

5 lakh children suffer from rickets

Say experts

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

The number of children suffering from rickets has been increasing day by day since the last three decades, which is estimated over 5 lakh in different upazilas across the country.

The prevalence of patients suffering from rickets is more in coastal belt areas. The cases of rickets are also found in six divisions with Sylhet and Chittagong predominantly.

Rickets is a crippling disease of growing children. The symptoms of rickets are emerged with the growth of children. Rickets can develop as early as six months of age. Vitamin D deficiency is the primary cause of the disease. Calcium deficiency is now considered the main cause of rickets.

Rickets results in physical deformities especially in legs. It sometimes decays muscle and leads to permanent disability. The first case of rickets was found in Cox's Bazar after the devastating cyclone in 1990.

Experts apprehended that tidal wave, storm and cultivation in the salty water may be the risk factors of people's getting infected into rickets as the density of calcium reduces due to the salty water.

Though it was thought that the people in Bangladesh would not be affected by rickets, the disease is

caused mainly due to lack of vitamin D as people can get plenty of vitamin D from the sunray. But the fact is that a huge number of children have been affected with the disease because of calcium deficiency, said ICDDR,B scientist SK Roy.

Experts said if the body does not have enough calcium, it will not be able to use the Vitamin D that would result in causing rickets. People suffering from rickets become disable gradually and resistance power of their bodies is reduced while psychiatric problems are also seen among them.

The daily calcium intake should be 500-800 mg for the children under age five. Whereas, most of the children are receiving calcium from 150 to 200 mg through their daily food consumption, they added.

They further said at the same time, around 35 percent children in the country are born with low birth rate, that is, they are born with calcium deficiency. Lack of exclusive breast-feeding aggravates it.

According to the survey of Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable (SARPV) in 2006, it was found that 9 percent children have been suffering from rickets. The survey was conducted at 24 villages of Chokoria upazila in Cox's Bazar.

Helen Keller International in association with SARPV also con-

ducted a survey in 2004 that revealed around 5 lakh children suffering from the disease.

The survey conducted at 28 upazilas in six divisions found that 16 upazilas are most affected with the disease. The rickets-affected children were found mostly in Sylhet and Chittagong.

The research revealed that the percentage of children suffering from rickets is 1.4 in Cox's Bazar and 0.8 at Choudhagram in Comilla. The rate is 1.13 at Srimangal in Moulvibazar and 0.58 in Naogaon.

"If we pay little heed to this group, it is possible to protect the children from the dreadfulness of rickets," said SARPV Chief Executive Dr Shahidul Haque, adding that intake of calcium-rich vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, arum, beans, pulse, small fish and milk should be increased in our daily meals.

At the same time, if slight sodium carbonate can be added while cooking rice, it would meet the need of calcium, he said.

The cause of rickets is not poverty, rather it is due to food habit and environment which should be addressed through study, he added.

It is important to start public health nutrition programme for rickets prevention and to establish regional treatment centers for the patients suffering from the disease

as it is found that some 75 children were cured through receiving proper treatment in Chokoria, experts suggested.

Nutrition treatment is also important, experts said adding that study shows 66 percent of a group of children aged between two and four became normal after receiving nutrition treatment for three years.

However, A Rickets Interest Group (RIG) has been formed with Brac, ICDDR,B, Unicef, Care Bangladesh and National Nutrition Programme (NNP) that has been reviewing the situation and analysing the causes, prevention strategies and providing treatment to combat rickets.

A national survey also is going to be conducted on rickets. But it is very much important to formulate rickets policy by the government for situation analysis and to take necessary steps regarding the policy.

While talking to The Daily Star, Assistant Director of National Nutrition Programme Dr SM Mostafizur Rahman said it is urgent to conduct a national survey on why the prevalence of rickets is so high in the coastal areas.

"We have prepared a proposal to address the issue and it has been sent to the health ministry," he said, adding that process is going on to conduct a survey in this regard.



PHOTO: STAR

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad addresses a view exchange meeting on child rights at WVA auditorium in the city yesterday. Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum organised the event.

'Lack of bonding between parents, children leads to violations of child rights'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Poverty prevents children from enjoying their rights, but their rights are violated most when there is lack of bonding between parents and children, Prof Muzaffer Ahmed said at a view exchange meeting yesterday.

Poverty is not always the only reason for the violations of child rights, he said, adding that there are many well-off families where child rights are not ensured properly. Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar

Forum (BSAF) organised the discussion titled 'Interactions between civil society members and children on child rights' at WVA auditorium in the city where underprivileged children raised various issues, including early marriage, repression of domestic helps, eve-teasing, and education- and healthcare-related problems they face frequently.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmed, chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), said the people can enjoy their rights most in those societies where they are more conscious

and develop themselves through self-education and values are given high priority.

He also stressed the need to incorporate vocational training into the mainstream education.

At the same time, all education systems should be streamlined under an education policy as the effective literacy rate has stood at only at 46 percent despite efforts made by the government, he added.

The schools should be the centers to nurture children's latent talents, he said.

He also said that making the people more educated is an effective way to put an end to early marriage and repression of domestic helps.

Children associated with Ucep Bangladesh, Aparajeyo Bangladesh, Assistance for Slum Dwellers (ASD), Nari Moitree, ACLAB Bangladesh and other organisations shared their experiences and told the stories of deprivation.

BSAF Director Mohammad Kafil Uddin and executive board member Kazi Shamsul Alam were also present at the meeting.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

The premises of the office of Khulna Metropolitan Police Commissioner, which is located about one km away from the river Rupsha, goes under water almost every day during the high tide. The picture was taken yesterday.

Solve Rohingya problem for sake of region's security

Speakers tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar on ethnic conflict in Myanmar and Rohingya issue said the Rohingya problem should be addressed immediately for the sake of the security of this region.

"Bangladesh should take initiatives along with the neighboring countries immediately to solve the problem otherwise we will suffer most for the Rohingya problem," they added.

The seminar was organised by Neeti Gobeshona Kendra (NGK) at the Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday.

Mahbulul Haque, director and

trustee of NGK, presented the keynote paper at the seminar chaired by Prof Anwar Hossain of Dhaka University.

Mahbulul in his keynote paper said human rights organisations, the UN, Myanmar and Bangladesh should step forward to resolve the problem not only for political perspective but also on humanitarian ground.

"The Rohingya community in Myanmar have been struggling to get a recognition as a race in the country but to no avail," he said.

The speakers at the seminar also said people of the country were not aware of ethnic cleansing that is taking place there. They said the

Rohingyas find Bangladesh as a suitable place for migration.

They urged the people to be vocal so that the government should resolve the Rohingya problem as it can cause unrest in the country.



PHOTO: STAR

Neeti Gobeshona Kendra Director Mahbulul Haque speaks at a seminar at the Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left are Prof Anwar Hossain and Aeyasha Kabir.

'People doubtful about elections'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers' Party of Bangladesh (WPB) President Rashed Khan Menon yesterday said the countrymen are doubtful whether the present government will hold the election.

After holding a meeting with the party's central committee on Monday, WPB president said the wholesale arrest drive against the political parties have hampered the environment of dialogue and election.

Urging the government to stop the arrest drive, Menon said people of the country cannot be stopped by repression and mass arrest, they know how to achieve an election by breaking state of emergency.

He demanded the government to lift the state of emergency and declare specific polls date.

The meeting, presided over by Dipankar Shaha Dipu, was also addressed by politburo member Nurul Hasan and central committee Organising Secretary Ragib Ahsan Munna.

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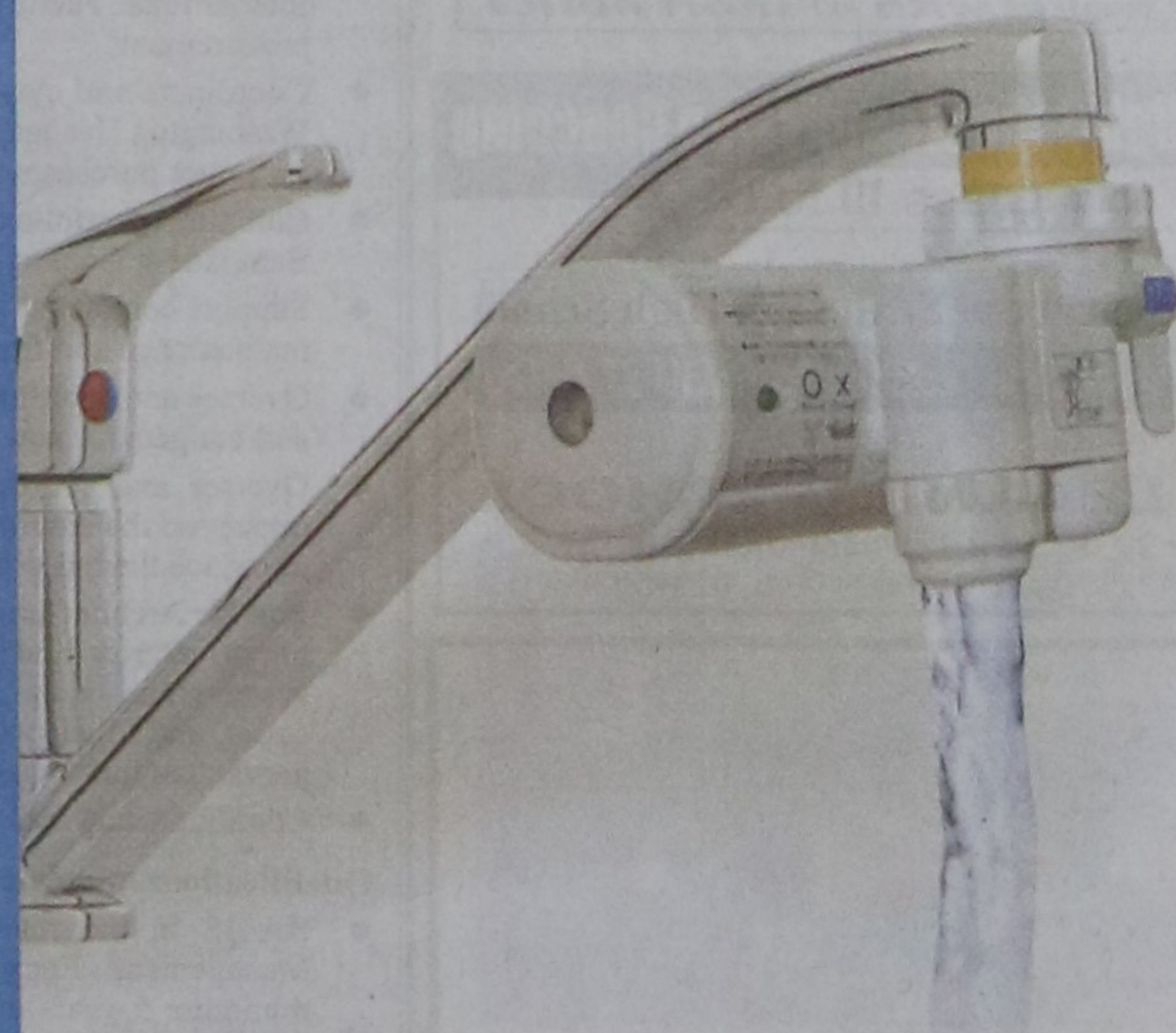
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