

## SAFE WATER, SANITATION FOR ALL

## DPHE may not reach target

Officials blame shortage of manpower, inadequate budget

ERSHAD KAMOL

With the shortage of one-fourth of total manpower and two-thirds of required budget, the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) may not reach the government's target of providing safe water and sanitation to all by the year 2011 and 2013 respectively.

As part of the national water policy, DPHE is running projects providing safe water sources to arsenic-affected and geologically challenged 135 municipalities across the country.

But the national water policy is being hindered due to dilly-dally attitude of the officials of the problem-ridden department.

DPHE is now providing safe water to 96 people from one source, but as per the national water policy one source will provide safe water to 50 people.

In fact, about 50 percent work under national water policy and national sanitation programme remains incomplete due to vacancy at the top level of the department including the posts of chief engineer and two additional chief engineers.

In addition to his own duty, the superintending engineer is discharging the duties of chief engineer and additional chief engineers (planning), said sources at DPHE.

Of the total 6875 posts, 1728 are vacant at different levels for the last three years.

No recruitment has also been made for the post of assistant engineer after 1983.

Moreover, apathy has developed among the officials who are deprived of due promotion for the last few years, said a high official preferring anonymity.

As a result many ongoing emergency projects of the

department are not implemented properly due to lack of proper monitoring and crisis of field officials, he added.

Budget constrain is another major obstacle to reach the target of safe water and sanitation projects.

To complete the projects an estimated Tk 6011 crore is needed, and accordingly DPHE sought Tk 1200 crore per year. But it received only Tk 419.57 crore in current fiscal year.

The donors have so long been providing remarkable supports to run many projects of the department.

But due to lack of stimulation among the officials, it has become difficult for the department to get financial and technical supports from the donors, says a DPHE source.

DPHE is running seven government-funded and seven donor-funded projects

with the target of providing safe water to all by 2011 and sanitation coverage by 2013.

"If the current state of the department continues, it will not be possible for us to provide safe water to people in rural areas and municipalities by 2011, let alone sanitation project by 2013," commented a high official of DPHE.

Bureaucratic tangle is also hampering the activities of the department. Many urgent proposals such as national sanitation project (phase II) and providing water from the surface sources are not getting permission due to red-tapism.

Under the proposed national sanitation project (phase II), DPHE intends to develop latrines after conducting surveys at 148 municipalities across the country.



Construction materials pile up on a road at Karwan Bazar in the city, causing suffering to road users. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Extortionist beaten to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mob beat a suspected extortionist to death and injured two others as they tried to escape after making an armed attack on a rice trader at Rampura in the city last night.

The identity of the dead and the rice trader could not be known immediately.

Rampura police said local people caught hold of three extortionists and gave them a good beating as they fired gunshots at the rice trader at East Rampura around 9:30pm. However, the bullets could not hit the trader.

The three injured extortionists were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, but one of them succumbed to injuries. The police also recovered a firearm and two bullets from their possession.

## Shahjahan Siraj gets bail

SC upholds HC order granting bail to Shamim Iskander

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted ad-interim bail for six months to former BNP lawmaker Shahjahan Siraj and former secretary Ismail Zabiullah in three corruption cases against them.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court (SC) upheld a HC order granting bail to Shamim Iskander, brother of BNP chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleida Zia, in a corruption case.

A HC bench of Justice Syed Muhammad Dastgir Husain and Justice Md Rais Uddin granted bail to Shahjahan Siraj in two cases, and to Zabiullah in a case after hearing separate petitions filed by the accused.

Shahjahan, however, cannot be released from jail following the HC orders, since he has been shown arrested in other cases, lawyers said.

But there is no legal bar to the release of Zabiullah from jail following the HC order, as he is not arrested in any other case, they said.

**CASE AGAINST SHAHJAHAN**  
The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the two cases with Joydevpur Police Station on May 20 last year against Shahjahan and eight others on charges of illegally leasing out government lands in Gazipur during the tenure of four-party alliance government.

In response to quashment petitions filed by Shahjahan, the HC also issued rules upon ACC and the government to explain why the proceedings should not be quashed.

**CASE AGAINST ZABIULLAH**  
A special court in Dhaka on June 2 sent Zabiullah to jail on his surrender in connection with a case filed by ACC on charges of amassing illegal wealth. In this case, he was earlier convicted and sentenced to 13 years in jail.

Upon an appeal filed by Zabiullah, the court granted him bail.

**CASE AGAINST SHAMIM**  
A four-member full bench of the Appellate Division headed by Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim dismissed an appeal filed by ACC against the HC order that granted bail to Shamim Iskander in a case filed against him on charges of amassing illegal wealth.

Following this order, the HC order will remain valid, the lawyers said.

## Rohingya refugees major threat to regional security

Speakers tell panel discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a panel discussion yesterday said Rohingya refugee problem in Bangladesh constitutes a major problem for the entire region, as under the condition the refugees are living has the potential for giving birth to insurgent groups.

"The problem regarding

Rohingya refugee is no longer a problem only for Bangladesh, rather a regional issue. And it would be a bigger problem for the region in future," said Prof Imtiaz Ahmed.

He said, "It has been a problem for the country years after years and remains the same and there was no change in the situation. Thailand,

India and Indonesia have already got involved in the issue and hope there would be some change this time. There has to be an international burden bearing to resolve the problem."

Focusing on the endless problems facing the Rohingyas, Imtiaz said, "There should have hundreds of insurgent groups under the circumstances they are living. If they live in such circumstances, they would definitely end up becoming violent while the children would end up being soldiers."

The country should raise the issue at global level and seek international support, suggesting that a meeting of the stakeholders at the national level is required to first brainstorm and fine-tune such an initiative, he added.

The discussion on 'The Rohingyas: From stateless to refugee' was organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) at its office in the city with its Director General Maj Gen Sheikh Md Monirul Islam in the chair.

Former defence attaché of Bangladesh to Myanmar Brig Gen (ret'd) Salim Akhtar said, "The problem exposed us to near to war once. We are in no condition to go in any kind of war. So, the problem must be addressed by international effort."

He suggested that Bangladesh provide support to the Rohingyas refugees in terms of their skill development and education and the government should also track down the undocumented refugees, because they may get connected to international gunrunning and militancy.

He also suggested bringing the Rohingyas leaders to the negotiating table to understand the realities of the situation and finding out a key solution.

Prof Anwar Hossain said, "Multi-dimensional effort is necessary to address the problem regarding the Rohingyas. At first, the problem is humanitarian, then demographical and it is concerned with security of the country."

"The only way out is to address the problem multilaterally with involvement of regional countries," he added.

Ambassadors of Indonesia, India and Thailand were also present at the discussion and felt the necessity of a combined regional effort to solve the problem.

"Camps are expensive to run. Camps are also discriminatory for the Bangladeshi people living around the area the Rohingyas camps are settled," said Arjun Jain, acting representative of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).



PHOTO: PID

Ambassador of Germany to Bangladesh Frank Meyke pays a farewell call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

## Review draft health policy

Experts tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a roundtable yesterday called on the government to review the draft of national health policy 2009 through further consultations with the stakeholders to make it a people policy.

This draft is simply a copy of the health policy 2000 and the proposed health policy of 2008, they said.

They also urged the authorities to form a new committee to prepare the policy anew after holding meetings, seminars and discussions at the union, upazila and district levels and assessing their needs and demands regarding health services.

Shashthya Andolon (Health movement) and Ubining organised the roundtable on 'The draft of national health policy 2009: a

review' at National Press Club in the city.

Dr Arup Ratan Chowdhury said diabetes has now become epidemic and the cases of heart disease and cancer are increasing in the country, but the draft policy does not provide any directions to prevent them.

He also said the government should open a special TV channel which will telecast health-related programmes to raise awareness among the mass people.

"Tobacco-related diseases attack around 12 lakh people and around 57,000 people die from such diseases a year, but the draft health policy keeps mum about the issue," he added.

Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, the founder of Gonoshasthya Kendra, said the national health policy should make it mandatory that newly

appointed doctors serve at the union level for a minimum period of three years to ensure quality healthcare service for rural people.

As 85 percent of delivery cases take place at home with the help of traditional birth attendants, the health policy should highlight the issue and call for training for such attendants three or four times a year, he said.

Dr AM Zakir Hossain and Dr Mezbah Uddin also spoke at the roundtable presided over by Farida Akter, joint convener of health movement.

The speakers also stressed the need to incorporate a set of specific policies regarding occupational health, women's health facilities during disasters, health system in Char and hilly areas and sex workers' health in the health policy.



PHOTO: STAR

Dr Arup Ratan Chowdhury speaks at a roundtable on the draft of national health policy 2009 at the National Press Club yesterday. On his right are Dr Mezbah Uddin and Farida Akter.

## NGOs concerned at embargo on loan recovery in Aila-hit areas

UNB, Dhaka

The NGO Foundation expressed concern about the survival of the micro-credit institutions (MCIs) due to an embargo imposed on recovery of agricultural and micro-credit money disbursed in the Aila-hit areas in southern districts of the country.

"The NGOs that disbursed loans in the areas will face closure if they are to suspend loan recovery for one year," Foundation Chairman Dr Muhammad Ibrahim told Finance Minister AMA Muhith at a meeting at the finance ministry yesterday.

Recently, the Microcredit Regulatory Authority slapped the restriction suspending loan

recovery by the NGOs for one year from June 28 this year and asked for rescheduling the unrealised and default loans for next one year as the cyclone last May hit hard life and livelihood of people in the coastal belt.

It also asked the micro-credit institutions to lend fresh credits to their members after rescheduling the previous loans and instructed taking measures so the borrowers do not face any harassment in fresh borrowing.

"We'll have to look into it as they raised the concern," Muhith told reporters after the meeting, adding that the decision in this regard would be taken in consultation with the

authorities concerned.

Dr Ibrahim apprehended that the suspension of loan recovery would affect financial discipline of the micro-credit institutions and requested the minister to put off the recovery on case-to-case basis.

NGO Foundation, the federation of NGOs in Bangladesh, also aired concern over the initiative for establishing NGO Commission, as the government did not yet discuss with them the possible framework of the proposed watchdog body.

They also urged the finance minister to set the criteria for NGOs which would be engaged in implementing government programmes.

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