

Living at cost of lungs

FROM PAGE 1
physical work," says the Lalmonirhat boy. His health is fast deteriorating.

He worked at a stone crushing factory in Lalmonirhat between 2001 and 2004 and then left the job once he started having difficulty breathing.

After local doctors failed to determine what was wrong with him, he came to the National Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital (NIDCH) in the capital early this year where he learnt about the deadly nature of the job.

But this knowledge came a few years too late. At his stage of silicosis, doctors cannot help much.

In Lalmonirhat's Burimari land port under Patgram upazila, where Raju lives and where poverty and unemployment are chronic, there are over 30 stone grinding factories.

The labourers, mostly young men, work in these factories from dawn to dusk for Tk200 to Tk250 a day.

In and around the factories, a dense fog of white dust, produced while crushing limestone, hangs in the air. The dust makes the men look like white apparitions.

Over the past few years, more than a thousand people worked in these factories, facing the risk of contracting silicosis, says Afzal Kabir Khan, research officer of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS).

He adds he has already found 386 workers with severe respiratory problems in the area. "We had 65 workers tested and found 53 of them had silicosis."

Limestone is crushed to make lime powder to be used as poultry feed. Manufacturers of poultry feed from across the country buy lime powders from the grinding factories in the area. Various types of uncrushed stones come to Burimari from India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Owners of these factories are mostly from other districts and are hard to reach for comments.

Contacted over the phone, Kamal Uddin, owner of JK Agrovit Industry, said: "If it is harmful to people, how the chicken can eat limestone all the time?"

During a visit to the factory in November last year, about 20 men were seen working doggedly around a grinding machine. Except for their bloodshot eyes, everything else about these men is white.

Some of these workers said they felt shortness of breath while working there.

"Excessive exposure to silica dust that these workers are being subjected to is causing many of them to suffer from silicosis," says Prof Rashidul Hassan, director of

NIDCH.

Some of the workers have acute silicosis and their condition would never improve even if they stop inhaling silica.

Prof Rashidul, who has been seeing patients with silicosis from the area, explains that once the silica dust is inhaled into the lungs, it can never be taken out. Silica also makes the patients particularly vulnerable to tuberculosis.

However, the disease is easily preventable and not contagious.

"Putting on masks and using propelled fans to blow the dust away can easily lower the amount of exposure and the risk of silicosis," the professor adds.

BILS researcher Afzal Kabir said setting up the factory in a building specially designed to drive the dust away and the use of professional masks would make the occupation less hazardous.

Dr Md Shahen, who participated in a health camp organised by BILS, says the disease is called "simple silicosis" in the primary stage. If the patient is not further exposed after this stage, the disease does not get worse. However, if the disease goes to the next stage, the patient's condition gets only worse with time. So it is very important that the worker stops coming in contact with dust as soon as he is diagnosed with "simple silicosis".

Most of the workers, however, do not know the danger of their occupation. The few that know do not have a choice. In this Monga-prone northern district of the country, work is scarce.

"Agricultural work is seasonal and there isn't enough work for everyone. This [factory work] is the only work available all the year round that can feed a family," says Azanur, a worker, who has been diagnosed with complex silicosis.

In his mid-twenties, Azanur has become a father recently.

"I cannot breathe properly and have to miss work when my condition worsens. The owner deducts my wage if I take a leave," he adds.

Under Section 53 (1) of the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, "In every establishment in which, by reason of any manufacturing process carried on, there is given off any dust or fume or other impurity of such a nature and to such an extent as is likely to be injurious or offensive to the workers employed therein, effective measures shall be taken to prevent its accumulation in any work-room.... and if any exhaust appliance is necessary for this purpose, it shall be applied as near as possible to the point of origin of the dust...."

Section 150 of the same law

says if a worker, while in service, contracts any disease specified as an occupational disease peculiar to that employment, it shall be deemed to have arisen out of and in the course of the employment. And the worker is entitled to get compensation in that case.

But compensations are difficult to realise because owners recruit workers verbally, often without any formal papers, said Kabir Hossain, coordinator of a BILS project.

Even after several awareness campaigns organised by BILS, the owners have not improved the working condition, let alone compensating the workers.

According to a BILS estimate, 16 workers died of complex silicosis over the last four years in the area.

Nurul Islam

FROM PAGE 20

The veteran physician fell sick at his Gulmeher residence at Central Road around 4:30pm and was admitted to LabAid Hospital around 6:30pm, said MA Quasem, a nephew of Nurul Islam.

He left behind two daughters and a son. His wife Anwara Islam died on December 9 last year.

The acclaimed medical researcher, who was the personal physician of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was born on April 1, 1928, at Patia in Chittagong.

In his lifetime he served as the director and professor of IPGMR, founding dean of postgraduate medicine department at Dhaka University, founder president and vice-chancellor of University of Science & Technology in Chittagong.

He has to his credit over 100 publications on health and drugs in international journals and over 100 articles on anti-tobacco movement only published in national and international dailies and journals.

Prof Islam has been awarded many medals and commemorative certificates, including President's Gold Medal (1963), Gold Medal-Bangladesh Academy of Sciences (1982), Bangla Academy Award (2003) and Marie Curie Award for Medical Science (2006).

His body would be taken to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University where his first namaz-e-janaza would be held around 11:00am today. His second janaza would take place at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after juma prayers.

His body would be flown to Chittagong for burial on the USTC campus in the afternoon, said his nephew.



From top left, spellers of Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School, Udayan Higher Secondary School, Rangpur Cantonment Public School & College, bottom left, and Sylhet Govt Pilot High School holding their golden ticket to the Divisional Round of The Daily Star Spelling Bee contest yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Schools

FROM PAGE 20

Yesterday's schools are Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School, Don Bosco School & College and Udayan Higher Secondary School from Dhaka; Sylhet Govt Pilot High School, and Millennium School and Cantonment Public School from Rangpur.

From St Joseph, Raiyan Shahryar, Ishraq Hasan and Minhaz Sarkar Abeer -- all from class IX -- were selected after an intense battle of five rounds among 35 participants. The Josephites provided an intense and compelling competition where the judges had to resort to the section of "Hard words" in the word list to select the three best spellers.

Judges had to select four qualifiers from Udayan, instead of the usual three, after an impressive competition put up by students. Saffan Nur Rahman and Ahmed Mahir Sultan Rumi from class VIII and Kashfia Shams and Shams Asif Chowdhury from class X were finally selected.

From Don Bosco, qualifiers are Komol Karmakar from class IX, Kynaat Kareem Chowdhury from class VI and Ridwan Lasker from class VIII.

The fight in Sylhet was also fiercely competitive, resulting in four students being chosen from Sylhet Govt Pilot High School -- Mushfiqur Rahman Chowdhury, Sheikh Sadi Mohammad and Prosenjit Kumar Das from class X and Amit Deb Roy from class VIII.

In Rangpur, Mehsan Maharib and Anwar Sharif Iqra from class VIII and Tasin Ali Rashid from Class VII made it through to the divisional round from Millenium School. Sumaiya Binte Azad from class IX and Ahnaf Abid and Fayejus Salehin from class VIII qualified from Cantonment Public School.

Students from class VI to X can still win a place in the competition playing the online Spelling Bee game at www.champs21.com. The bulk of participants for the divisional round will be selected via the online game.

For further information on registration and online game, log on to www.champs21.com.

Brac ranked

FROM PAGE 1

The journal said, "A member of the era-defining 1970s wave of Bangladeshi micro-credit and microfinance pioneers alongside the Grameen Bank and ASA, Brac has since gone on to outpace its old counterparts and assume an unparalleled position in the crowded field of international development."

"While size is not often an indication of quality, BRAC represents a welcome outlier and a continuing force for good at the global level," it added.

Brac, the word's largest development organisation, was founded by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed in 1972, and currently operates in 11 countries across Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.

In an instant reaction, Abed said, "I hope this will encourage Brac to continue its work with innovation and efficiency towards creating more opportunities for the poor."

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

"During this long time, it has constructed a number of apartments and commercial buildings, educational institutes, roads, bridges and culverts. The yearly turnover requirement for all three joint venture partner is well above BDT 6,500 crore," the rejoinder said.

It added that on September 20, 2012, Dong AH-ASCON-Sikder JV submitted tender for construction of B and C types' total 144 number buildings in Rajuk's Uttara Apartment project. Sikder Real Estate Ltd fulfilled all the required requirements of Rajuk to be the partner of Dong AH-ASCON-Sikder JV.

Dong AH, being the lead partner (of this project) required to have 40 percent and other two partners

should have at least 25 percent of yearly turnover BDT 2,000 crore.

Being JV participant, Sikder Real Estate Ltd's required to have BDT 500 crore turnover. As per last 5 years' audit balance sheet, the average turnover of Sikder Real Estate Ltd, is well above BDT 500 crore. Sikder Group's yearly turnover is USD 235 million.

OUR REPLY

The Daily Star report was based on the findings of Rajuk's technical evaluation committee and tender evaluation committee. The fact remains that the Rajuk committees have disqualified Sikder Ltd's participation in the bid on several grounds, including its annual turnover claims.

While the rejoinder

claimed that the company has over Tk 500 crore annual turnover, the two committees found that the turnover shown by the company was basically money collected from its clients against some projects and loans from some banks and from sister concerns -- which are not turnovers. Actually, turnover is the part of income statement but there was no income statement in the submitted audit report.

The company also failed to submit required drawings including that of architectural, structural, plumbing, sanitary and electro mechanical works of the buildings. Accordingly, the Rajuk board on January 16 rejected the bid of Dong AH-ASCON-Sikder JV.

We stand by our report.

Govt in for a tall task

FROM PAGE 1

time, yet they should be given training so they can impart quality education.

The demand for nationalisation was met on January 9 with an announcement from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The process will be carried out in three phases.

In 1973, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman first nationalised 36,165 primary schools with 1.55 lakh teachers. Later, 1,507 schools were nationalised. Since then, over two decades had passed without nationalising any more schools.

There are now more than 85,000 primary schools across the country and with the latest step, the number of government primary schools exceeds 63,000.

According to officials of the primary and mass education ministry, the schools that did not come under the purview of nationalisation are semi-autonomous or run by special forces or agencies, commercially run kindergartens, and primary schools attached with high schools.

Ministry insiders say a section of the teachers at the recently nationalised schools have third division in public examinations and were recruited before and after 1990 when the management committees of the

non-government primary schools enjoyed the authority to appoint.

Since these schools were private institutions, the government's teacher recruitment policy was not followed, and in most cases, the governing bodies appointed teachers as per their will.

Rasheda K Choudhury, noted educationist and former adviser to caretaker government, said there are questions about the quality of many of these teachers as they were not recruited in a transparent manner and many got the job using political influence.

"For them, training is a must," she told The Daily Star.

Rasheda, also executive director of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), said since the government's primary training institutes (PTIs) are burdened with training programmes, it is essential to launch a short-term crash course for the teachers with newly regularised jobs.

The resource centres of the Directorate of Primary Education can be used for this purpose, she said, adding that there should be a fixed regulatory mechanism over the managing or governing bodies of these institutions.

Contacted, Abul Kalam Azad, additional secretary of the primary and mass education ministry, said teachers' training is a continuous process and the ministry will soon step up the programmes.

"We have achieved almost cent percent enrolment at primary level and now we are focusing on quality education. For this, there is no alternative to training the teachers," he added.

RMG worker

FROM PAGE 20

Kamrul Islam, assistant superintendent of Manikganj police, said the victim was a garment worker of Ashulia.

The officer quoted said the girl as saying she got on the bus at Nabinagar terminal to go to her village in Pangsha upazila of Rajbari.

After all the other passengers got down at Manikganj bus station around, the two raped her and then threw her out near Manra bridge.

Police with the help locals and Rapid Action Battalion, arrested the driver from Manikganj and his assistant from Savar. The victim filed a case with Manikganj Police Station.

The evidence of rape is very clear, the police officer said.

Dhaka to turn

FROM PAGE 20

Starting in 1997, the festival has grown on every occasion and is now one of the most respected and biggest photo festivals in the world.

Shahidul Alam, director of the festival, said the idea behind initiating Chobi Mela began with the realisation that all major photography festivals take place in the West.

It is impossible for most local photographers to participate in the festivals despite their talent and passion, he said. "That is why instead of taking our photographers to the world, we thought we would bring the world to our photographers."

Through the theme of "Fragility" this year, photo artists will explore and interpret the fragile existence of man in a multicultural, war-ridden and globalised world. The director observed that the theme was chosen in a participatory manner as people voted for it online from a list of suggestions from last season's participants.

He continued, "I think one of the reasons people chose the theme is that it reflects the state we are in -- wars are ravaging the planet, the environment is being damaged, economic conditions are making people feel fragile and vulnerable."

The festival promises to stimulate the mind and the senses with a diverse array of

print exhibitions, digital presentations, workshops, portfolio reviews, discussions, seminars, review of image-related publications, film screenings and video conferences.

"What we have done," said the veteran photographer, "is ensure that the artistic practice is not limited to traditional forms of repertoire; and we are featuring a wide and eclectic group of artists and art practices."

Apart from holding seminars for international audiences, the festival will stage mobile exhibitions in non-conventional places, enabling a wide range of people to enjoy the art works.

In keeping with the character of Drik and the organisations that have grown with it, the festival has a core belief in social justice and equality, opined Shahidul, adding many of the exhibits and discussions have an underlying political message.

Shahidul hoped that school students would take part in the festival this time in huge numbers, as he had reached out to 80 schools across the country.

The festival will exhibit the works of celebrated artists, such as Eugene Richards, Gideon Mendel, Okhai Ojeikere, Lu Guang, Muge and Zhang Hai, Graciela Iturbide, Max Pam and Pablo Bartholomew.

There will be five presentations, each highlighting a

specific region in the world. Eight workshops will be conducted by some illustrious photographers, including Morten Krogvold, Chris Riley, Chris Rainier and Gaël Turine.

The festival will highlight, in addition to international artists, seven promising Bangladeshi photographers.

The festival ends on February 7.

Greedy driver

FROM PAGE 1

without the knowledge of his first wife, who lives in Barisal with two children. Three days later, he along with Ali bought a bus for Tk 10.4 lakh.

With the new wife at his home and the bus hitting the Turag-Jatrabari route, Anwar might have thought they would live happily ever after. But lady luck came in the way, smirking.

Early yesterday, detectives arrested the duo from their hiding place at Rajfulbaria in Savar, on the outskirts of the capital.

Mashiur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said the two were robbers in the guise of drivers.

"After the looting of the SA Paribahan covered van, they looted Tk 11 lakh from another place," he told The Daily Star yesterday. Police recovered Tk 24 lakh from Anwar's house in Savar and seized the bus from Mirpur.

Power price

FROM PAGE 1
electricity prices now, as demanded by distributing companies.

"Following a meeting with the prime minister," said Salim Mahmud, a member of the commission, "we have stalled the process to increase the retail power tariff."

The word came when the commission, led by its acting chairman Emdadul Haque, met the prime minister at her official residence Gono Bhaban in the capital.

Mahmud said the government has also decided to subsidise utility companies to help them reduce their losses.

The commission had been planning to announce the hike at retail level last week, after assessing the revenue requirements of the distributing companies.

In November last year, distributors such as Dhaka Electricity Company Ltd, Dhaka Power Distribution Company, Power Development Board and Rural Electrification Board proposed raising power prices by 9 to 12 percent.

The companies applied for an increase in tariff to reduce the gap between the bulk price (the price the companies pay to power producers) and the retail price.

They estimate the resultant shortfall will amount to between Tk1,300 and Tk1,500 crore in FY2012-13.

Since assuming office in January 2009, the incumbent government has raised retail power prices on six occasions.

Fakhrul

FROM PAGE 1

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Saifur Rahman came up with the order after rejecting a 10-day remand prayer of the investigation officer of the case and bail application of the accused.

During the hearings of the case, Fakhrul was produced before the court at 10:30am amid tight security.

The hearing on a 10-day remand prayer, which was sought to quiz Fakhrul in another case, will be held on Sunday.

The case was filed with Paltan Police Station for his alleged involvement in blasting cocktails in the city's Bijoy Nagar area on December 9 last year.

Earlier on January 8, Fakhrul was sent back to jail for the second time in connection with two cases.

The cases were filed with Sutrapur and Motijheel police stations for his alleged involvement in blasting cocktails and assaulting police during the opposition's road blockade.

On December 11, the BNP leader was sent to jail for the first time in two other cases.

The cases were filed with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and Paltan police stations for his alleged involvement in torching vehicles and exploding cocktails in Kakrail and East Razabazar areas during the road blockade.

So far, the BNP leader got bail only in five of the 22 cases he has been facing.

Miladunnabi

FROM PAGE 1

messages of peace for mankind.

He also passed away the same day.

The government as well as religious and socio-cultural organisations will arrange various programmes, including discussions, highlighting the significance of the day.

President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia issued separate messages on the occasion.

In his message, Zillur Rahman said the overall welfare and emancipation of the mankind lie in following the ideals of the Prophet.

Hasina, in her message, said proper practice of Prophet's universal teachings can bring peace and progress in this conflict-ridden world.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private television channels will air special programmes while newspapers will publish special articles marking the significance of Miladunnabi.

The day is a public holiday.