

LONE CANCER HOSPITAL NEEDS THERAPY-II

300-bed plan cut down to half, equipment rust in storerooms

DURDANA GHIAS

Delay in implementing an extension project for the National Institute of Cancer Research & Hospital (NICRH), coupled with shortage of resources and dysfunctional equipment, is hampering treatment at the hospital. In May 1993, the health ministry took a decision to upgrade the 50-bed NICRH to a 300-bed facility and then to a 500-bed one in the second phase. But the decision could not be executed in the last 15 years.

The deadline has been revised to June 2008.

"It took time to evict the slum on the plot. The contractor also delayed in work," the PWD engineer said.

The 50-bed institute is now struggling to provide services to hundreds of patients coming from across the country.

"NICRH is the lone government hospital for cancer treatment. But we do not have adequate resources to treat a cancer patient," said a doctor.

"Only 50 beds are not adequate

every operation. But these are now lying idle in the stores," said another doctor.

Doctors at the Radiology Department said PET or positron emission tomography machine is needed for proper diagnosis of cancerous parts, metastasis (spread of disease), and detection of tumour.

"The nuclear medicine department is trying to bring PET machine," said Dr Mozizul Haque, in-charge of the Radiology and Imaging Department.

On average over 100 patients

"We do CT-scan of our staffs and dummies to keep the machines running or they would be damaged for not being used," he said.

Electro-medical engineers are needed for proper maintenance of the machines. Without proper maintenance, machines may start to degenerate after the warranty period of two years, said doctors.

As the department does not have a generator, these machines shut down abruptly when electricity goes off, raising risks of

machine is not working the patients have to do the tests from outside which is quite expensive," said a pathologist.

"We gave requisition for reagents in August last year. In the last couple of months at least six reminders were given. But we are yet to get the reagents due to the long tender process," he added.

"These kinds of problems arise because the government offices are not dynamic," the pathologist said. "So we need autonomy."

there will be 32 cabins and an 8-bed ICU in the new building. "Central oxygen system has been set up for the ICU," he added.

Though institutional practice of doctors at the institute was recommended at the beginning of the project, it has not been implemented till now.

"Had there been institutional practice, the doctors could have done private practice staying at the hospital. It would have compelled them to stay at the hospital till 7 in the evening. A percentage of their earning could also be donated to the institute," said a doctor.

"Institutional practice would have doubled the output of the expensive machines by serving more patients," he said.

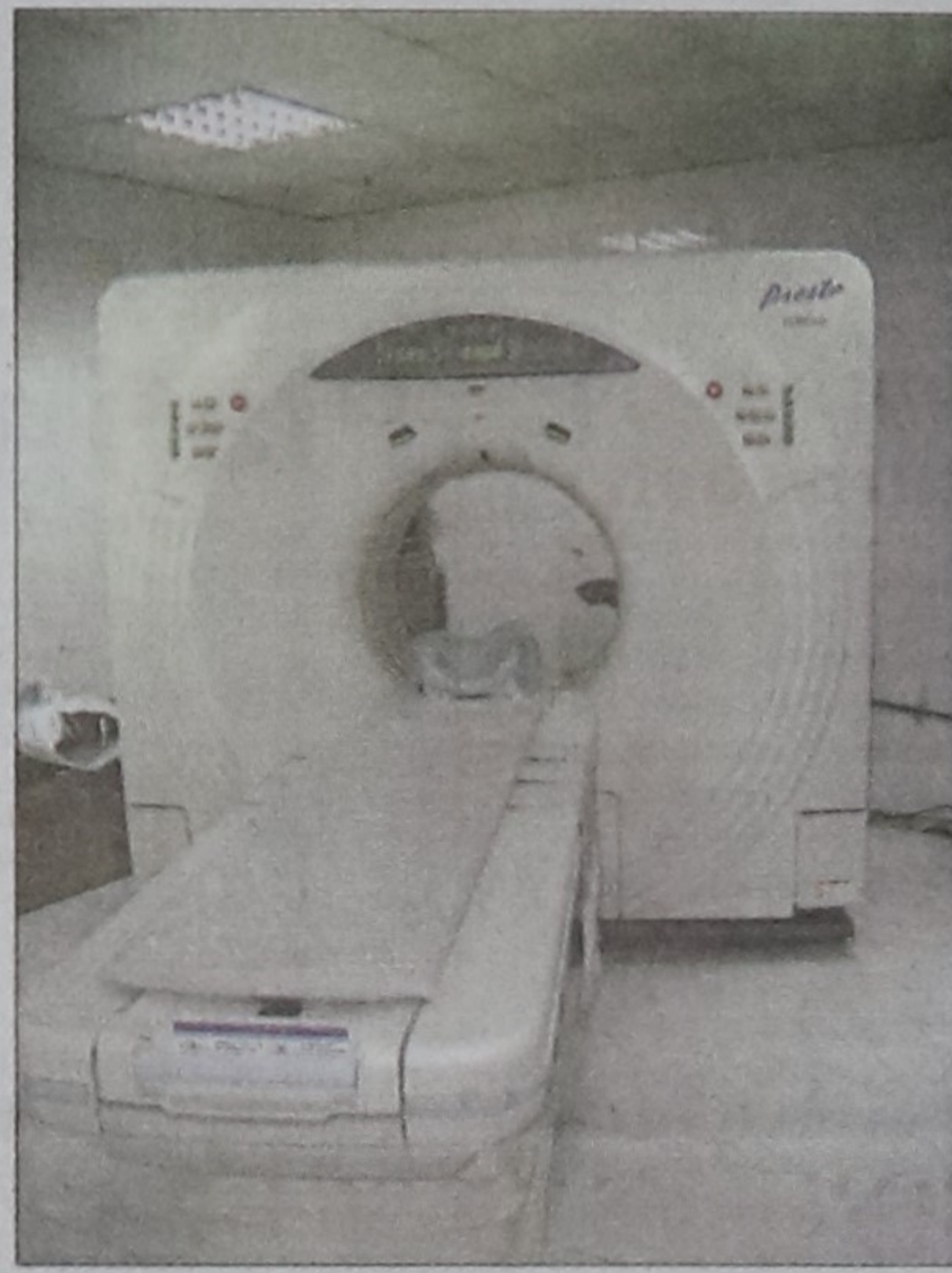
Doctors said the institute should be given autonomy as all kinds of work including procurement and supply are delayed due to bureaucratic tangles.

"When we apply to the ministry for a faulty machine part it takes at least six months for them to allocate the money. When the money is available after six months, by that time another part of that machine or another machine goes out of order. Then we apply for more money," said a doctor.

"The ministry officials delay the fund allocation," he said. "It is a vicious circle within which we are going round and round."



The under construction 150-bed building of national cancer institute and the unused CT scan machine.



Due to fund constraints the ministry revised the project and decided to make it a 150-bed hospital, which was approved by Ecne in December 2003.

The new building for the 150-bed facility is now incomplete although it was supposed to be finished by June 2006, officials said. The construction work is going on at a snail's pace.

Afsar Uddin, sub-divisional engineer, PWD, said the first phase of the building has almost been completed. "We will start the second phase once the Saudi fund for that phase is available," he said.

Asked about the delay he said

to meet the demand. Besides, we are unable to provide full OT service, ICU, full-capacity indoor service, extended capacity day care and cabin facilities," he said.

Expecting that the building would be completed by June 2006, 90 percent of the equipment for ten new OTs, ICU, washing plant and kitchen were procured which are now lying idle unpacked in the storerooms.

"We have procured state-of-the-art sterilisation equipment for central sterilisation store department or CSSD, which will work in an organised way to provide sterilised clothes and equipment to surgeons before

come to the Radiology Department every day.

At present the department has expensive CT-scan, MRI, X-ray and ultrasonogram machines. But the MRI machine has not been working for the last two weeks because its CPU is out of order, said sources.

The supply of imaging films for the MRI and CT-scan machines is much less than the requirement. "At present the department has only 100 imaging films, which we bought locally as the CMSD (Central Medical Store Department) does not supply imaging films," said a medical technologist.

early damage.

Generator is also needed to prevent evaporation of helium level, which should be at least 50 percent in the MRI machine, the doctors said.

Due to long tender process and bureaucratic tangles it takes time to fix machine parts and keep them running round the year.

At the pathology section, the electrolyte machine is not working for the last four months due to lack of chemical reagents needed to run the machine.

"Electrolyte machine tests the sodium, potassium and other mineral levels in blood. As the

Asked, Prof AMM Shariful Alam, director, NICRH, said the reagent supplier has been given a letter one month ago. "We cannot purchase large number of imaging films at a time due to shortage of funds," he said.

The institute has three linear accelerators and two cobalt machines for carrying out radiotherapy. There are only two honorary physicists to look after the expensive machines when at least 20 are needed.

Prof Shariful said they have proposed for creation of posts of physicists.

The institute does not have an ICU. However, Prof Shariful said

Controversial coffee shop at DU still has strong blessing

TAWFIQUE ALI

The Dhaka University (DU) authorities remain firm on protecting the controversial center of a coffee shop located behind Mokarram Hossain Bhaban on the Science Annex premises where it is planning to construct a 10-storey mathematics building.

Although the sponsoring foundation of the proposed mathematics building has offered to build a modern cafeteria inside the building, the DU authorities want to make sure that the coffee shop is not removed from the site.

The authorities have recently proposed for a change in the building's location close to the coffee shop, but asked the sponsor to build a makeshift shed to the west side of the site to let the coffee shop operate by the sidewalk and facing Shaheed Minar.

According to the DU Estate Department, the university authorities have built the shop and rented it out at a monthly rent of Tk 3,182 on a five-year lease deal.

Without any bidding the lease deal was made with an activist of BNP's student front Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), said sources.

Asked about the lease deal, Prof Syed Abul Kalam Azad, DU treasurer, said, "I do not know

how the shop was rented out or whether it was done under any pressure as I was not in my present position at that time."

Prof AFM Yusuf Haidar, pro vice-chancellor of DU, said they are shifting the coffee shop to the west for the time being. "Later, on completion of the new building, we will accommodate it on the ground floor," he said.

About the allegation that the shop was rented out to an activist

of JCD through favouritism, he said, "I do not know exactly in what procedure the shop was rented out."

Once the coffee shop is relocated to the new place, its customers will have to occupy the footpath in front of the Central Shaheed Minar.

Earlier, the DU authorities verbally committed to the sponsor of the proposed mathematics building to remove both the

coffee shop and a drug store.

The sponsor of the building is irritated by DU's rigidity to retain the coffee shop at the site. "It is just not understandable why the DU is hell-bent on protecting a coffee shop even by delaying construction of a vital infrastructure facility of the university," said a source directly involved in the building project.

Faculty members and students of the Science Faculty

alleged that the nuisance around the coffee shop hampers their routine academic activities.

A professor of mathematics said that a number of teachers of Science Faculty verbally complained the matter to the university authorities but to no avail.

Teachers of Geography and Environmental Science Department and Pharmacy, seeking anonymity, said that most of the visitors to the shop are outsiders and the nuisance hampers lab classes during afternoon.

According to sources, the coffee shop owner has turned the adjoining area into an enclosure by placing concrete benches beyond contractual agreement.

Prof Yusuf Haidar said there is no denial that the business of the coffee shop at present site creates nuisance but the universal authority has imposed a strict instruction on the shop renter to close down the business by evening.

But the renter runs his business until night.

Mubasshar Hussain, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), said it is ridiculous that the university authorities give so much of emphasis on protecting the renter of the coffee shop. "We need to know who the renter is and why the DU authorities are hell-bent on guarding his interest."



BTTB slowly packing up card phone booths

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The card phone booth near the Salimullah Muslim Hall looked deserted. Its rusty and dust covered interior suggests that no one has entered it for quite a while.

"I cannot remember anyone using that [booth] in months," said Shimul, a resident of the hall and student of Dhaka University. "Not that there is anything surprising about it. Who would use card phones when there are mobile phones around."

Things have not been much different in the 400 other card phone booths in the city, and things are likely to change in future with the authorities planning to gradually withdraw all the card phone booths from the city.

"We have been slowly withdrawing card phone booths from different places of the city over the years. The number of booths which was about 1400 a few years ago now stands at around 400," said an official at the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB).

"Revenues from this sector have been decreasing while monitoring and maintenance of the booths have become increasingly difficult over time. In fact, we have been operating a lot of booths solely because of their value as a communal service," he said.

The authorities will withdraw the remaining phone booths as soon as the current stock of telephone cards is exhausted, sources said.

"Although the [card phone] business is almost dead, it will take a while to withdraw the booths as there are a lot of telephone cards in stock right now. It may take well over a year or maybe two," said Mohammad Bayez, an operator and seller at card phone office at New Market.

The scheme received significant popularity when it was introduced in 1992 as a joint venture between the communication ministry, BTTB and Telephone Shilpa Shangstha (TSS). Almost all the major areas and spots of the city were equipped with card phone booths for the convenience of general public.

According to unofficial sources, revenues earned from this sector totalled up to Tk 172 crore over the past 17 years. Of the amount, over Tk 28 crore came during the fiscal year of 1996-1997.

However, returns from this sector declined fast and they were



A card phone booth locked for long near the New Market.

little over Tk 21 lakhs during the fiscal year 2006-2007. Authorities believe that the amount will be even lower this year.

"People value convenience more than anything else," said Bayez. "They would rather spend Tk 20 on an ISD call from their mobile, sitting comfortably in their bedrooms rather than going all the way to the nearest card phone booth and making the same call with Tk6."

"Also, with majority of the telephone exchanges in the city being digitalised, card phones cannot offer similar features and conveniences. This has been another drawback of the service," he said.

Sources at Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) said that it has been difficult to monitor and maintain the booths.

"Siemens - the company responsible for mainstreaming and repairing the card phones is also reluctant to repair the booths now

Because of this, scores of card phones are either left unattended or out of order for a long period," said a BTTB official.

"The BTTB or TSS lacks the technology or resources to maintain these booths without the help of Siemens. Therefore, we have been facing difficulties in maintaining a large number of booths," he said.

It has also been alleged that deliberate poor maintenance by a section of corrupt BTTB officials to allow private phone shops to do brisk business was a major reason behind the virtual death of the card phone service.

TSS officials even blamed the private phone shop owners for intentionally damaging the card phone booths for self-interest.

Post office officials and authorised distributors of the cards were also allegedly involved in corruption as they used to sell the cards only on commission.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"We don't think you can have a good election under a state of emergency."

-- Richard A Boucher

Visiting US Assistant Secretary of State Said at a press conference at the American Club in the city, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"Tourists and other local individuals also visit the area frequently and we think that the fire could originate from a cigarette butt thrown by any individual while visiting the forest."

-- Steve Wilson

President, Chevron Bangladesh Told a press conference organised by Petrobangla regarding the recent fire at Lawachara reserve forest allegedly resulting from a three-dimensional seismic survey by Chevron, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"Those who are taking the decisions can say why the arrests are taking place."

-- Lt Gen (Rtd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury

Chairman, Anti-Corruption Commission Told reporters at a press briefing, on Monday. Source: Prothom Alo

"Media saved the country from famine but the media itself is now facing famine following increased rate of newsprint, imprisonment of the owners of media-houses, shutting down of media, decrease in advertisement and control over the media."

-- Matiur Rahman Chowdhury

Editor of daily Manabzamin Said at a seminar on contemporary media environment organised by Mass-line Media Centre marking World Press Freedom Day at the IDB Bhabar in the city, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias