injuries is not available at the jail hospitals.

"The injured prisoners often cry for help in pains," said an official of Dhaka Central Jail, adding, "These prisoners need immediate treatment."

The ailing prisoners also have to wait in long queues for receiving medicines like paracetamol tablets, oral saline or ointments.

"We attend 250-300 patients every day to treat only minor problems," said one of the four doctors at the Dhaka jail hospital, seeking anonymity as he is not authorised to talk to the media.

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Polls by Dec, president tells Prince Richard

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday told visiting Duke of Gloucester Richard Alexander Walter George that the next general election in Bangladesh would be held by December this year.

"The present government is continuing its efforts towards strengthening democracy in the country," the president said when the Duke of Gloucester paid a courtesy call on him at Bangabhaban.

During the meeting, the president said Bangladesh attaches great importance to her relations with the United Kingdom (UK) and considers it to be dependable trade, development and strategic partner.

He said the existing relations between the two countries are very good and it will be strengthened further in the days to come.

The president stressed the need for increasing educational exchange programme between Dhaka and London.

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Chittagong Regional Cultural Academy organises a rowing competition on the Karnaphuli yesterday, protesting pollution in the river and demanding the sampans be saved.

Bid to reunite BNP factions

Fresh dispute among Khaleda loyalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Differences are growing between BNP pro-Khaleda faction leaders as many of them are trying to start a process to reunite the party without the consent of Khandaker Delwar Hossain, BNP chairperson appointed secretary general of the party.

Party insiders said a number of leaders loyal to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had several meetings with BNP pro-Saifur faction

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Chevron starts examining cracks in houses

UNB, Dhaka

Chevron, an international oil company, has launched an investigation to identify the causes behind the cracks developed in the houses in Lawachhara area of Moulvibazar where it has been conducting a seismic survey.

There have been press reports that cracks have developed in a

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Myanmar holds referendum despite cyclone devastation

Aid being held up by the regime, says UN

AFP, Patheingyi

Myanmar held a national referendum yesterday despite warnings that more people would die unless the government focussed on delivering emergency aid for survivors of last week's cyclone.

In surreal scenes, voting booths were erected close to makeshift camps for the homeless, and the country's military regime continued to hold up tonnes of urgent relief supplies at the airport.

The junta, deeply suspicious of the outside world, has refused to let in foreign experts who specialise in getting aid to disaster victims, and said that only the government would be allowed to distribute emergency supplies.

But the United Nations said that even the aid itself was being held up by the regime, strangled by customs and red-tape as the country went ahead with a vote whose only goal, critics say, is to cement the regime's hold on power.

"It's a race against time," said Richard Horsey, a spokesman for the emergency relief arm of the United Nations.

He said only one-quarter of the neediest victims of Cyclone Nargis had received any kind of aid one

week after the tragedy, which left 60,000 people dead or missing and as many as two million more short of food, water and supplies.

Some aid has been distributed, but more people could die of disease or starvation unless they get help soon. At least one planeload of food is stuck at the airport, not yet cleared for release.

"We're dealing with lots of bureaucracy, we're dealing with a lot of red tape, and possibly we're dealing with an environment where the authorities aren't fully open to a relief effort of this kind," Horsey said.

"That's very frustrating." The UN refugee agency said its first aid convoy had arrived by land over the Thai border, but it was to be unloaded on to Myanmar trucks and it was not clear who would distribute the supplies including tents and tarpaulins.

"We're hoping that the authorities will keep their word and give us access to monitor the distribution of these materials," spokeswoman Vivian Tan told AFP in the border town of Mae Sot.

Ignoring calls to put off Saturday's vote and focus on saving lives, the government went ahead with the referendum on a new

constitution in all but the worst-affected areas -- which will vote later in the month.

The regime says the vote is a key step in its much-criticised "road map" to democracy and will lead the country, formerly known as Burma, to national elections within two years.

But the last time there was a national ballot, in 1990, democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi won in a landslide. She was never allowed to rule, and instead has been under house arrest for much of the time since.

Among its provisions, the constitution would forever make it illegal for her to lead the country.

The regime, which has long scorned the opinion of the international community, has tried to mobilise the people to vote in favour of the constitution.

As it has for days, state television Saturday broadcast patriotic songs urging people to approve the charter, alternating with images of planes unloading food -- and military officers handing it out to the grateful poor.

But the reality on the ground is sharply at odds with the government propaganda.

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Emergency 'insult' to country

BBC talk show told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The state of emergency is an "insult" to the country and the caretaker government must lift it immediately to hold the election and restore democracy, speakers said at the BBC Bangladesh Snglap yesterday.

"The state of emergency must go if we want democracy and election in the country. If the emergency is not lifted, holding of the

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CHT linked up to cellphone network

STAR REPORT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region was finally brought under mobile phone network yesterday with the state-owned Teletalk Ltd launching test operations in Bandarban and Rangamati districts.

Khagrachhari joins the two today in line with the chief adviser's March 27 announcement that the hill districts would be

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PAY HIKE DEMAND

Workers vandalise Ctg RMG factory

CU CORRESPONDENT

Garment workers demonstrating for a hike in their wages vandalised offices, machinery and finished products at a sweater factory in the city's Muradpur area yesterday.

The workers of BLP Warm Fashion Ltd also swooped on the factory officials injuring two of them seriously.

The injured are knitting in-charge Arifur Rahman and knitting supervisor Abdul Khalek.

The agitating workers calmed down after the management assured them of meeting their demands including an increase in allowances.

Sources said the workers stopped working on Friday afternoon demanding fixing of a proper piece rate of products. They also placed a 19-point demand including an increase in basic salary, tiffin allowances and overtime payment.

However, they returned to work after the factory authorities assured them of considering their demands.

The workers again staged demonstration yesterday morning and refrained from work demanding fixing of a proper piece rate of

products by 10:00am.

Later, they vandalised offices, machinery and finished products at the factory building ignoring a call for negotiation with the management.

They disconnected the factory from power mains and attacked the two officials who tried to pacify them.

On information, policemen and Rab members rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Factory worker Jasim alleged that the authorities were decreasing the piece rate gradually and did not pay them overtime bills and tiffin allowances properly.

Another worker Towhid said although they placed their demands in writing before the management on Tuesday the authorities did not take any step in this regard leaving them with no alternative but to stage demonstrations.

He also alleged that they are not paid as per the 'salary sheet' the authorities had submitted to the buyers.

Factory Chairman Mohammed Mohiuddin told The Daily Star that

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Agricultural census begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fourth agricultural census begins across the country from today after over two decades, covering both rural and urban areas for the first time.

The last full-fledged agricultural survey was conducted in two phases for rural and urban areas in 1983-84.

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Gen Moeen starts tour of Kuwait, Greece tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed will start his 10-day official tour of Kuwait and Greece tomorrow. During his visit to Kuwait he will pay a courtesy call on the Kuwaiti emir and meet the high officials of that country.

He will also address the Bangladesh army personnel working in Kuwait and inspect their activities.

The army chief will visit Greece and join the conference of International Olympic Association as the chairman of Bangladesh Olympic Federation.

He will return home on May 22, said an ISPR release.

OMS ends without further extension

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's Open Market Sale (OMS) of rice in 36 districts and five city corporations ended yesterday without any decision on further extension of time limit of the programme.

Earlier, the OMS programme was scheduled to end on April 30 but it continued for another 10 days. Rice was sold at Tk 25 per kg under the programme.

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Lebanon PM urges army to restore order

14 more killed in violence

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora called on the army to restore order on Saturday after a fourth straight day of violence between government and opposition supporters left another 14 people dead.

In his first reaction to the Shia

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Prayer Timing		
May 11		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-10	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-36	6-40
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation



2nd day's clash at polytech

Students of Dhaka Polytechnic Institute peit police with bricks from a rooftop, top left, during a clash between them and the law enforcers yesterday. Policemen take an injured colleague, top right, for medical attention. Law enforcers take cover behind a wall and fire rubber bullets at the agitating students on the other side. (Story on page 1)

PHOTO: STAR