

## THREE-DAY KATHMANDU CONFERENCE ENDS

## Vow to address issues of reproductive, maternity healthcare

RASHIDUL HASAN, back from Nepal

The three-day international conference on access to reproductive health services ended in Kathmandu, capital of Nepal, on Thursday with the adoption of a 20-point declaration.

Ministers, lawmakers and government officials from 12 South and South East Asian countries who attended the conference also vowed to work together to address the issue of reproductive and maternity healthcare, for want of which one woman dies in every minute across the world.

High officials and experts of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) also attended the conference.

UNFPA Asia Pacific regional office organised the conference to review the current status of implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDG)-5 to reduce the maternal mor-

ality ratio by three-quarters by 2015.

The declarations said legislators, lawmakers, policy makers, representatives of national organisations, religious leaders, civil society members and media professionals have the common responsibility with their governments to ensure health of women through providing accessible, affordable and sustainable reproductive healthcare at all levels.

In the declarations the delegates also expressed their concern at the relatively slow progress made in the region, in particular, in reducing maternal mortality and ensuring equitable access to healthcare services.

The declarations also called for actions so that no woman should die while giving birth.

At the conference, UNFPA officials lauded Bangladesh for its performance in family planning activities and over-

all reproductive healthcare services.

At the same time they cautioned Bangladesh for the high rate of unmet need of contraceptives and dependency on short-term methods.

Pakistan at the conference showed interest in applying the experience of Bangladesh in the area of advocacy for family planning and contraceptive uses.

Delegations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Philippines, Mongolia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, UNFPA and WHO attended the conference.

The five-member Bangladesh delegation included Mozammel Hossain, a ruling Awami League (AL) lawmaker and chairman of parliamentary standing committee on social welfare ministry, Prof M Amanullah, an AL lawmaker and former state minister, BD Mitra, additional secretary to health ministry, and Afsana Taher of UNFPA Bangladesh attended the

conference.

Members of Bangladesh delegations at the conference said at present the country's total fertility rate (2.7) and contraceptive prevalence rate (55.8) are good considering that 87 percent of its population are Muslim.

"But the future challenges are to meet the increased demand for contraceptives, simplify lengthy procurement procedures, overcome the short fall of reproductive health commodities, and develop national strategy on RHCS," they added.

They also stressed the need for cooperation and coordination among the countries specially at the time of present global economic meltdown to address the burning issue of reproductive and maternity health care.

The UNFPA and WHO officials urged the ministers and lawmakers to extend their hand to meet the goal of MDG-5 by 2015.



Children are engrossed in painting pictures at a drawing competition on the TSC premises at Dhaka University yesterday. Sheikh Russell Shishu Sangsad organised the event to mark the National Mourning Day on August 15.

## River routes around Dhaka city to be dredged on priority basis: Shajahan

A CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan yesterday said here the river routes around Dhaka city would be dredged and made navigable on priority basis to reduce traffic jam.

The initiative would also help face the impacts of disasters, including floods. The lost capacity of reserving water would be restored through dredging rivers, he said.

The newly appointed minister said freeing the rivers throughout the country,

including Dhaka, from the clutches of the grabbers would be his first task.

Shajahan said this while talking to local media representatives after offering feteiha at the grave of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Tungipara in Gopalganj with five new state ministers who took oath of office on Friday.

The minister along with his colleagues Brig Gen (retd) Enamul Haque, Capt (retd) Mujibur Rahman Fakir, Promod Mankin, Mahbubur Rahman and Dr Sharmin

Shirin Chowdhury first went to the grave of Bangabandhu where they laid wreaths at the altar. They also offered special munajat there.

District Awami League General Secretary Emdadul Haq Chowdhury, district AL leader Salauddin Panna and Tungipara Upazila Chairman Soleman Biswas were present.

Attorney General Mahbub Alam and additional assistant attorneys general and officials and employees of their officers also offered feteiha at the grave.



Finance Minister AMA Muhith visits a stall after inaugurating 'Media Fair 2009' organised by Fiesta Event Management.Com at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the city yesterday.

## Technical edn right tool to remove unemployment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday said technical education would be the right tool to eliminate unemployment from the country.

Proper curriculum should be developed for this focusing the new technologies, he added.

Nahid as the chief guest said this while addressing a

conference on 'Principals of technical schools and colleges' at the auditorium of College of Textile Technology yesterday.

Presided over by Director General of the Department of Technical Education Prof Nitai Chandra Shitradhar, the conference was also addressed by Technical Education Board Chairman Prof Abul Kashem and Director of the Department of

Technical Education Mostafizur Rahman.

The minister said economic freedom could be achieved by turning huge population of the country into human resources through technical education.

He called on the technical education institutions to develop their syllabuses keeping an eye on the demands for the next three, 10 and 20 years.

## Old vehicles to be removed from city roads

Says minister

BSS, Dhaka

Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain yesterday said old and junk vehicles plying in the city for more than 20 years would be removed from the roads.

"To implement the plan, a tender is under the process for purchasing 100 new buses in the public sector and 100 more new buses are coming in the private sector," he said while he was inaugurating a digital ticket counter of 'Suchona Associates Bus Service' at Azimpur Bus Stand in the city.

Chairman of Bangladesh Transport Coordination Board Abu Bakar Salahuddin attended the function as the special guest.

Later, the minister inaugurated five new buses, imported from China, of the company.

He said more new buses would be introduced in the city roads in phases to mitigate sufferings of the commuters.

"The government has taken initiatives to purchase 500 more buses with the finan-

cial assistance of India," he said, adding that rickshaws would be removed from the city roads in phases with the increase in the number of buses.

Replying to a question, he said the government would give permission if any person, company or non-government organisation want to import double-taker buses.

"There is no extortionist among transport traders, but outsiders may be involved in the illegal toll collection," he added.

He said the government is working with a plan to bring the whole communications sector under the digital transport system. As part of the digital communication system, a bus service named 'Suchona' was introduced by the private initiative on April 14, he said.

With the inauguration of the Azimpur digital bus counter, the number of digital bus counters has raised to five and another eight digital bus counters would be inaugurated soon, he said.

## 61B-class rly stations closed in western zone

Plan to call back retired masters to resume operation

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Railway (BR) has planned calling back its retired station and locomotive masters to keep some stations functional, which were closed over the days due to shortage of manpower.

A proposal made by the Railway Department in this regard is now waiting for government's approval, chief operating superintendent (west) of BR Abdul Wahab told BSS.

Senior officials of the railway both western and eastern zones recently recommended the higher authorities to give temporary appointment to some experienced station and locomotive masters in the backdrop of acute manpower shortage.

According to official sources some 40 B-class stations in the western zone of railway now remained closed completely and 21 partially due to dearth in manpower. Many stations also remain closed frequently when its masters fall sick or go on leave.

Railway department also recommended for taking move for withdrawal of the legal barrier on recruitment of assistant station master following a court order in 2006.

"It will take at least two years to equip a new master with necessary knowledge to operate a station and locomotive engine. So, we have recommended for giving temporary appointment to some retired but experienced masters, Wahab said.

The BR in its western zone now have 615 vacancies in the post of station master, locomotive master, loco-master, guard (train driver), booking assistant and points-man.

He said 37 personnel went into retirement in 2008 and 56 loco-master and assistant loco-master would go into retirement this year in addi-

tion to 159 in 2010 plunging the railway in acute manpower crisis.

He said closure of the 61 B-class stations in the western region left the huge property of the railway department unguarded, taking tolls on revenue earnings.

In the Pakshi and Lalmonirhat divisions 22 D-class stations remained closed due to shortage of book clerk. Travelling Ticket checkers (TTs) collect fares from the passengers of these routes.

Closure of the B-class stations has increased the distance of two stations and deteriorated the line capacity, he said.

## Bangalee Chhatra Parishad's 48-hr agitation a hoax!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Parbatya Bangalee Chhatra Parishad did not bring out any protest procession or hold any meeting as per its 48-hour agitation programme to create pressure on the government to change its decision to withdraw one brigade of army and 35 temporary camps from several places in Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) by September.

The student forum announced the 48-hour agitation programme at a press conference at Khagrachhari Press Club on Friday.

President of the Parishad Mohammad Alamgir Kabir announced the programme, including protest procession and meeting, in all upazilas in CHT, human chain in front of Chittagong Press Club yesterday and protest procession in Rangamati today.

But no one was available on cellphones for their comments.

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