

Draft health policy

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fee' from all public health care centres as per a guideline to be prepared in this regard.

"The provision of 'user fee' has been kept in the draft policy to increase government's revenue. If the revenue from health sector increases, it would ensure better services for the people," said Director General of the Directorate General of Health Services Prof Shah Monir Hossain.

The poorest of the poor would get health services free of cost as per the health policy, he said and mentioned that still people are paying charge for the outdoor health services and cabin at the medical college hospitals.

The provision of imposing user fees has invited strong criticism as it would make the health services costlier for the poor people and violate the constitution, which guarantees health rights.

The poor people are not receiving health services free of cost actually rather they have to spend money for medicines and other services as per the doctors' prescriptions, allege the health experts.

"Collecting user fee might be a source of corruption," said Farida Akhter, executive director of UBINIG, a policy advocacy and research organisation.

If the user fee provision is

introduced, people will think that receiving health care services from private clinics will be better than services from public hospitals, she added.

The timeframe of the 'safety net' for the poor people is not clearly mentioned in the draft health policy, said president of the Health Rights Movement Prof Rashid EMahbub.

He said it would help commercialise the health sector while the poor people would be deprived after implementation of the user fee provision.

The country has no health policy to ensure people's health. Earlier a draft health policy was prepared during the Ershad regime, which was changed in 2000, while another during the last caretaker government in 2008. Now the government has formulated a draft health policy 2009 after reviewing previous two draft policies.

Talking to The Daily Star Prof Shah Monir Hossain said that the government will review the recommendations to be posted on the website to formulate a second draft and several meetings with different stakeholders would be held before finalising the policy.

Before December it will not be possible to finalise the health policy, he said.

The draft health policy has 15 objectives, 18 principles and 49 strategies.

No step yet

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The local leaders of Awami League (AL), who earlier staged arbitration and set free the perpetrators after awarding fines of Tk 10,000 each, are now approaching the leaders of both Kalapara Press Club and Patuakhali Press Club to have a rapprochement with journalists who reported the incident.

Local journalists said the leaders are now telling them if the reporters stop digging further into the incident, they would ask the victim to withdraw the defamation case that she had to file under duress against the editor, publisher and reporter of a Bangla daily.

Earlier, under immense pressure, the editor of a local daily sacked a reporter who covered the September 25 incident. The reporter filed a general diary with the police seeking protection.

The administration is yet to take any step to arrest the culprits or arrange medical test for the victim, whose family fled home for fear of reprisal.

Aug 21 attack

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petitions on August 17 seeking cancellation of their bail.

The Huji members -- Munshi Mohibullah alias Mohibul Rahman, brother of Huji Chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, and Arif Hasan Sumon -- obtained bail in the case on August 12.

Their bail was earlier cancelled in a case filed under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.

Upon separate petitions submitted by the investigation officer (IO), the court extended the investigation completion deadline into the cases by two months and also directed Inspector General of Police (IGP) to submit probe reports by the same time, which had earlier expired on October 3.

On August 12 this year, Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 Judge Masdar Hossain granted the Huji men bail saying they were not directly involved in the incident.

Earlier, the same court on August 3 ordered a further probe into the cases following petitions filed seeking fresh investigation.

Meanwhile, the newly appointed IO Criminal Investigation Department's (CID) additional superintendent of police Abdul Kader Akond took Pintu and a Huji member Moulana Abu Theron a three-day fresh remand for interrogation.

Twenty-three people were killed and 300 others were injured in the grenade attack on an Awami League rally at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004.

Two cases -- one for murder and the other for blasting grenades at the rally -- were filed following the incident.

On June 11 last year, CID pressed charges against 22 people including Mufti Abdul Hannan, and former deputy minister and BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu.

CID arrested Hannan, Pintu and 12 others who are now in jail custody.

Pintu's brother Moulana Tajuddin and seven others have been absconding since the cases were filed.

SSF protection

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Rehana, daughters of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, with foolproof security round the clock.

Ganabhaban, official residence of the prime minister, was allotted to Hasina and a Dhanmondi house to her sister, causing huge uproar.

The BNP-Jamaat alliance government however scrapped the law in December 2001.

In that law, family members meant only Bangabandhu's two daughters who survived the bloodbath that killed the father of the nation and most of his family on August 15, 1975. The proposed law includes their children too.

The bill says a son and a daughter of Hasina and two daughters and a son of Rehana will be entitled to lifelong SSF security no matter where they live.

It however does not specify how the arrangements will be made if they live abroad.

Currently, Hasina's son lives in the United States and daughter in Canada, and Rehana's are settled in the UK.

The July 6 cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina okayed the proposed law.

In a statement tagged to the bill, the home minister says the legislation is needed to ensure security for the members of Bangabandhu's family as conspiracy is still on to kill them.

Hasina, also Awami League president, has seen several attempts on her life over the years.

While in opposition, she survived a grenade attack at a rally on Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004. The blasts left 23 people including AL leader Ivy Rahman killed and scores injured.

In 2000, 80 kg explosives were found in Gopalganj where Hasina's helicopter was supposed to land.

World Bank environment specialists Shakil Ahmed Ferdousi and Nadia Sharmin, among others, spoke at the session.

Dhaka wants

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visiting Economic Affairs Minister of Bhutan Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk paid a call on her at her office in the capital yesterday morning.

PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed the news media after the meeting.

During the meeting, they discussed issues on bilateral interests, including expansion of trade and people-to-people contact between the two countries, and facing global warming and climate change.

The premier said Bangladesh attaches importance to its relationship with Bhutan as this South Asian neighbour was the first country to recognise Bangladesh after its independence in 1971.

Referring to her meeting with US President Barack Obama on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, Hasina informed the Bhutanese minister that she had brought the issue of climate change for which least developed countries are the worst victims.

In this context, Wangchuk

said that Bhutan is facing natural disasters due to global climate change and sought Bangladesh's cooperation in the disaster management process.

Appreciating the role of female police at home and abroad, Sahara said, "Though the history of female police in the country is not long, they are making a significant contribution to improving the law and order. And they are also utilising their merit and skills in upholding the country's image in the world."

About the PM's upcoming visit to Bhutan, he said the people of his country are eagerly waiting to welcome the Bangladeshi premier in their country on November 6.

The Bhutanese minister also informed the PM that Bhutan is going to set up a medical college where Bangladeshi doctors would be recruited.

Bhutanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Dusho Bap Kesang, PM's Principal Secretary M A Karim, Office Secretary Molla h Waheeduzzaman and Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad were present on the occasion.

Political culture

FROM PAGE 1

seventh parliament, between 1996 and 2001, the BNP had boycotted 163 House proceedings out of a total 382 sittings, official records preserved at the Parliament Secretariat show.

Going with the culture of House boycott, the main opposition BNP has begun staying away from the current parliament and its lawmakers joined only 22 out of 72 sittings of the ninth parliament.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday over telephone, AL presidium member Kazi Zafarullah said, "As far as I know, no work has begun to join the parliament Sunday, when the House resumes after Eid recess.

However, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain said his party lawmakers would not join the parliament until a congenial atmosphere is created in the House.

The last caretaker government had made a move to formulate the code of conduct with the consent of political parties through holding a planned national dialogue. During the "unofficial dialogues" with political parties to prepare the grounds for the December 29 parliamentary elections, the caretaker government advisers sought opinions of political leaders to ensure a smooth journey to a sustainable democracy. The move eventually failed.

Political analysts, however, observed that the ruling party, if it moves to formulate the code of conduct, might face enormous difficulties in getting a consensus as differences between the two rival major political parties continue to widen each passing day.

"It seems the ruling party does not want to reach an understanding with the opposition to bring changes in the political culture. The gap between the two parties has already widened," M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government, told The Daily Star.

He said the ruling AL had announced that the deputy speaker of the House would be elected from the opposition lawmakers but it did not keep its word. "This was the beginning..." Hafizuddin said.

Asked if any move would be successful in forging a consensus between the rival parties on national issues, Hafizuddin said success of such move depends on the ruling party's sincerity.

BNP has been threatening to launch street agitation at the end of this year or early next year against the government. Talking to The Daily Star yesterday over telephone, BNP senior leader MK Anwar expressed his frustration at the prevailing situation.

"I do not see any way of shunning the previous political culture as the government has made the situation worse," Anwar said replying to a query whether the negative culture of politics will continue.

When his attention was drawn to the AL electoral

Hasina also expressed hope that the two countries are pledged-bound to extend cooperation in establishing world peace.

The Bhutanese minister congratulated Hasina on her assumption of office as the Prime Minister after her party's overwhelming victory in the last general election.

The victory will give democracy a firm footing in Bangladesh, Wangchuk added.

He widely acclaimed Hasina for her address on climate change issue in the recently concluded UNGA, saying this will help tackle challenges of global warming for which least developed countries are the worst victims.

In this context, Wangchuk

32,000 cops

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collaboration with the Department for International Development of UK and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organised the programme.

Sahara said women will be given priority in the recruiting scheme to reduce gender gap in police department as there are only 2,269 female police at present.

On security issue, she said, "The government is committed to ensuring security to all, but its task would be easy if the leader of the opposition and people from all strata of life cooperate."

A total of 193 women members of Bangladesh Police received the membership card yesterday, and of them 10 received it directly from the home minister's hand.

Appreciating the role of female police at home and abroad, Sahara said, "Though the history of female police in the country is not long, they are making a significant contribution to improving the law and order. And they are also utilising their merit and skills in upholding the country's image in the world."

About the PM's upcoming visit to Bhutan, he said the people of his country are eagerly waiting to welcome the Bangladeshi premier in their country on November 6.

The home minister thanked Amena Begum, additional superintendent of police, Chittagong, for being elected coordinator of the IAWP Network, Region-15. The image of Bangladeshi police has improved before the world through this election, she said.

Sahara asked the law enforcement agencies to work more sincerely to curb militancy, terrorism and other crimes in the country.

Speaking on the occasion, Renata Lok Dassalien, UN resident coordinator and UNDP resident representative, said IAWP membership card distribution ceremony shows that Bangladeshi Police Women Networking (BPWN) is progressing.

He mentioned many achievements of female police. "Women are still battered, victims of domestic violence, pornography and trafficking. So, efficient and professional service by the police can ease their life," he said.

Others who spoke at the ceremony included Abdus Sobhan Sikder, home secretary, NBK Tripura, additional inspector general of police, Fatema Begum, deputy inspector general of Special Branch and Yasmeen Ghafoor, general secretary of BPWN.

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Indonesia

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Desperate villagers complained to AFP reporters they were being neglected while the focus remained on the city.

Whole hillside villages were found obliterated after giant landslides buried houses and hundreds of people, including an entire wedding party of 30 people swept away in an avalanche of mud and rock.

"Today the military will be heading to landslide areas which we have not been able to access earlier because roads are closed and broken," Indonesian military spokesman Sagom Tambo told AFP.

The mayor of Padang, Fauzi Bahar, said that only 60 percent of the disaster zone had been accessed by emergency teams, and that more heavy machinery and materials to rebuild houses were urgently needed.

He said people were "traumatised" in his city, the capital of West Sumatra, which faces a colossal rebuilding task.

Anger about poor construction and lax enforcement of building regulations is beginning to surface as people recover from the shock of the disaster.

"The government must introduce new standards when rebuilding the city," said Irwadi, a fisheries ministry official waiting outside the Ambacang hotel for news of colleagues who had been meeting there when the quake hit.

"They must only approve permits for buildings that are strong and only use quality building materials."

Countries from around the world have rushed aid and rescue teams to the scene and international aid groups are ramping up efforts to provide housing, medical services and basics such as food and water.

Teams from Australia,

Britain, Japan, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and the United States have arrived or are travelling to the scene to help overwhelmed and exhausted locals.

The quake struck off Sumatra's west coast northwest of Padang on Wednesday on a major fault line on the volatile "Ring of Fire" that scientists have long warned was a disaster waiting to happen.

Another 5.5-magnitude earthquake rocked Indonesia on Sunday, in West Papua province which is in the far east of the sprawling archipelago about 3,500 kilometres (2,200 miles) from the Sumatra quake disaster.

Authorities said there were no reports of injuries there.

Poor countries

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