

## Neonatal, maternal mortality rates still high

Says Unicef Country Report 2009

AMENA KHATUN

Although the country has made significant progress in reducing under-five child mortality, the rates of neonatal and maternal mortality still remain high, creating obstacle to achieving the target of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) four and five by 2015.

According to Unicef Country Report 2009, around 12,000

### Online quiz kicks off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ACI Pure Salt and Aamra Infotainment Ltd, a concern of Aamra Group, have jointly launched an online competition styled the "ACI Pure Salt Desh Ke Jano" on Monday, says a press release.

Syed Farhad Ahmed, managing director of Aamra Group, and Syed Alamgir, executive director of ACI consumer brands, launched the event through a press conference in Banani.

The gaming contest will formally start on April 27, 2009. Any Bangladeshi citizen above 14 years of age can join the competition from anywhere by logging into www.2funmail.com, the first ever gaming portal of Bangladesh.

The online quiz has been organised to encourage the young generation to know more about Bangladesh and its rich tradition, culture and history.

The competition will run in three phases: the first and second phases will take place online and the third and final phase will take place live.

Gamers will play the first and second phases from April 27 midnight to May 25 midnight. The final phase will be held on May 30 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.

The top ten scorers of this contest will win cash awards of Tk 1,00,000 each from ACI Pure Salt.

Banglapedia will be the strategic partner, while the Daily Showkai, Radio Foorti and Channel 1 will be the media partners for the event.

mothers and 120,000 newborn babies die every year in the country due to pregnancy or childbirth-related complications which is still big challenge to achieve the MDG targets.

It said the reduction of maternal mortality has been much slower than child mortality and Bangladesh still records a high maternal mortality ratio above 320 deaths per one lakh in childbirth, while it was 574 in 1990.

The MDG target of reducing maternal mortality is 143 per lakh by 2015, the report added.

These high mortality rates are underpinned by the fact that around 85 percent of women give birth at home and most with unskilled attendants, it said, adding that around 45 percent of mothers are malnourished and are likely to give birth to a low-birth weight baby which is one of the major cause of death for newborns.

According to Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2007, the neonatal mortality is 37 per thousand live birth which is 57 percent of under-five mortality.

It said the neonatal mortality in 1994 was 52, while it was 48 in 1997 and in 2000 it was 42. The rate was 37 in 2007.

However, MDG Bangladesh Progress Report 2007 also suggested larger reduction in neonatal mortality is required for the country to meet the MDG target four.

Dr Ziaul Matin, health officer on neonatal health of health and nutrition section of Unicef, said the first week of life is the most critical time for a newborn as three in four newborn deaths during this time.

In order to curb neonatal and maternal mortality, he stressed the need for ensuring community based health services and access to community skilled birth attendant who would help at home delivery.

Matin said awareness building programme needs to be launched at community level regarding antenatal and postnatal care, emergency birth preparedness and the danger sign of maternal and neonatal to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality.

Director of Public Health and Nutrition (PHN) Dr Parveen Fatema focused on extending the national nutrition programme across the country as malnourishment is one of the root causes of maternal and newborn mortality.

Director General of DGHS Prof Dr Shah Monir Hossain said the government has taken proper steps to integrate community-based interventions in order to reach out to mothers and newborns.

"The national nutrition programme has extensive activities in 109 upazilas and the health and family welfare ministry is also working in this regard in 33 upazilas to increase poor women's access to utilisation of quality maternal and neonatal services," he added.

A government survey in 2007 said shortages of nurses are over 163,177 in the country, while it lacks over 60,013 doctors.

On shortages of doctors and nurses, Monir said initiatives are under way to recruit more health personnel to overcome the existing challenges in health sector.



Anjana Rahman speaks at a press conference on Swadesh Properties Dance Festival at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On her right are Farzana Khan Ila, Amjirul Islam Moni and YJ Moon.



Hameeda Hossain speaks at a regional workshop on 'Right to transparent governance: South Asian perspective' at Brac Centre Inn in the city yesterday. On her right are Dr Devendra Raj Panday and Barrister Manzoor Hasan and on her left is Asad Jamal. (Story on Page 1) PHOTO: STAR

### 3 BCL activists arrested

DU CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested three Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists.

The arrestees were identified as Utpal Saha of Jagannath Hall, Saminur Rahman Sumon of Salimullah Muslim Hall and Kamal of Ziaur Rahman Hall.

Police sources said Utpal and Sumon were arrested after they were called in to the police station at around 2:45pm, while Kamal was arrested from the campus at around 1:00pm.

On condition of anonymity, a sub-inspector of the police station said the BCL men were arrested following the directives of higher authority.

Campus sources said Kamal beat up two BCL activists of Zia Hall early yesterday.

Sources said Sumon is accused in several cases and the DU authorities have cancelled his studentship after finding irregularities in his admission process at Public Administration department under session 2003-04.

Campus sources said Kamal was a member of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) of Zia Hall unit and joined BCL during the period of the last caretaker government.

### PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

## Ensure access to proper assistive devices

### Speakers tell workshop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The issue of assistive technology for persons with disabilities should be incorporated into national policies and effective measures should be taken to ensure that they have access to assistive technology devices that are best suited to individual needs, speakers at a workshop said yesterday.

They said the persons with disabilities are generally provided with such devices that may not meet an individual's special needs. So, special condition and status of an individual should be taken into consideration before providing assistive devices.

The Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) in association with Handicap International (HI) and the European Commission organised the workshop on 'Assistive Technology in Bangladesh' at LGED Bhaban in the city.

Assistive technology enables people with significant disabilities to overcome their disabilities to some extent and live a normal life.

Wheelchairs and Braille system are two examples of assistive technology output.

With proper assistive devices, physically challenged people can make their abilities count and be an asset to the society, the speakers said at the workshop.

"There are various forms of disabilities, and the needs of the people with disabilities are different and much varied," said AHM Noman Khan, executive director of CDD. "You cannot give a wheelchair designed for an adult to a child. This may put the child in a more disadvantageous position than before and may even permanently damage his spinal cord," he said.

To ensure that quality assistive devices are produced and distributed to the right people, the CDD, with financial and technical assistance from HI and EU, is launching a project called

'Development of a Comprehensive National Network for Provision of Assistive Technology (PROVAT)', he added.

The speakers also stressed the need to form a joint taskforce of different organisations to work together for the welfare of physically challenged people.

They said raw materials for such devices should be exempt from taxes and training facilities should be established to teach the people with disabilities on proper use of assistive technology devices.

"Although there is a national policy for the disabled, it has seen little development over the years. There is little coordination among the different bodies and also little awareness on the proper use of assistive devices," said Khandaker Jahurul Alam, president of National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD), who chaired the event.

Acting Country Director Tanja Berretta of Handicap International in Bangladesh, Disability Technical Advisor Nancy Rollinson and NFOWD Secretary General Towaherul Islam also spoke.

### Care to drown?

The earth is getting warmer everyday and the sea levels are rising. Environmental scientists fear that the entire Bangladesh will go under water by the year 2100. We all might have to survive as divers with fins.

The predictions can be changed if we act now. Be a minimalist while using water, gas and power and avoid using cars and air conditioners whenever you can.

Which one would you prefer- a little change of habits or a life under water?



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