

Case goes into trial at last

FROM PAGE 1
mentioned that the syrup was "substandard".

Lacking is also noticed in testing the syrup. Products from the same batch were tested in government and private laboratories. While the private tests showed presence of diethylene glycol, the government lab did not. No effort was put to check the validity of the government lab tests, and the private test result was not mentioned anywhere in the cases.

Tests at the government lab of another batch however found traces of the toxin as well, but when a case was filed the quantity of the element was not mentioned, making it unclear whether the presence was fatal or not.

In two months starting from June 2009, the 28 children died from acute renal failure (ARF) after they had been allegedly administered Temset paracetamol syrup for fever. Rid Pharma did not have the license to produce paracetamol syrup -- which is another offence.

In Dhaka Drug Court, hearing on charge framing in one of the cases, was deferred six consecutive times till February 28 this year, on flimsy excuses like inability of the accused and defence lawyers to appear before the court either due to illness or being occupied otherwise. Finally the charge was framed yesterday by accusing the five.

Director General (DG) of the Directorate of Drug Administration (DDA) Abul Kalam Azad admits to the flaws.

"What you are saying is right, the cases were not filed properly," said Azad. "Probably it should have been mentioned in all the cases that Rid Pharma used diethylene glycol. Without an autopsy you cannot claim that diethylene glycol was the cause of deaths."

The lone petitioner who complained about detection of diethylene glycol in the case filed in Narayanganj, DDA's Drug Superintendent Nayar Sultana, is not hopeful of a conviction either. "The case may not stand at all because we tested only one sample instead of customary eight," Sultana said.

The Daily Star investigation also found that the private laboratory test that detected traces of diethylene glycol in a batch of Temset was officially ordered by the then DDA Director General Brig Gen Ismail Hossain, but the findings were mysteriously not mentioned in any case.

When contacted, Ismail could not recollect why he had not taken into account the private laboratory test result. He also avoided clarifying why he had sent the sample to a private lab for testing in the first place.

But he faulted drug superintendents for making the cases weak, because they were the ones who filed those. He also blamed the health ministry for not conducting autopsies of the dead children, although according to his claim, he had reminded the ministry to do so.

Current DDA DG Abul Kalam Azad surprisingly sympathises with the adulterators. He said, "The owner's business is already devastated over this single incident. This is also a kind of punishment, particularly financial punishment. Serving jail time is of course another kind of punishment."

Hopes of trial of the adulterators, however, still remain as many samples of the syrup collected, are still available from local DDA offices while the private laboratory that conducted a test, also preserved the sample it tested, said sources in DDA and the laboratory, adding that an immediate test of the samples may help the case towards a fair trial.

The Rid Pharma cases are utterly reminiscent of the fate of four other cases filed in 1992 against four other companies for adulterating paracetamol syrups using the same toxin, in which the same authorities were dealing with estimated deaths of 2,700 children

over a period of more than ten years. Two of the 1992 cases are still pending with the High Court (HC) while trial of another just resumed, 16 years after it had been stayed by the HC. In the fourth case the accused were acquitted.

THE WHISTLE-BLOWER
Prof Mohammad Hanif, the man who blew the whistle first in 1992 confirming presence of diethylene glycol in four brands of paracetamol syrup, was again the first to announce presence of the same element in Temset of Rid Pharma around mid July of 2009.

Deaths of 20 children admitted to Dhaka Shishu Hospital with acute renal failure in June-July 2009 prompted Hanif to send for laboratory test of a sample of Temset that he had collected from the family of a victim. The test found the toxin in the sample, Hanif told The Daily Star.

Following his alarm, the government formed a committee to probe the incident. DDA collected a few samples of the drug from Sylhet and Narayanganj, although children died in a wide area including Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Sylhet, Rangpur, Madaripur, Bogra, Narayanganj, Habiganj, and Narsinghdi.

THE TESTS
The committee tested different brands of paracetamol syrup including Temset at government affiliated Essential Drug Company Ltd under the supervision of analysts appointed by the government, and detected diethylene glycol only in the 5th batch of Temset.

Temset samples were also tested at Plasma Plus, a private lab, where the toxin was traced in two samples of the 8th batch of the drug.

"But the tests done at Plasma Plus cannot be counted, as the testing laboratory is not a government one," said Drug Superintendent Shafiqul Islam, who sent the samples for test to both the government and the private labs.

Though documents show that DDA collected samples of Temset belonging to the batches 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th, and 12th, the government only had two batches tested. Nobody could answer why the remaining samples were not tested.

Even the sample of Temset belonging to the 3rd batch, which DDA collected from a victim's family at Shishu Hospital, was never produced for test for reasons unknown.

A member of the probe body Prof Moazzam Hossain said they only tested the samples provided by DDA. **FILING OF WEAK CASES**
DDA filed four cases against five people of Rid Pharma Ltd on August 10 and 11, 2009 in four districts -- Narayanganj, Brahmanbaria, Sylhet, and Dhaka.

But ironically no reference of use of diethylene glycol by the manufacturer was made in three cases. Only the one filed in Narayanganj mentioned it.

"Separate cases were filed based on separate tests. Diethylene glycol was not detected in the sample I collected," claimed DDA Drug Superintendent Shafiqul Islam, who collected the sample from Shishu hospital, and filed the case with Dhaka Drug Court.

Since DDA in its depositions in three of the cases had not mentioned that diethylene glycol had been found in Temset, the drug adulterators soon managed bail from all the three courts, said public prosecutors. The courts in their orders for bail mentioned since no diethylene glycol was detected, the drug cannot be said to be life threatening.

Gaining bail from the three courts, the accused approached the Narayanganj court with a submission that three other courts had already granted them bail as their drugs were tested negative for diethylene glycol. Narayanganj court also granted them bail, the public prosecutors added.

DDA officials who filed

the cases said the depositions had been prepared in the same format by someone in the head office and were sent to them.

Shafiqul said he had no hand in the depositions. "Actually we are not legal experts. Under the DG's instruction we filed the case after taking suggestions from lawyers. Our office doesn't have a legal expert, and we had to take advice from our personal lawyers."

The DG DDA back then was Brig Gen Ismail Hossain. **ABUL KHAYER FACTOR**
The then Drug Superintendent in Brahmanbaria Abul Khayer was ordered by DDA to seal off Rid Pharma's factory situated in that district, following a wide media coverage of the children's deaths, and Prof Mohammad Hanif's finding that Temset had diethylene glycol. He was also ordered to collect samples of all medicines produced by Rid Pharma.

After sealing off the plant, Khayer initially reported to the head office that he had collected Temset samples, but when he filed a case in August 2009 in Brahmanbaria, he did not mention anything at all about Temset.

Khayer is the only DDA official who has been dealing since 1992 with the allegations of the toxin's use in paracetamol syrups. In his Rid Pharma case statement, he stated that he could collect samples of only two batches of Ridaplex Syrup, which is a vitamin B complex.

When asked how he could not find even one sample of Temset, Abul Khayer said, "From where would I collect the sample when there wasn't anything left in the factory. I searched through the entire area of Comilla and Brahmanbaria, but did not find even a bottle of Temset syrup."

But when he was reminded that his initial report to the head office said that he had collected some Temset samples, he remained quiet.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the letter dated July 23, 2009 in which Khayer clearly wrote to a DDA director that he had obtained "Temset from batch no 5, 7 and 12".

He also told The Daily Star recently that he managed to get hold of 1,200 bottles of Temset soon after the government ordered tests were done. "I requested the local chemist and druggist associations and other drug related bodies, to collect the 1,200 samples swiftly," he said adding that Brahmanbaria DDA office still has those.

Abul Khayer came under strong media criticism once before on October 20 last year during a trial of a case filed in connection with paracetamol syrup adulteration in 1992, when he sided with drug adulterators.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 20
her Gulshan office on the occasion of 79 members of pro-government Democratic Lawyers' Forum joining pro-BNP Jatayatatabadi Lawyers' Forum ahead of the election to Supreme Court Bar Association.

She urged the court to deliver verdict sensibly.

Khaleda said, "The government evicted me from my house, removed Prof Yunus from his bank, amended the constitution by scrapping fifth amendment and arrested Mahmudur Rahman by using the court."

Dr Yunus is now being denied justice, she added.

She said now they [govt] are trying to introduce e-voting system but the election results will not reflect the people's verdict. "In fact, the government is creating a way to rig election."

Censuring the government and the prime minister, BNP chairperson said the country is now under a one-person rule. The prime minister is controlling everything. "She [PM] is also exerting illegal influence on the Supreme Court," added Khaleda Zia.

2 traders

FROM PAGE 20
M Saiduzzaman, an executive magistrate asked the police to arrest them after he found them reselling the OMS rice to wholesalers.

Rab members following day-long investigation found City Rice purchased 2000kg of OMS rice for reselling while Mita Rice purchased 850kg at about 4.30pm.

A team of Rab led by Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Humayun Kabir found that the some people were purchasing rice at Tk24 per kg from the OMS centres several times only to resell those to the rogue rice traders at rates varying between Tk27 per kg and Tk29 per kg.

Humayun told this correspondent that around 10 people were employed by the rice traders with money for purchasing the OMS rice.

After collecting the OMS rice, the rice traders used to resell those to wholesalers at Tk31 per kg. Humayun said quoting confessional statements from the arrestees.

They said they were "not aware" that such trading of OMS rice is prohibited by law.

Many local rice traders at Shaheb Bazar told this correspondent that they are finding it quite hard to survive in the market due to some dishonest traders.

"I usually collect rice from haats or larger rice markets at Tk 19 commission per sack containing 84 kg of rice. But some rice traders are making profit of Tk2 or more per kg by buying OMS rice and eventually they are doing better than us", said Muhammad Harun, a rice dealer.

"Although trading OMS rice is prohibited by rules, some rice traders make easy money by exploiting poor people to buy OMS rice and reselling those to wholesalers", Saiduzzaman told The Daily Star.

He also said he asked police to check whether any officials of the food department are involved in practicing such illegal activities.

The District Controller of Food Hafizur Rahman said at least 90 tons of rice are allocated daily to 30 OMS dealers at every ward of the city and some 18000 people are purchasing the rice daily.

PM warns

FROM PAGE 20
supply to people.

"But there are some unscrupulous syndicates who create artificial food crisis to hike price of food and cause suffering to the people. We must take stern actions against those engaged in playing foul with food of hungry people," she said.

The prime minister informed the House in detail about her government's various measures to keep food price at a tolerable level through open market sale, fair price cards, social safety net programme, etc.

In a scripted reply, she also described the government's different steps to increase food production in the country by strengthening agriculture sector.

On tackling the climate change impact on agriculture, the premier said her government has collected drought resistance Nerica paddy seeds from Africa.

Cultivation of this paddy is now under trial at a farm in Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporations. Nerica can be cultivated three seasons a year, she said.

Hasina took 20 minutes out of 30 minutes of question hour session to read the eight-page reply to a single written question on country's food situation.

Hasina also described various measures taken by her government to bring pace in the civil administration by utilising modern technology including automation of the public service commission, introduction of e-tendering, coordination with field level administration through video conferencing, introduction of e-centre at 4,501 union parishads, etc.

On holding union parishad elections, the premier said her government will provide all out support to the Election Commission to hold the elections in a free, fair and non-partisan manner.

Biman to fly in evacuees

FROM PAGE 1
"The government will share the cost of repatriation with Biman," said Zafar Ahmed Khan, expatriates' welfare secretary.

The decision comes when the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is struggling to repatriate thousands of Bangladeshi nationals stuck at Ras Adjir of Tunisia and Sollum of Egypt after evacuating politically troubled Libya.

So far, IOM has repatriated around 4,500 Bangladeshis from the borders while over 4,000 returned with the help of their employers and some on their own, said officials at the foreign ministry.

According to IOM around 12,000 Bangladeshis are in refugee camps at Ras Adjir while over 6,000 in Sollum.

Those who have returned home said quick repatriation is crucial as the people stranded at Egypt and Tunisia borders are immensely suffering from food crisis, chilly weather and lack of sanitation.

Many of the refugees at Sollum border have been sleeping in the open for nearly two weeks, said an IOM statement Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Italian government has organised and financed two civil flights operated by Alitalia, to transport some 600 Bangladeshis home from Tunisia border, said a press release of the Italian Embassy in Dhaka.

The first flight was sched-

uled to arrive here early today, while the second Friday evening.

Asif Munier, IOM spokesman In Dhaka, said the organisation is arranging repatriation -- mainly from Tunisian border -- of around 2,000 Bangladeshis a day.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said the flow of incoming refugees from Libya to the borders has now slowed down. On Sunday, for instance, only 2,000 people showed up at the camp.

The population of the camp at the Tunisian border has dropped to 15,000 from 20,000, owing both to dwindling number of arrivals and surge of departure.

A foreign ministry release says a flight of Korean Airlines chartered by Daewoo Engineering and Construction Co was scheduled to arrive here today at 1:00 a.m. with 206 Bangladeshis.

The flight was also supposed to bring the bodies of three Bangladeshis who died at Hania Port, Greece after jumping from a ship that was carrying foreign workers from Libya.

With this departure, repatriation of all Bangladeshis (around 3,000) who arrived in Greece from Libya, except for the 11 who jumped from the ship and remained missing, will be completed.

Meanwhile, the returnee workers yesterday demanded that the government negotiate for compensation with Libyan govern-

Boy survives 7-storey fall

FROM PAGE 20
banana plants and later rolled down on the ground.

During a visit to the spot where the boy fell, two banana plants were found smashed as the boy first fell on those.

Talking to The Daily Star, the boy alleged his housemistress Parveen Begum threw him from the building top at around 10:30am as he went to see his rickshaw-puller brother at Jatrabari on Sunday and stayed there for two days.

But relatives of Parveen, who has gone into hiding along with her husband and other family members, claim the boy might have

fallen down when he tried to escape the house by climbing down a pipe.

Her aunt Lovely Begum, who also resides on the second floor of the building, told The Daily Star that Parveen's family members had kept the boy confined to a room as he fled on Sunday stealing money.

Asked, Lovely said the boy however returned after two days.

Shahidul denied the allegation of stealing money and said he went to his elder brother Maidul to hand him over his monthly salary.

"As my return was delayed, they beat me up, kept me confined to a room

Dutch make India sweat

FROM PAGE 20
The Indians are now on top of Group B with seven points following three wins and a tie. Netherlands are in danger of ending up with the wooden spoon, going down to their fourth defeat in a row.

India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni said: "I don't mind chasing or batting first as long we are winning. We achieved quite a few objectives but there are still some areas we need to improve like the Powerplay overs."

Dutch skipper Peter Borren sensed a shock when India were 99-4.

"At 99-4, you never know, sneak a couple of wickets but I am proud of my boys. We have two games coming up (against Ireland and Bangladesh) which are big games for us. Tonight will give us confidence."

India began their chase in style with Sachin Tendulkar (27) belting three fours in a row off Ryan ten Doeschate to become the first player to complete 2,000 runs in the World Cup.

Virender Sehwag scored a typically aggressive 39 off 26 balls with five fours and two sixes before slicing slow left-arm Peter Seelaar to point where he was caught by Alexei Kervezee.

Seelaar struck twice in his next over to remove Tendulkar and Yusuf Pathan in the space of four balls.

Tendulkar tried to smash the bowler to the long-off boundary but an alert Bradley Kruger swooped down to take a fine catch while Pathan offered a simple return catch, stunning the capacity crowd into silence.

India appeared in deep trouble after Virat Kohli was bowled by captain Peter

Borren but Yuvraj and Gautam Gambhir put on 40 runs for the fifth wicket to arrest the slide.

Earlier, spinners Piyush Chawla and Yuvraj shared four wickets while fast bowler Zaheer Khan grabbed 3-20 as the Dutch slipped from a healthy 99-2 to be bowled out off 46.4 overs after electing to bat.

Borren offered the only resistance with a late cameo of 38 runs off 36 balls, containing three fours and two sixes.

The Dutch were off to a steady start with openers Eric Swarczynski and Wesley Barresi negotiating India's bowling attack with surprising ease in the first 15 overs.

Szwarczynski, one of two changes in the Netherlands team, hit Zaheer for two fours in an over and looked composed until he was bowled by a googly from leg-spinner Chawla.

Yuvraj struck in his very first over when he had Barresi (26) trapped leg before for his 100th wicket in one-day internationals.

The all-rounder gave India another breakthrough when ten Doeschate (11) offered an outside edge which was superbly pouched by Zaheer just inches from the long-off boundary.

It was all downhill for the Dutch from there on, with Tom Cooper (29) edging to wicket-keeper Dhoni in Ashish Nehra's second spell with the old ball and Bas Zuiderent trapped lbw by Zaheer for a duck.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard of the World Cup Group B match between India and the Netherlands at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium in New Delhi on

ment and arrears from their employers.

They said most of them managed the money for going to Libya by borrowing or selling land.

Against such backdrop, several hundred returnees yesterday formed a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club under the banner Libya Probashi Kallyan Samity (welfare association for the expatriates in Libya).

Dipak Mallick of Munshiganj told The Daily Star that he spent over Tk 2 lakh to work at South Korean company Won Construction in Libya in 2008. His monthly salary was Tk 8,000. He was supposed to come home by the end of March.

"I had saved 2,000 Libyan dinar (1 dinar = 56 taka). But the Libyans looted it all and drove us out of labourer camps," said Dipak, adding that apart from two months' arrear salaries they also did not receive one year's bonus from their employers.

Another worker Mominur Rahman said on January 13, around 2,000 foreign workers including about 500 Bangladeshis were looted at a labourers' camp in Derna of Benghazi, stronghold of the anti-Gaddafi group.

Mominur demanded that the government takes initiatives to ensure jobs for the returnee workers on a priority basis and lend them interest-free loans to start businesses. Otherwise, the returnees will face serious social and economic debacle, he added.

overnight and threw me down from top of the building," said Shahidul.

"Moments after I was thrown down, I discovered myself lying on the ground. I cried for drawing attention of the locals. As no-one came forward, I walked somehow and hired a rickshaw for my brother's house. But before I could reach there, I fainted on the way," he added.

The rickshaw-puller, with the help of pedestrians, informed his brother and admitted him to DMCH, he continued.

Contacted, Sutrapur police said they have heard of the incident, but no-one filed any complaint.

2 brick fields

FROM PAGE 20
at Kuchigram of Alfadanga. The unit had been running for last four months without environmental clearance, said a DoE release.

The team penalised four owners of the brick field including Vice Principal of Alfadanga College Sarekul Hasan with a fine of Tk 5 lakh.

It also seized 80,000 pieces of brick, five metric tonnes of firewood and destroyed about 50,000 raw bricks.

The owners were allowed 15 days to dismantle and remove the structure of the unit.

In the vicinity of the unit are houses, shops and orchards. It was set up on six acres of agricultural land, according to the release.

Locals alleged they had been leading a miserable life due to the heat, dust and fumes of the brick field.

The DoE issued a notice in January asking the owners to stop operation but they did not pay heed to it.

The same team on Tuesday seized a record 50 metric tonnes of firewood from M/s MNK Bricks at Chandipur village of Faridpur Sadar upazila.

Its owner Md Nasir Uddin Khan was asked to appear at DoE headquarters in the capital yesterday. The authorities fined him Tk 2 lakh and took an undertaking of not burning wood at the brick kiln again.

The seized firewood would be put up for an auction.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion, police and fire service and civil defence assisted the drives.

Policeman

FROM PAGE 1
Md Masud Miah, sub-inspector of Jatrabari Police Station.

Police could not identify the bus as it sped away, he said, adding that the body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Delwar was returning to his residence after his night duty till 9:00am, said Masudul Islam, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station.

Delwar hailed from Dhamrai of Manikganj district.

37 killed

FROM PAGE 20
(prayer leader) to wait for him to join us but as he came close he blew himself up," said witness Mehmod Shah said.

A top provincial health official said 37 people had been killed and 52 wounded.

The Pashtun elder whose relative was being buried, Hakeem Khan, was instrumental in raising a militia force, known as a lashkar, with the support of the government to fight militants.

A Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility.

"These lashkars are raised to create chaos instead of maintaining peace," militant spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"The lashkars and the army are fighting us at the behest of the Americans. We will continue attacks on them," he said.

It was not immediately clear if the Pashtun elder, Khan, had been killed or wounded in the explosion.

Bloodied shoes and caps littered the ground where the attack took place as stunned survivors milled around or bundled the wounded into trucks and away to hospital, television images showed.

Al-Qaeda linked Taliban militants have staged numerous attacks in Pakistan over recent years, many in the northwest near the border with Afghanistan, where the Pakistani military is battling the insurgents.

"It was like doomsday ... There were dead and injured lying all around," said resident Anwar Khan, who went to help after the blast.

The attack came a day after militants set off a car-bomb at a natural gas filling station in the central city of Faisalabad killing 25 people and wounding about 125.

Pakistani Taliban fighting to bring down the US-backed government also claimed responsibility for that attack.

The army says that several military offensives over the past three years have weakened the militants but bomb attacks are still common.