

## 7.5 lakh suffer from blindness, 1.2 lakh added a year

UNB, Dhaka

Blindness is a major public health threat in the country, with over 750,000 people suffering from the malaise while 120,000 new incidences occurring every year mostly for lack of eye care resources and awareness.

"Of the sufferers from blindness, 80 percent (650,000 people) have cataract problem that can be cured using intra-ocular lens surgery," said Dr Wahidul Islam, country director of Sightsavers International, quoting The Bangladesh National Blindness and Low Vision Survey 2003.

The survey is carried out every 10 years.

Besides the 750,000 sufferers from blindness, another over six million who have been suffering from refractive error and other eye problems need vision by spectacle and other means. Dr Islam told UNBIN an interview yesterday.

Of the total, approximately

150,000 are 'irreversible blind' that cannot be cured through treatment or surgery but need to be rehabilitated in the society, he said, adding that of the others, 75 percent are curable.

Major causes of blindness in Bangladesh are cataract, childhood blindness, refractive error, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, trauma, age-related macular degeneration, etc.

Dr Islam said that it is of great concern that 80 percent of the sufferers live in the rural areas, but 90 percent doctors and their assistants live in the towns and cities.

Every year, the number of blind people is increasing for what he said lack of public awareness, coordination between government and NGOs and human resources (ophthalmologists and their assistants) as well as barriers in uptake of eye care services by the poor.

Dr Islam expressed his doubt in achieving the goals of Vision 2020, the National Eye Care Plan, as only a national level V2020 committee

and 10/15 district level committees have been formed so far since launching of the plan in 2000.

"Vision 2020-The Right to Sight", a global initiative for elimination of avoidable blindness by the year 2020, was launched by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and ratified by Bangladesh in 2000.

Only 626 ophthalmologists and 618 mid-level eye care personnel (MLEP) from government, NGOs and private sector are working in the country for eye care services though four MLEPs (assistant) are needed for each ophthalmologist, Dr Islam said quoting the latest National Eye Care Capacity Assessment 2003.

To control the cataract blindness in Bangladesh, there is need for nearly 380,000 cataract operations annually but currently about 140,000 cataract operations are being done, which represents around 45 percent of the need, says the assessment.

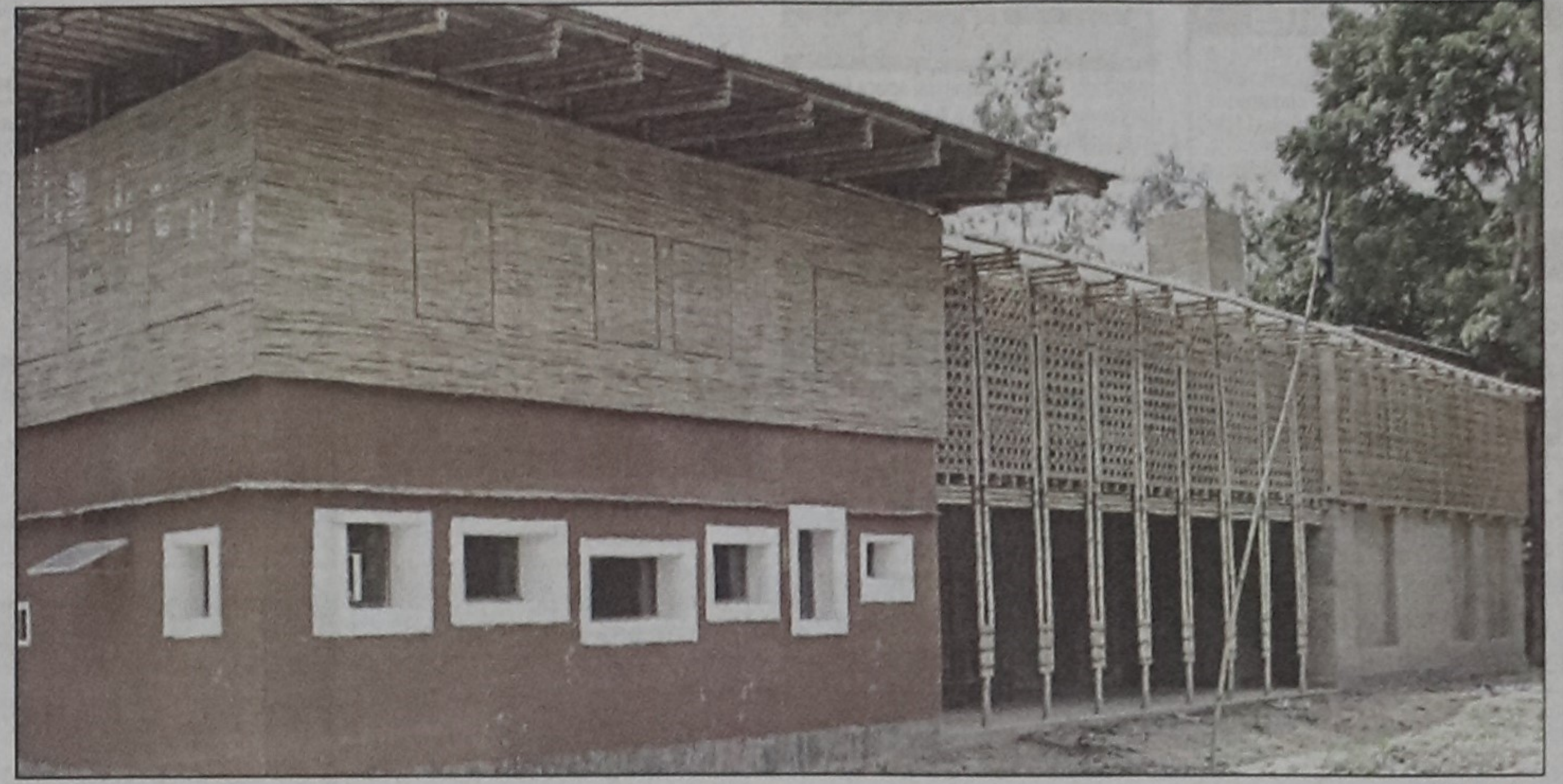
The government's National Eye Care Operational Plan (revised)

(2005-2010) feared that the number of blind population would double by the year 2020 if no intervention is initiated immediately.

It mentions that the blinds are treated as the burden in society, both from economic and social points of view. The estimated cost of blindness in Bangladesh is about Tk 20,000 crore calculated on the wages loss of the blind persons.

Dr Wahidul Islam emphasised on immediate formation of the district level committees under the Vision 2020 and making the existing committees more functional to control the avoidable blindness.

He also stressed the need for creating mass awareness, increasing human resources specially ophthalmologist's assistant along with their training, providing government subsidy to the NGOs, establishing government-NGO collaboration in eye care, including the eye care component of the government's Primary Health Care (PHC) activities to eliminate avoidable blindness from the country.



The new clay- and bamboo-made school building in Dinajpur.

PHOTO: STAR

## Another bamboo-clay school building opens in Dinajpur

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Another clay- and bamboo-made two-storey eye-catching school building was inaugurated at Rudrapur in Dinajpur yesterday near the similar old building which won the 2007 triennial Aga Khan Award for Best Architecture.

The construction work of the building was completed with the help of eight students of Brac University and key architect of Aga Khan award-winning building Anna Heninger.

Biraj Upazila Health Officer Md Abu Bakkar inaugurated the building as chief guest.

Dipshikha, an NGO working at Rudrapur, initiated to build a clay and bamboo-made multi-storey building for the first time in Bangladesh using local materials which are available everywhere in the country.

According to the NGO officials, the building will be used for students of electrical department under Dipshikha Electrical Skill Improvement (DESI) project. For the reason, the building has been brought under complete electric wiring to provide the students with power.

The students of the project have installed the solar power system at the rooftop of the building. They also installed two power generators inside the building.

Prof Alfred Glaese, an electrical engineer and lecturer of a Swiss university, told The Daily Star that the attractive building would be a global model as it used local resources, adding that it would be environment-friendly.

Speaking at the inaugural function as the special guest, Shanti Swchweiz Chairman Jakob Schaub thanked all who were involved in building the houses.

The building is weather-friendly as the moisture and heat inside it are controlled by clay, straw and bamboo. So, it is not required to use foreign resources, he added.

Dipshikha officials said the buildings have been made built to carry out their two educational programmes -- Modern Education and Training Institute (METI) and DESI -- of Dipshikha, an NGO working to help the underprivileged children and explore their creative potential.

The school building of METI was constructed in 2005 and took only four months to set up the building but it took 14 months to make DESI school with the help of local craftsmen and resources.

The building drew a lot of attention at home and abroad for its use of local cheap materials and converting those into an

elegant structure. Villagers of remote areas of the district showed their interest in building such structures and three families of the villages built three houses with the same resources.

Anna Heninger, an Austrian national, and Eike Roswag from Germany, were the key architects behind the building. They engaged skilled local craftsmen and helped them refine the processes and taught them new techniques.

Heninger, now in Austria, told The Daily Star over phone that the building was made with local materials like clay, bamboo, straw and rope and it was built at a cost of Tk 17 lakh.

Proddip Tigga, head teacher of METI, received the award in September 2007 on behalf of Dipshikha in Malaysia with a prize money of \$500,000.



PHOTO: STAR

Artistes render songs at a programme at Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday. Gono Sangeet Samannaya Parishad organised the programme demanding trial of the war criminals.

## Brac wins world's largest humanitarian prize

UNB, Dhaka

Brac, a development organisation, has won the world's largest humanitarian prize for helping more than 110 million poor people with microcredit and basic services.

The \$1.5 million (euro 1.1 million) Conrad N Hilton Humanitarian Prize goes each year to an organisation chosen for making extraordinary contributions to alleviating human sufferings.

Brac Founder Fazle Hasan Abed yesterday said the prize money would be used for anti-poverty programmes in Southern Sudan, says an AP report.

Brac, founded in February 1972, has acted as both the initiator and catalyst for many such innovations and changes. It has expanded its programmes to Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan.

Its unique, holistic approach to poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor encompasses a range of core programmes in economic and social development, health, education, and human rights and legal services.

Now Brac has more than 100,000 staff, the majority of which are women, reaching more than 110 million people with its development interventions in Asia and Africa.

## 28th BCS preliminary test Nov 28

UNB, Dhaka

The preliminary (objective) test of the 28th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Examination will be held at 10:00am on November 28 in all centres of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal simultaneously.

Seat-plans for the test will be published in newspapers in time, says a press release yesterday.

## Khulna AL leader murder case shifted to DB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Detective Branch of Khulna Metropolitan Police has been asked to investigate into the killing of Awami League leader Khan Ibne Zaman after Khalishpur police failed to make any headway in the case.

Khan Ibne Zaman, senior joint secretary of Khulna city Awami League, was killed at his Khalishpur residence on Monday night.

KMP Commissioner Helaluddin Badri transferred the murder case to Detective Branch on Thursday evening for further investigation.

Inspector Nikhil Chandra Mandal of DB who has been made the second investigation officer of the case interrogated three domestic helps of slain AL leader's house yesterday. But they gave no information about the murder during interrogation.

The three domestic helps earlier picked up by police for interrogation are Makbul, Faruk and Tufani. DB also interrogated Nazma Begum, wife of arrested domestic help Makbul, but she did not give any important information.

Assistant Commissioner of DB Md Abu Sayem told this correspondent that the AL leader might have been killed over previous enmity over financial matters.

## Resist move to lease out gas fields to foreigners

### Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday urged the countrymen to forge a strong unity to resist the plot of handing over oil and gas to foreigners.

The roundtable was organised by the Weekly Shapthahik at the National Press Club in the city.

The speakers said the chief adviser's Special Assistant M Tamim is desperately making all arrangements to lease out nine gas blocks in deep sea to multinational companies.

They said gas and coal are essential for country's development, but a section of the government on the eve of handing over the power to next elected government is trying to complete their mission of establishing multinational companies in gas and coal fields.

The speakers said Tamim has already managed the approval of the energy ministry and now the file is at CA's office to have his approval for leasing out the nine gas blocks.

They said of the nine blocks, eight blocks- 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 20 and 21- were proposed to award to American Oil Company 'Conoco

Philips' while block five to an Irish company.

As per the agreement, the multinational companies will be able to export 80 percent of extracted gas converting into Liquid Natural Gas (LPG) and the nation which is the owner of the gas will have only 20 percent share of the gas, they added.

Editor of the weekly Golam Murtaza, President of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal Hasanul Huq Inu, Prof Abu Ahmed, Lt Col (retd) Mahabur Rahman and Prof MM Akash also spoke on the occasion.

## DU classes resume today

DU CORRESPONDENT

The classes of Dhaka University will resume today after a 23-day vacation on the occasions of Eid-ul-Fitr and Durga Puja.

The resident students have already started to return to their respective dormitories.

The vacation started from September 25. All the departments and administrative offices remained closed between September 27 and October 5.



Participants at a programme marking the World Poverty Eradication Day makes a pledge to work towards reducing poverty. Justice Golam Rabbani administers the oath. People's Empowerment Trust organised the event at Rabindra Sarobar at Dhanmondi.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

North Alpine Club Bangladesh members inaugurate a cycle rally by releasing balloons at Shahbagh in the city yesterday. The club organised the rally as it will begin an expedition to Langsisa Re mountain in Nepal on October 26.

## Teenage girl found dead in city slum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The police recovered the body of a teenage girl with her hands and legs tied in a sack at a slum at Gulshan in the city yesterday.

The identity of the victim could not be known. The girl, aged around 18, was wearing a salwar and kameez.

Gulshan police found the body at a lane at Sattala slum at around 10:30am and sent it to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Sub-Inspector Nur-e-Alam told The Daily Star that some unidentified people dumped the body wrapped in jute sack at the slum at around 6:30am.

Morgue sources said the girl was strangled and that she was three months pregnant.

### Apollo Children's Centre

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**(Left to Right)**

- Dr. Abu Iqbal**  
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