

81pc blood transfusion centres do not have licence

Health Watch report reveals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As much as 81 percent of the country's blood transfusion centres do not have any licences or follow the safe blood transfusion guidelines, according to a study conducted by Bangladesh Health Watch (BHW).

Bangladesh Health Watch of the James P Grant School of Public Health at Brac University revealed this at a press briefing at the National Press Club in the city yesterday.

The study report titled 'How Healthy is Health Sector Governance' will be launched today. Nobel laureate

Prof Amartya Sen will be present at the launching ceremony as the chief guest.

Out of the 37 blood transfusion centres surveyed, 19 reported that they do not screen blood for all the five Transfusion Transmittable Infections (TTIs) and 74 percent of the managers responsible for supervising blood transfusion did not have knowledge of safe blood transfusion, revealed the report.

It also said tendency of prescribing multiple unessential drugs in prescriptions has increased from 5 percent from 1994 to 33 percent in 2009 due to increased commercialisation and

fervent marketing of drugs has led to increasing cost of treatment cost per head.

Dr Khairul Islam, country representative of WaterAid and a coordinator of the study, presented a summary of the report at the press conference.

Columbia University teacher and convenor of BHW's advisory board Dr Rounaq Jahan, ICDDR,B official and convenor of the working group Dr Abbas Bhuiya, Dr Simin Ahmed and Dr Faruq Ahmed of Brac were also present.

According to the study, almost all the important statutory and regulatory

bodies in the health sector have become non-functional in the face of undemocratic practices and politics, said the speakers.

Most hospitals hardly have any diet advisers or nutritionists and were found to serve inappropriate and sometimes inadequate diets to patients with coronary heart disease, liver disease, diabetes and malnutrition, they added.

They also said that ethics should be adopted as a major element in the curriculum at medical schools to instil moral values in the doctors from an early time.



Turkish President Abdullah Gul stands in solemn silence after placing wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar yesterday to pay tribute to the liberation war martyrs. (Story on Page 1)



(Clockwise from left) Flames come out of an apartment on the 10th floor of Japan Garden City as a fire broke out on Thursday night. Neighbours console a relative of the victims who died in the fire. Materials for interior decoration and equipment were gutted in the flat.



PHOTO: STAR

UK tightens rules for int'l students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Kingdom has introduced stricter criteria for international students wishing to study in the UK.

Home Secretary Alan Johnson announced the new requirements on Wednesday.

The announcement came in the wake of temporarily suspension of student visa applications in Bangladesh under Tier 4 of the Points Based System (PBS).

"The new requirements for international students follow a review of Tier 4," said a British High Commission press release.

The review looked at whether the current arrangements met the right balance between facilitating access by genuine students and preventing abuse, it added.

"The Points Based System was introduced to provide a rigorous system to manage legitimate access to the UK to work and study, with the ability to respond to changing circumstances," said Alan Johnson.

"We want foreign students to come here to study, not to work illegally, and today we have set out necessary steps which will maintain the robustness of the system we introduced last year," the home secretary added.

On January 31, the UK Border Agency temporarily stopped accepting student visa applications from Bangladesh, Nepal and North India due to unexpectedly high numbers of applications from these areas.

The temporary suspension of student visa applications in Bangladesh remains in place and will be reviewed at the end of February, said the press release.

The new requirements include raising the level for English language students coming under Tier 4 from A2 (beginner) to B2 (intermediate) with only exceptions for overseas government-sponsored English language students and students on pre-session English language courses as preparation for full degree courses; and restricting the working hours of the students studying below degree or foundation degree level to 10 hours per week during term-time (a reduction from 20 hours), with full time employment permitted during the holidays.

The other requirements are: the students studying on courses of six months or less will not be entitled to bring their dependants to the UK unless they qualify in their own right under one of the other PBS tiers; and the dependants of students studying courses below degree or foundation degree level will not be permitted to take employment in the UK unless they qualify in their own right under one of the other PBS tiers, the release said.

These requirements require changes to the Immigration Rules and are expected to come into effect on March 3, 2010, it added.

In addition, the government will also develop a mandatory English language test for students coming to study below degree level.

Develop PPP projects for agri research, development

Muhith tells BADC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith wants Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) to plan projects under public-private partnership (PPP) to increase investments in the agricultural research and development.

"BADC, besides its normal activities, could develop projects under PPP," he said at a seminar titled 'PPP in agriculture: A new way forward' organised by Bangladesh Krishibid Institution at Khamarbari in the city yesterday on the occasion of its 4th national convention.

Addressing the programme as the chief guest, Muhith said PPP is important because the government's investment capacity is less. Only 16 percent

of the total GDP of Tk 600,000 crore is the income of the government and the rest is of private sector.

"Only 23 percent of our national income comes to investment. By 2013-14, we want to increase it up to 30 to 35 percent," he said, adding that this is possible through PPP.

He said the government is mulling introduction of crop insurance, which may require PPP. Setting up of warehouses for preserving crops and development of marketplaces may also be done under PPP, he said.

Finance Adviser to Prime Minister Mashur Rahman said the crucial areas where the government focus is less should get more attention for PPP while the private sectors, which are doing well, should be encouraged in their own fields.

"PPP is expected to do better as it involves profitability, but its areas should be determined first," he said, adding that PPP could be considered in introducing new technologies for small farmers.

Shahjahan, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on agriculture ministry, said with the impacts of climate change, there might be more cases of crop losses. Therefore, introducing crop insurance, especially for the marginal farmers, is of utmost importance.

Member of Planning Commission Prof Shamsul Alam said PPP could be applicable in river dredging and major irrigation projects and food processing sectors. However, he said, a cell could

be set up to critically study the PPP experiences of different countries and suggest the government on it.

Dr Uttam Deb of Centre for Policy Dialogue suggested some areas like production and distribution of improved seeds, storage facilities for food grains, spices and vegetables, contract farming, research and development of new agriculture technologies, establishment of agro-processing zones, adoption of good agricultural practices, which could be done under PPP.

In an earlier seminar, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said increasing manpower in the agriculture sector was a crucial need. The organogram of manpower, which was introduced after the independence of the country,

still exists now when population has doubled.

The government was willing to do everything for the agriculturists, but sought a change in their attitude, she said, adding: "If you lobby for transfers and only serve in the towns, it will not do."

The minister said she would like to create posts of graduate officials at the union parishad level, provided that they are willing to work with the farmers.

MM Motlur Rahman presented a keynote paper in the morning session.

Cabinet Secretary Abdul Aziz, Bangladesh Agriculture University Vice Chancellor Dr MA Sattar Mondal, and economist Dr Mahabub Hossain also spoke.

Bangladeshi company develops arsenicosis medicines

UNB, Dhaka

Viola Vitalis, a Bangladeshi company, has developed Arsenicure, an ointment for treatment of external symptoms, and Ars-detox, a capsule formulation to neutralise the accumulated arsenic inside the body.

The founder of Viola Vitalis, young scientist Dr Abdul Kader, made the announcement at a press conference held at the National Press Club yesterday morning.

Bangladesh Academy of Sciences and Viola Vitalis jointly organised the press conference.

Addressing the press conference, Dr Abdul Kader said there are certain specific problems, which are only encountered in developing

countries but not experienced in the developed countries. In the developing countries, marginal people are mostly the victims of arsenicosis.

But, he said, the pharmaceutical or nutraceutical companies are not interested to develop products or services for the marginal people as their only "interest is on return on investment".

Dr Kader said Viola Vitalis and Allium Vitals have developed an innovative system, which has been found effective to address arsenicosis problems.

He said that Viola Vitalis in cooperation with Helmholtz Centre for Environment Research, Leipzig, Germany are now developing 'biosensor to detect specific arsenic

contamination' from water samples which will be user-friendly.

Dr Kader said: "The nutraceuticals are made based on natural preparations. It has been tested on animals. All ingredients are classified as GRAS by the FDA (Federal Drug Administration of United States Government). Generally, it is recognised as safe for human consumption."

Secretary of Bangladesh Academy of Sciences and former chairman of Atomic Energy Commission Prof Nayyem Chowdhury, scientist Prof Dr Amir H Khan and representative of the Helmholtz Centre for Environment Research Carola Endes also spoke at the press conference.



PHOTO: STAR

A spectacular light-and-sound show displays the historic events of the liberation war and killing fields. Liberation War Museum organised the show at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in the city marking the launching of its fund collection programme for construction of a new building. (Story on Page 2)

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