

Apollo, Star to launch health campaign

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Apollo Hospitals in collaboration with The Daily Star will bring lifesaving knowledge to people through a health awareness campaign that starts tomorrow.

The newspaper and the hospital signed a memorandum of understanding at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

As part of the campaign, "To know is to prevent", articles on recent healthcare awareness and specialised healthcare services available in the country will be published bi-weekly in The Daily Star every Sunday and Thursday.

"I see this campaign as an attempt by Apollo to reach out to people who may never go to Apollo or who have not gone there yet. It is a public service," said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

Describing the contents of the articles as relevant and informative, Anam hoped that these would work as an eye-opener for many.

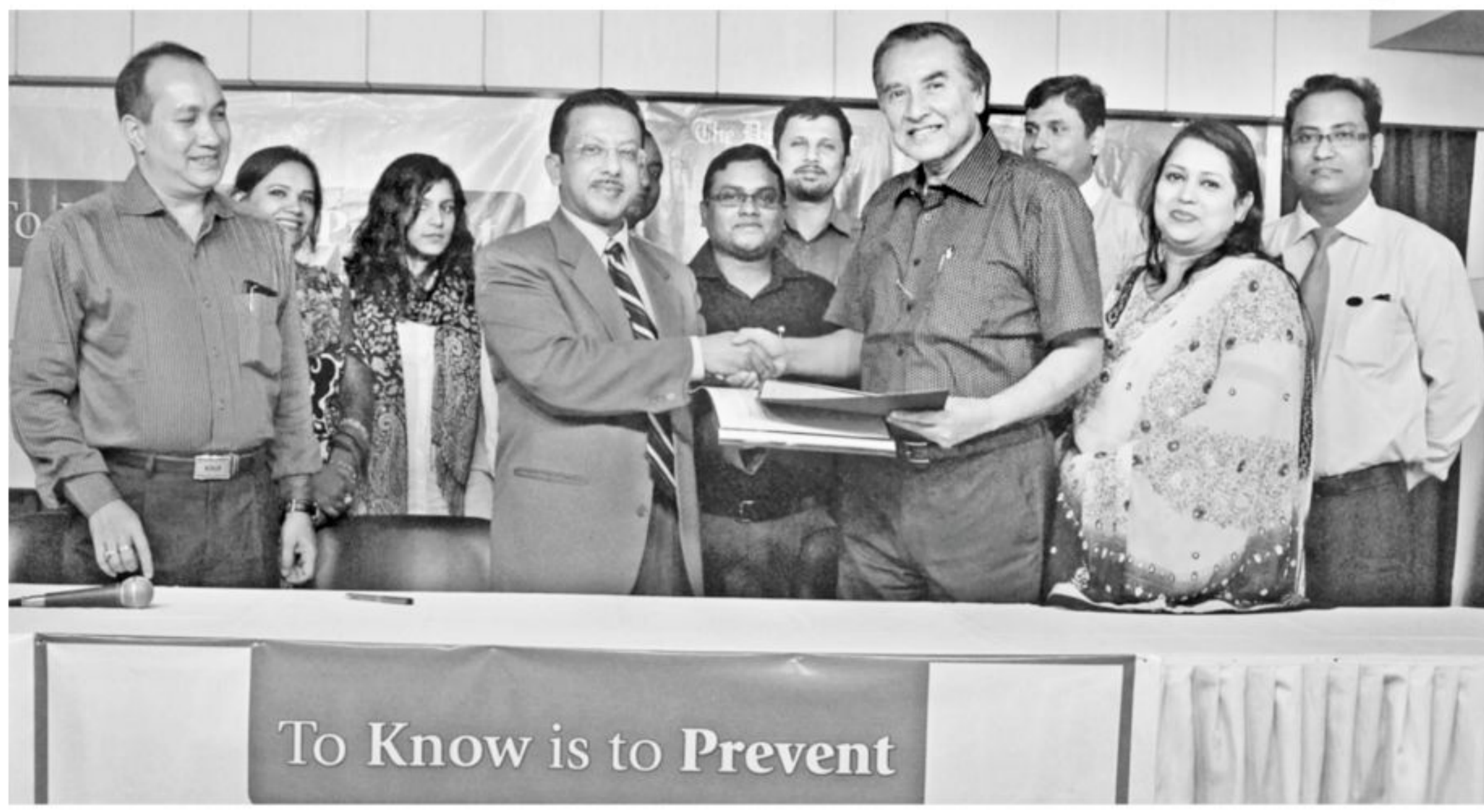
Anam however pointed out that the partnership with the hospital should not be allowed to create any barriers to executing journalistic duties.

R Basil, chief executive of Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, said: "The topics we are going to touch on are beyond just prevention."

Highlighting the health problems of the country including the prevalence of cardiac disease and cancer, Basil said: "Some of these things are predictable. All you need to do is step into a hospital once a year and find out about the risk."

"This can be a forum for people to write back to us," he said referring to the campaign.

Basil also said many specialised treatments are now



R Basil, chief executive of Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, and Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, exchange documents after signing an agreement at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka yesterday. Under the deal, they will launch a campaign for raising health awareness.

available in the country which people are not aware of. "Bangladeshis spend as much as 4,000 crores of rupees to go to foreign countries for treatment. But many services which are available in post-modern countries are also

available here currently," he said, citing the use of robotics to perform surgeries.

Both teams of Apollo and The Daily Star that will work on the project were present at the MoU signing ceremony.

Ecneec approves Tk 1,050cr training project

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Around three lakh people will be provided higher training to help them get jobs in six sectors including garment, light engineering, ship building and information technology, under a project going to be launched by the finance ministry.

The Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP Phase-1) project worth Tk 1,050 crore received a green light from the Executive Committee on National Economic Council yesterday. It will provide technical education in private and public sectors.

The Asian Development Bank will give Tk 780 crore in loans while the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation will grant about Tk 54 for the project.

The project will provide technical education to turn manpower into human resource, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told the reporters after the meeting.

The finance ministry will supervise the implantation of the new project implemented under various ministries, said State minister for Finance and Planning MA Mannan.

Under the project set to end in 2017, around 47,000 people will be trained through different government institutions and the rest through private ones.

The project is among the four involving Tk 2,590 crore approved by Ecneec in its meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

A project, Enhancement of Capacity of Grid Sub-stations and Transmission Lines for Rural Electrification, involving Tk 1,333 crore, was also approved, with the World Bank financing Tk 913 crore.



Hassan O Rashid, deputy managing director of Eastern Bank, receives the second prize in the private commercial banks (traditional operations) category in Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh's Best Corporate Award 2013 from AMA Muhith, finance minister, at Radisson Hotel in Dhaka on Sunday.

Govt's bank borrowing yet to pick up steam

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Furthermore, subsidy spending is low, which further curtailed the government's need to borrow from banks, he added.

In the first nine months of the fiscal year, the ministries spent only Tk 28,428 crore under ADP, which is 43 percent of the total allocation, according to data from the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division. The number compares with 49 percent in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Planning ministry officials said ADP implementation is normally low in the first half of the fiscal year, but this time it was much lower due to political unrest.

For the same reason, the expenditure on subsidy was also low. During the July-February period, the subsidy spending on exports and agriculture stood at Tk 6,571 crore, down from Tk 8,263 crore last year, according to data from the finance division.

Subsidy spending on energy and fuel was around Tk 800 crore in the first eight months—meagre considering the budget allocation in Tk 16,911 crore.

Hussain said the reason for the low spending on energy and subsidy is political unrest that continued non-stop for three months, keeping vehicles off the streets and shops closed.

He, however, expects bank borrowing to shoot up in the coming months as the government expenditure tends to gather momentum in the last two months of the fiscal year.

On the other hand, the government's non-bank borrowing has increased substantially, thanks to increase in sales of savings certificates.

In the first eight months of fiscal 2013-14, the government's non-bank borrowing stood at Tk 6,277 crore, which is about 11 times higher than in the previous year.

NBR to slap higher taxes on new factories in Dhaka

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Over the past few decades, Dhaka city grew fast due to industrialisation, expansion of trade and rising internal migration. The capital and its surrounding areas house nearly 80 percent of the garment factories in the country. Economic activities in Dhaka contribute about 13 percent to the country's gross domestic product.

By 2015, almost 13 percent of Bangladesh's total population or a staggering 22 million will call Dhaka their home, according to a Sixth Five Year Plan document.

Hussain called upon businesses to invest outside Dhaka, saying amenities will be made available in other regions if factories are set up there.

At the discussion, BCI Senior Vice

President Mostafa Azad Chowdhury Babu said entrepreneurs would be encouraged to invest in less-advanced regions if the government provides incentives.

He also suggested raising the tax-free income limit to Tk 250,000 from 220,000 now.

The trade body called for eliminating duty on import of capital machinery for all industries, and imposing 2 percent duty for essential raw materials.

It also suggested reducing import duty for spare parts of toys to 5 percent, from 25 percent now, to encourage growth of the plastic-based toy industry.

"Reduced duty will allow local industries to meet the domestic demand for toys and explore scope of exports," it said.

Bangladesh: second most open economy in trade in South Asia

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So far, these reforms are not sufficient to attract foreign investors. Full capital mobility is one of the important concerns to authority, thus a roadmap for such activities has been designed.

The success of such roadmap will depend on overall macroeconomic conditions as well effectiveness of the coordinated efforts of BB and other related organisations.

Meanwhile, the volume and size of exports increased gradually over the last two decades. During the 1980s, Bangladesh earned \$435.6 million from exports of goods and services on average, which was 4.0 per cent of GDP. It increased almost twenty times over the next three decades, the paper said.

In today's globalised world, external trade openness is crucially important for growth as it frees up efficient domestic producers from demand limitations of the local markets, said Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank.

Openness to global capital flows likewise spurs growth by attracting investment inflows. But, at the same time, heightens instability risks from volatile trends of global capital flows, arising both from speculative position-taking and from spill-overs of persistent imbalances in major economies, he said.

External opening up also poses new demands on approaches in safeguarding of monetary and financial stability.

AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a former finance adviser to caretaker government, also presented a keynote paper on external sector management in South Asia.

Appoint lobbyists for duty benefit in US: analysts

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He said India has also given Bangladesh duty-free access for all products except 25 alcoholic and drug items as the country had been putting pressure on India for long.

India, Japan and many other countries, where Bangladesh enjoys duty benefits, did not wait for any WTO decision, Khan said.

"If we can continue putting pressure on the US, they may allow us the duty benefit. But, we need to hold negotiations regularly. Ticfa is a good platform for such negotiations," Khan added.

He also said, if the US government wants to give the duty benefit to Bangladesh, it will have to seek a waiver from the WTO.

Mahbub Ahmed, senior secretary to the commerce ministry, said Bangladesh will have to continue dialogues, both bilaterally and multilaterally, with the US for the getting the duty benefit.

"The US has given duty benefit to many countries on different grounds," Ahmed said.

On exports of goods to the US market, Vietnam pays 8.38 percent duty, Indonesia 6.36 percent, China 3 percent, Germany 1.16 percent, India 2.29 percent, Turkey 3.57 percent and Hong Kong 1.25 percent.

Bangladesh paid \$828 million in taxes to the US customs last year and \$3.38 billion over the last five years, according to data from the commerce ministry.

Create special fund for factory safety upgrade

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Zaman's recommendation comes at a time when the government is bargaining with the US to cut the higher duty on Bangladeshi garment exports.

"Let us for now assume that for various reasons the \$850 million or so of tariffs that Bangladesh pays the US to export our garments remains."

"If so then why can't this \$850 million, or even a portion of that, be placed by the US in a fund which finances factory upgrading and general improvement in working standards in Bangladesh?"

Zaman said he pitched the idea at a meeting of the Commonwealth countries and G20 representatives in Washington two weeks ago.

"But it needs even higher level advocacy and I suggest that this is an idea that the Saarc could take up with the likes of the G20."

This type of fund has been set up for different initiatives in the past, he said, while citing the fund created by developed countries 15 years ago to reduce the external debt levels of low-income countries as an example.

"The issue of labour and factory standards is now as important as debt relief was back then."



Rubaba Dowla, chief service officer at Airtel Bangladesh, and Md Mehmood Husain, managing director of Bank Asia, attend the signing of a mobile banking agreement for the bank's soon-to-be-launched 'Hello' product at Airtel's corporate office in Banani, Dhaka.



Amin Khan, Marcel brand ambassador, inaugurates an outlet of the company at Pallabi in Dhaka recently. Humayun Kabir, executive director of Marcel, was also present.

Steps on worker safety, rights under watch

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"It is now time for better factories, higher health and safety standards, and for full compliance with ILO conventions."

Germany is a prime destination for garment products manufactured in Bangladesh: about 17 percent of the country's total garment exports go to the European nation, making it the second largest market for Bangladeshi products.

Two-way trade between the two countries now stands at 5 billion euros. In 2013, Bangladesh's exports to Germany stood at 3.5 billion euros and import at 452 million euros.

"This creates a joint obligation for buyers, traders and producers, for the government and for us, for the trade unions and civil society, to make sure that production and working conditions are up to international standards."

On the first day of their trip, the seven-member delegation visited a garment factory and the Rana Plaza building site, where the members laid down flowers.

It held meetings with leaders of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, government higher-ups including the prime minister and international retailers.

Woehrl, however, praised the under-going factory inspection efforts in the garment sector. "But it is only the beginning of a long road."

In particular, further steps need to be taken to amend the existing labour laws once more, he said, adding that the issue has already been discussed with the government.

"All objectives must be centred on the need to further improve safety and social standards in order to ensure decent working conditions for those who are producing the garments we are wearing in Germany, and to avoid industrial tragedies in future."

Woehrl said Germany also has its fair share of responsibility. "We also need to do our homework, as we are the second largest garment customer of Bangladesh."

This was the first German parliamentary

delegation visit to Bangladesh after the Bundestag election in September last year.

"For us, it was very important to resume the dialogue with the current government because in Germany we are currently in the process of negotiating our budget."

"We are currently deciding how we would like to continue this partnership with Bangladesh because we have been a partner for so many years and we would like to continue to support you and expand our relations."

Since 1972, Germany has given Bangladesh 2.5 billion euro in aid, and it does not include the international and multilateral contribution.

Rebmann said after the fateful Rana Plaza disaster, the country has already taken the first step in improving labour conditions by amending labour laws.

"This is something we are aware of. We also realise that further steps will be needed when it comes to recognising the ILO-set labour standards."

He also advocated for trade unions in the country's garment factories.

"There are strong trade unions in Germany, which are not detrimental to the country or the employers. A strong trade union actually helps a country move forward."

He said his country would do everything within its power to influence German companies so that production is continued in Bangladesh and jobs can be saved.

"Steps to establish high labour standards have to be taken."

She said Bangladesh would have to ensure reliable energy supply to woo foreign investment for raising industrial production.

The delegation expressed Germany's willingness to invest in reliable energy, renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Other members of the delegation included Jürgen Klimke, Frank Heinrich, Gabi Weber, Niema Movassat and Uwe Kekeritz. Albrecht Conze, German ambassador to Bangladesh, was also present at the briefing.



Nazmul Haque, director (investment) of Infrastructure Development Company Ltd, poses with the Solar Project of the Year award for IDCOL's Solar Home Systems project at the Asia Power and Electricity Awards 2014 at Resorts World Convention Centre in Singapore recently.