



An Afghan commando takes his position during a gunbattle near the site of a Taliban attack in Lashkar Gah, centre of Helmand province on Friday. An eight-hour shoot-out in southern Afghanistan ended with the deaths of six insurgents on Friday who had occupied a building near government offices, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

4 Afghan soldiers killed in clash with Nato forces

Kabul condemns airstrikes, 3 Americans killed in separate incidents

AP, AFP, Kabul

Four Afghan soldiers died in a clash yesterday with Nato forces who called in an airstrike after both sides mistook each other for the enemy, the Defence Ministry said, condemning the incident.

The fighting began about 3 am (2230 GMT Friday; 5:30 pm EDT Friday), in the eastern Wardak province, when a joint Nato-Afghan force traded fire with another Afghan unit already in the area. Nato troops then called in an airstrike, which killed four Afghan soldiers and wounded a number of others, the ministry said in a statement.

"Besides expressing heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyrs, the Afghan Defence Ministry is condemning this incident," it said, adding a delegation had been sent to the area to investigate. "After the investigation is completed, the Defence Ministry wants to bring those responsible to justice."

The statement confirmed earlier reports from provincial officials who said the fighting followed a misunderstanding

as the joint force returned from an operation in the Sayed Abad district. Provincial spokesman Shahidullah Shahid said seven Afghan soldiers also had been wounded.

A Nato official said earlier that a gunbattle broke out when the joint force came under fire from unknown assailants and two Afghan soldiers had been killed, but it was not immediately clear who fired on them.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to release the information ahead of an official announcement, said an investigation was under way. The conflicting casualty tolls could not immediately be reconciled.

The shooting reflects the difficulty facing foreign troops as they increasingly partner with Afghan forces with a heightened emphasis on training and an influx of 37,000 more US and allied troops.

It was the first apparent friendly fire incident since November, when eight Afghans, four soldiers, three policemen and an interpreter were killed during close combat amid a search for a missing

US paratrooper.

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said at the time that the deaths had been caused by "an air attack by Nato forces" during the fighting.

Earlier a civilian was among three Americans killed in Afghanistan in an incident still under investigation, Nato said Saturday.

A brief statement from Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf), released late Friday, said the deaths occurred in eastern Afghanistan earlier in the day.

"Two US servicemembers and one US employee were killed today in eastern Afghanistan," it said.

An Isaf spokesman confirmed to AFP the "employee" was an American civilian but said no further information was available on what happened or where.

Large parts of eastern Afghanistan border Pakistan's volatile tribal areas and have been the scene of fierce battles between Afghan and international forces fighting for the Kabul government against insurgents led from Pakistan.

Sharif rules out prospects of mid-term Pak polls

No rift between PPP, PML-N, says Gilani

ANI, Peshawar/ Islamabad

Former Pakistan Prime Minister and Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif has ruled out the prospect of mid-term polls in the country.

Talking to reporters after a meeting of the party's provincial council here, Sharif said his party believes that the government should serve the people and honour the people's mandate.

Sharif called on the government to ensure good governance and strengthen democracy.

He described unemployment, price hike and the deteriorating law and order situation as core issues confronting

the government, which needed immediate attention.

Sharif also criticised the government for allowing the US to continue with the drone attacks, which he said, have killed mostly innocent civilians.

"On one hand the government has given a free hand to the United States for carrying out drone attacks and on the other it is opposing the strikes in the media," The Dawn quoted Sharif, as saying.

Responding to a question regarding the now defunct National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO), Sharif said it was a dictator's gift that benefited influential people.

"The PML-N had always

opposed it and demands accountability of those who had plundered the national wealth," he added.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has rejected reports about differences between the Pakistan People Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) over the issue of constitutional amnesty to President Asif Ali Zardari.

Interacting with media persons at the Prime Minister's Secretariat here, Gilani said he had never tried to defend the controversial amnesty law, the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO), either inside or outside Parliament.

Lanka closes opposition newspaper

Media blames govt for post-polls attacks

AFP, Colombo

Police in Sri Lanka shut down the offices of an opposition newspaper yesterday, the weekly said, as international rights groups accused the authorities of a vendetta against critical media.

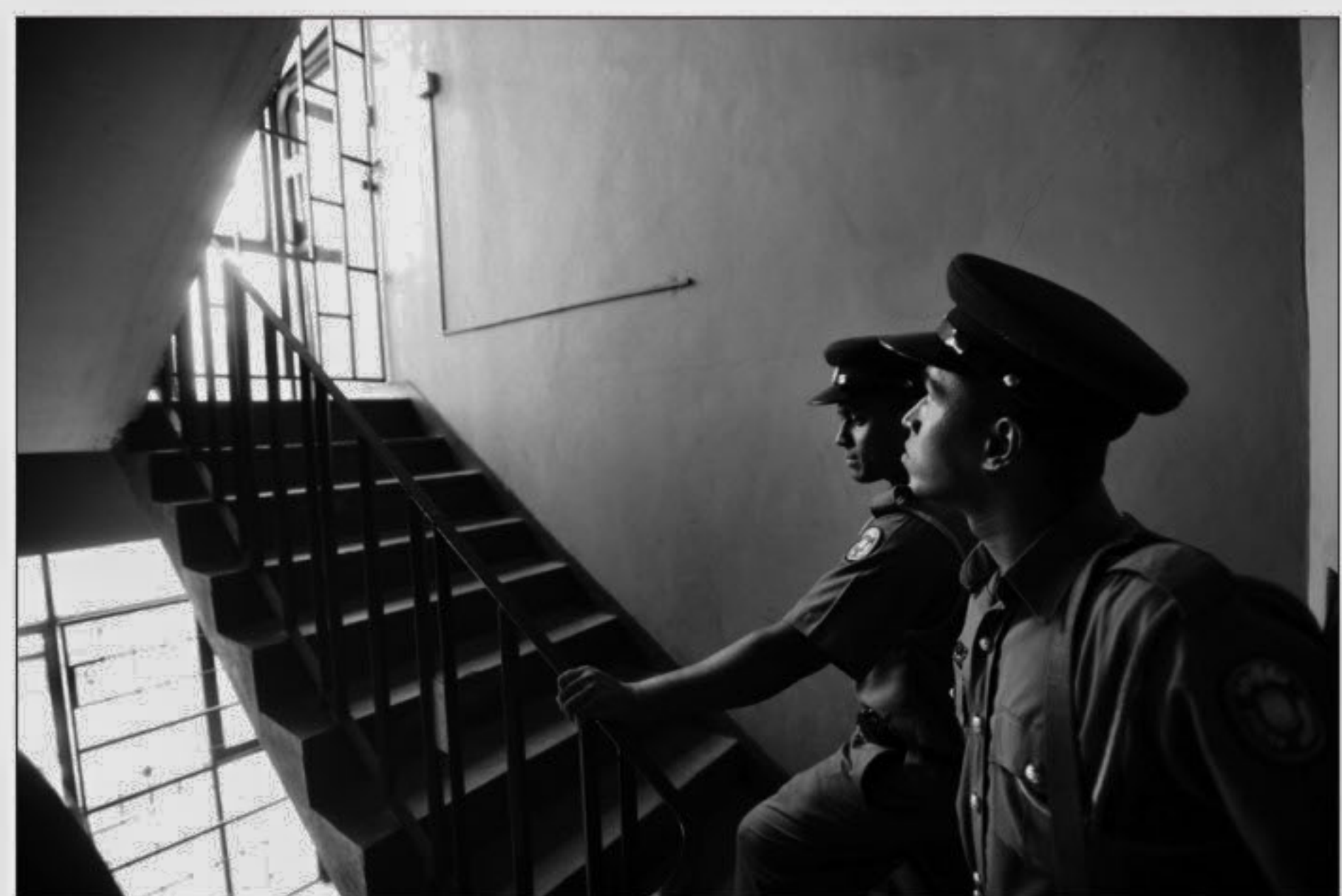
Police went to the offices of the Lanka weekly and sealed the premises, a day after taking its editor into custody for questioning over reports that criticised a top government official, the newspaper said.

"The Criminal Investigations Department officers have surrounded the Lanka office and sealed it today," the web edition of the paper said.

A police spokesman said he was not aware of any action taken against the newspaper and the government declined to comment.

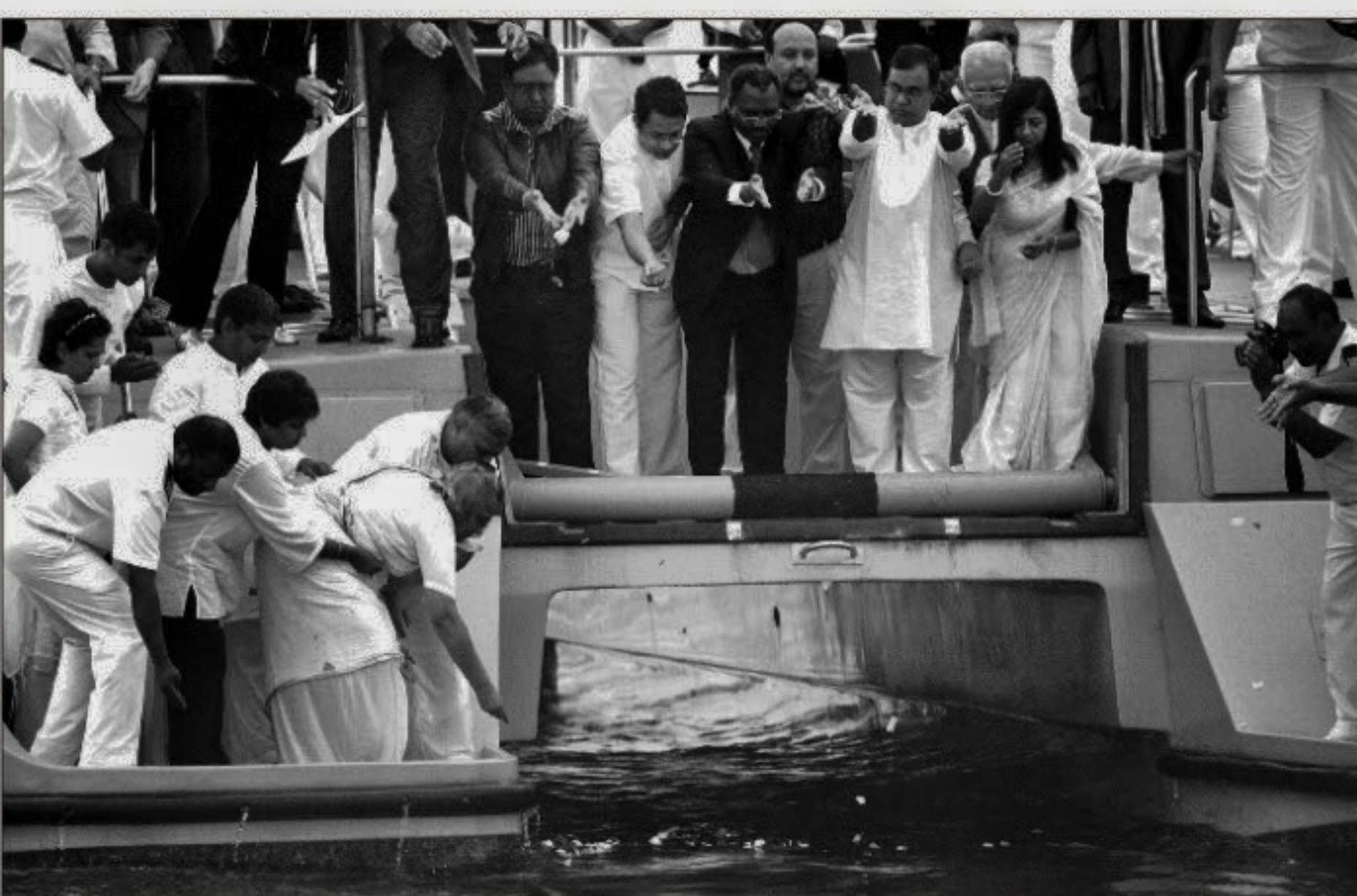
The Paris-based Reporters Without Borders urged President Mahinda Rajapakse to end arrests, and what it called intimidation of journalists working for privately owned and foreign media.

"This wave of post-election violence could cast a lasting stain on the start of President Rajapakse's second term and bodes ill for the political climate during the coming years," the group said.



Sri Lankan policemen stand guard in the staircase of the pro-opposition 'Lanka' newspaper offices in the Colombo suburb Delkanda yesterday. The Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) asked President Mahinda Rajapakse to end arrests and what it called intimidation of journalists working for privately owned as well as foreign media.

PHOTO: AFP



Mahatma Gandhi's family members follow the ritual after scattering his ashes in the sea off the city of Durban on Saturday. Some of the last of Mahatma Gandhi's ashes, kept in secret for decades by a family friend, was scattered at sea off South Africa's coast, 62 years after his assassination.

PHOTO: AFP

India may join world powers in engaging with Taliban

AFP, New Delhi

India may join world powers in engaging with moderate Taliban in Afghanistan, despite worries about repercussions for its own security, reports said yesterday.

India still considers the Taliban to be a terrorist group with close links to al-Qaeda and other outfits.

But New Delhi would back proposals to reach out to them conditionally, Foreign Minister SM Krishna told the Times of India newspaper in an interview published Saturday.

"The international community has come out with a proposition to bring into the political mainstream those willing to function within the Afghan system," he said.

"If the Taliban meet the three conditions put forward -- acceptance of the Afghan constitution, severing connections with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and renunciation of violence -- and they are accepted in the main-

stream of Afghan politics and society, we could do business," added Krishna.

The Economic Times quoted Krishna as saying the Taliban "should be given a second chance" and that military action was not the only way to counter their activity.

Krishna's comments follow a major international conference in London this week where nearly 70 countries backed a 500-million-dollar Afghan government drive to tempt fighters to give up their weapons in exchange for jobs and other incentives.

India has provided over one billion dollars in humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan since the Taliban were ousted in 2001 and also warily backed US President Barack Obama's surge of 30,000 extra US soldiers.

But it has expressed concerns that an early US exit from the war-torn country could reverberate in the region, already reeling from a wave of militant violence in Pakistan.

Bangabandhu killers

FROM PAGE 1

So you must work for strengthening the party at all levels," she observed.

Hasina, one of the two surviving daughters of Bangabandhu, expressed satisfaction at the execution of the detained killers of Bangabandhu. She observed that the country got rid of the curse for the assassination of its founding father with the execution and sought blessings from all so that her government could make poor people happy and build a golden Bangladesh as dreamt by Bangabandhu.

Special prayers were offered at the meeting expressing gratitude to the almighty Allah following the execution of the five killers four days ago.

In her one-hour speech, the AL chief highly praised the grassroots leaders for their contribution to keeping the party united at all moments of crisis including the emergency rules during the last caretaker rule. She added it is due to them that her government has been able to hold the trial of Bangabandhu's killers.

She said conspirators wanted to topple the elected government by killing 57 innocent army officials during the BDR mutiny in February last year. She posed a question as to why the leader of the opposition didn't stay at her cantonment residence for three days during the mutiny.

"The elder son of the opposition leader, I don't want to mention his name, phoned three times early morning that day and asked his mother to leave the cantonment residence immediately. How did they

know that there would be killings in the BDR? We will have to find out these answers," said Hasina.

She added the killers killed those brilliant army officers who were much active against militancy and were supposed to work with Special Security Force for the protection of the prime minister.

She suspects they [BNP] wanted to take revenge on the BDR, as its personnel did not "shoot at the procession of the then opposition AL when it was staging movements for a free and fair election during 2005-06.

Conspiracies to destroy democracy are still going on and will continue, she said, directing her party to stay alert. She urged all to work for strengthening democracy in the country by foiling every conspiracy.

Hasina pledged to hold trial of the killers of the army officials, war criminals, killers of four national leaders, perpetrators of the August 21, 2004 grenade attack, among others. She firmly said her government would not allow any crime and unlawful acts in Bangladesh.

"Tough action will be taken against the lawbreakers wherever they are," said Hasina, adding, they would leave no room for militants and criminals on the soil of the country and make Bangladesh the most peaceful country in the world.

She added her government is working hard to ensure justice for all sections of people.

She sought blessings from all to perform properly the responsibilities bestowed upon her and directed her party's grassroots leaders to work for the welfare of the people who voted the AL to power.

Mental health

FROM PAGE 16

A nurse who spoke on condition of anonymity said, "Here in the hospital, patients are supervised by the nurses. But when they go back to their village home, it is often the case that they do not receive adequate drugs and treatment. Their condition deteriorates and they must be admitted to hospital again."

Sufia Begum, the mother of Minna, a 30-year-old man with a mental disability, said,

"This is the fifth time I have brought my son to this hospital. When he returned home he didn't want to take his medication and I struggled to care for him properly. His condition frequently deteriorates and it makes him violent. I am then forced to admit him to hospital again."

Although the authorities claim that 40 per cent of hospital beds are free of charge, it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain one. Minna has been admitted to the hospital five times, and only on this particular occasion did he receive a free bed. Many attendants claim that it is impossible to secure a free bed without bribing hospital staff, who have turned the bed allocations into something of a business.

Although the hospital requires each patient to have an attendant care for them in hospital, it does not provide food for attendants. This creates further suffering for the poor, many of whom struggle to manage the transport costs to reach the hospital.

NIMH's Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine is not yet functioning because staff are currently abroad to receive training on how to operate it. For more than a year no X-rays have been done, forcing patients to pay more for the service elsewhere.

A survey conducted by NIMH found that six crore of the total population are aged below 18 and that over 18 per cent of people in this age group have a mental illness. However NIMH has no separate ward for children and very few are admitted to the hospital.

According to the same study, 16 per cent of the total population suffers from a mental illness. Very few receive treatment due to inadequate health facilities, social prejudice and ignorance. Furthermore, there are not enough trained psychiatrists and psychologists to treat the large number of mentally ill patients.

Prof Kamaluddin, chairman of the department of Clinical Psychology at Dhaka University, said, "There are around 150 psychiatrists and psychologists in the country to serve at least 1.5 crore mentally ill patients. It is just not possible for them to treat everyone and a huge number of patients are not receiving scientific treatment."

Medical experts roundly described the current situation as frustrating.

Kitchens to get prepaid meters

FROM PAGE 1

On the move to increase gas use efficiency, Titas has started issuing letters to industries asking them to replace old inefficient boilers and furnaces by June-July. If they can't replace them, those old equipment should be run with alternate fuel.

"Titas will provide these industries with technical advice and give them demonstrations on how to increase energy efficiency of their old machineries," comments a high official.

"We'll also ask owners of gas-fired power generators to use efficient engines," he adds.

As the country's biggest gas distribution company, Titas has 14.58 lakh customers. Of them, 14.42 lakh are domestic users, 4,443 industrial customers and the rest represent commercial, CNG stations and bulk consumers (like fertiliser and power plants).

Titas sources say introducing prepaid meters for domestic consumers would most likely be a costly and huge affair.

However, once the meters are introduced, it would not be possible for customers to continue using gas without paying the bills for months.

Presently, domestic consumers daily use 150 million cubic feet (mmcf) gas, while the country's total gas consumption is around 2,000 mmcf.

The home burners have very low energy efficiency and they waste around 65 per cent of gas. In addition, many domestic users keep their burners on to save matchsticks.

The prepaid meters might not stop domestic consumers from wasting gas as the price of gas is still too low and the prepaid meters would not increase their monthly bills.

A consumer with double burners now pays Tk 450 per month with the assumption that they use the stoves for eight hours a day and burn 86 metre cubes of gas. The price of gas per metre cube is Tk 5.16.

"With such a rate, gas usage would continue to hover around Tk 450 per month even after introduction of prepaid meters. On the bright side, the customers will not be compelled to pay Tk 450 a month when there is gas supply crisis.

They can then think of alternative fuels like LPG or kerosene stoves during the crisis period," observes an official.

But prepaid meters might have more meaningful effect with commercial and industrial consumers. However, Titas is pondering whether industrial consumers should be brought under prepaid metering as it is not known to be practised elsewhere in the world.

"Some industries waste huge gas. For instance, rolling mills and lime and glass factories waste around 80 per cent gas. It would be much better if these factories use alternative fuel. But they prefer to use gas because it is very cheap. For example, the cost of gas in an industrial production is only 2.5 per cent of the total cost. If they use furnace oil, this cost will increase to 9.25 per cent," says the source.

The few industries also owe Titas more than Tk 105 crore outstanding bills equivalent to 5.8 months billing.

Increasing energy crisis is prompting the government to take up various measures to conserve gas and electricity. These include replacement of old bulbs with energy saving lamps across the country, introduction of Daylight Saving Time (DST), staggering

Financial Management and Municipal Finance Project

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Audit Expert (28 months over 5 years): graduate degree in accounting, professional accountant credentials, with 10 years experience conducting financial compliance audits in development projects

IT Computer Specialist (full time, 5 years): graduate or postgraduate degree in Information Communications Technology (ICT), with 10 years experience in systems development, with emphasis on functional applications in finance and accounting in the government sector.