



An artist presenting his performance art -- Existence of Identity -- at Cox's Bazar Public Library Hall on the third day of the International Biennale Cox's Bazar yesterday. Painters, sculptors and photographers from different countries are participating in the four-day art extravaganza that ends today. PHOTO: ORCHID CHANGMA

# Still a long way

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among students, WHO experts and anti-tobacco campaigners say. 'ONE DEATH EVERY SIX SECONDS' Latest data is not available, but according to a 2012 research by Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) and Campaign for

Tobacco-Free Kids, tobacco production in Bangladesh rose to 60,000 tonnes in 2009 from less than 40,000 tonnes in 1980.

Export and import of tobacco also increased significantly during the period. And between 1997 and 2009, national cigarette consumption rose from 50 billion sticks to 70 billion sticks and bidi consumption from 45 billion sticks to over 80 billion sticks, the research found.

Only last year, tobacco was grown in 108,000 hectares of land, up from 70,000 hectares the previous year, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension.

All this goes against the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) that Bangladesh signed in 2003 and ratified the following year, becoming one of the first countries to do so.

Sections 17 and 18 of the world's first public health treaty call on governments around the world to help farmers grow alternative crops and to take preventive steps to protect the environment and public health from tobacco damages.

But 12 years on, there is little government campaign against tobacco production and consumption.

WHO experts say the fight against tobacco is important because it causes cancer, stroke, heart disease and respiratory problems, among other deadly diseases. It also affects sex life and long-

Unlike most countries around the world, Bangladesh has different tax structures for different tobacco products -- cigarette, bidi, and smokeless tobacco (Gul, Jarda). Then, there is a four-tier tax system (based on prices) for cigarette and a five-tier system for bidi (based on number of sticks).

While this makes it easier for the companies to evade higher taxes just by readjusting the prices and changing packages, many tobacco users simply change brands or shift to lower-quality cigarettes.

"Bangladesh's tobacco tax system is far from ideal as very few countries in the world are currently using multi-tier pure ad-valorem tax system. And the tax increase isn't that effective to reduce consumption because it isn't proportionate with the rise in people's income," said Huq, also a physician.

### THE FRENCH WAY

France is a great example of how price increase can cut prevalence of smoking and reduce deaths from lung cancer.

In 2009, the country's adult smoking prevalence dropped below 40 percent from close to 60 percent in 1974 as tobacco prices almost tripled during the period.

At the same time, deaths in lung cancer came down to below 1.5 from two persons per 1,00,000, according to the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic 2015.

### SUCCESSES & CHALLENGES

But Bangladesh has its own achievements in the fight against tobacco. Successive governments have effectively curbed smoking prevalence over the years.

An estimate by the WHO shows that in 2000, nearly 62 percent men aged 15 and above used tobacco against about 6 percent women of the same age group.

# Demo continues

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students held placards inscribed with "Education is not a product," "We'd rather die than pay VAT," and "Education is our right."

NBR CLARIFICATION  
Meanwhile, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday issued a fresh clarification regarding the VAT issue.

It said students will not have to pay the VAT as indirect tax is already included in the tuition fees.

"There is no room for a spike in tuition fees as it is the university authorities' responsibility to pay VAT, not the students'," said the tax authority in a clarification issued yesterday evening.

Citing rules, the revenue collector said VAT is determined based on the total price for service rendered by a business or a company or an organisation. It said the total price for service may be of two categories -- VAT inclusive price and VAT exclusive price.

If the price of service and VAT are not mentioned separately, then the VAT is already included in the total price paid for the service, it said adding there are specific rules on how to calculate VAT from VAT inclusive price.

Since the imposition of VAT on private universities in June 2015, the tuition fees students pay are counted as VAT inclusive price.

For further clarification, the NBR gave an example. If a university received Tk 1,00,000 as tuition fee, 7.5 percent VAT (Tk 6,976) will be deducted from it and the rest will be regarded as the total price. So the government will get Tk 6,976 and the university Tk 93,023.

## STUDENTS' DEMO IN CAPITAL, OTHER CITIES

At a press briefing on the Dhanmondi campus of Stamford University yesterday evening, students under the banner of "No Vat on Education" said they would continue their peaceful strike till Monday.

"Today's [Saturday] agitation was peaceful. Students suspended their classes in support and brought out rallies," said Moshir Rahman, an organiser of the platform.

Reading out a written statement, Moshir alleged a vested quarter was trying to foil the movement by threatening them. He, however, did not mention any particular organisation or person.

Private university students intensified their protest programme against the imposition of VAT a day after police fired rubber bullets at an anti-VAT demonstration of East West University students in the capital's Rampura on Wednesday.

In the capital's Dhanmondi, students of Stamford University, State University of Bangladesh, Daffodil International University and World University of Bangladesh brought out a rally and formed a human chain yesterday morning.

Students of Bangladesh University demonstrated near Asad Gate and students of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology on their campus in Tejgaon Industrial area.

Nurul Muttakin, OC of Bhatara Police Station, said private university students marched for about an hour on Pragati Sarani near Bashundhara residential area in the morning.

In Chittagong, vehicular movement on Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway was disrupted for about 10 minutes as around 250 students of BGC Trust University took to the streets in Chandanaish upazila around 10:45am.

In Sylhet city, students gathered near Court Point around noon and chanted anti-VAT slogans, our local correspondent reports. Police had been deployed in the area to avert any untoward incident.

In Rajshahi city, students brought out a procession at Shaheb Bazar and Mani Chattar in the early afternoon.

## FINANCE MINISTER ON VAT

Meanwhile, Finance Minister AMA Muhith reiterated that the VAT on private universities will not be withdrawn.

"We have to expand the scope of revenue collection. To do so we need to push different areas," he told a programme at the capital's Bangla Academy yesterday.

At another programme in a city hotel, Muhith said students will not bear the brunt of VAT this year.

"What I think is ... this time no student is going to be charged [the VAT]. They [universities] will pay it from what [tuition fees] has already been collected."

The finance minister also asked students to be cautious from next year so that the authorities could not collect extra money from them.

"If you are not alert enough, they [the university authorities] might impose it [VAT] on you in different ways in the coming year," he said.

# Man held for raping minor girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

An eleven-year-old girl was raped allegedly by a union-level Jubo League leader in Habiganj's Baniarchang upazila early yesterday.

The "rapist" was arrested. The girl, a student of class-V, was undergoing treatment at Habiganj Sadar Hospital, said police.

The arrestee, Shamsul Miah, 32, vice-president of Kagapasa union unit of Jubo League, is a neighbour of the girl, said Nirmalendu Chakraborty, officer-in-charge of Baniarchang Police Station.

Shamsul, 32, entered the kid's room around 1:30am by breaking open the door and raped her, the official said, quoting the victim's family.

Hearing screams of the girl, her mother and other neighbours rescued the girl.

The OC said the victim's mother filed a case against Shamsul with the police station yesterday afternoon.

# Two 'traffickers' held in Teknaf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

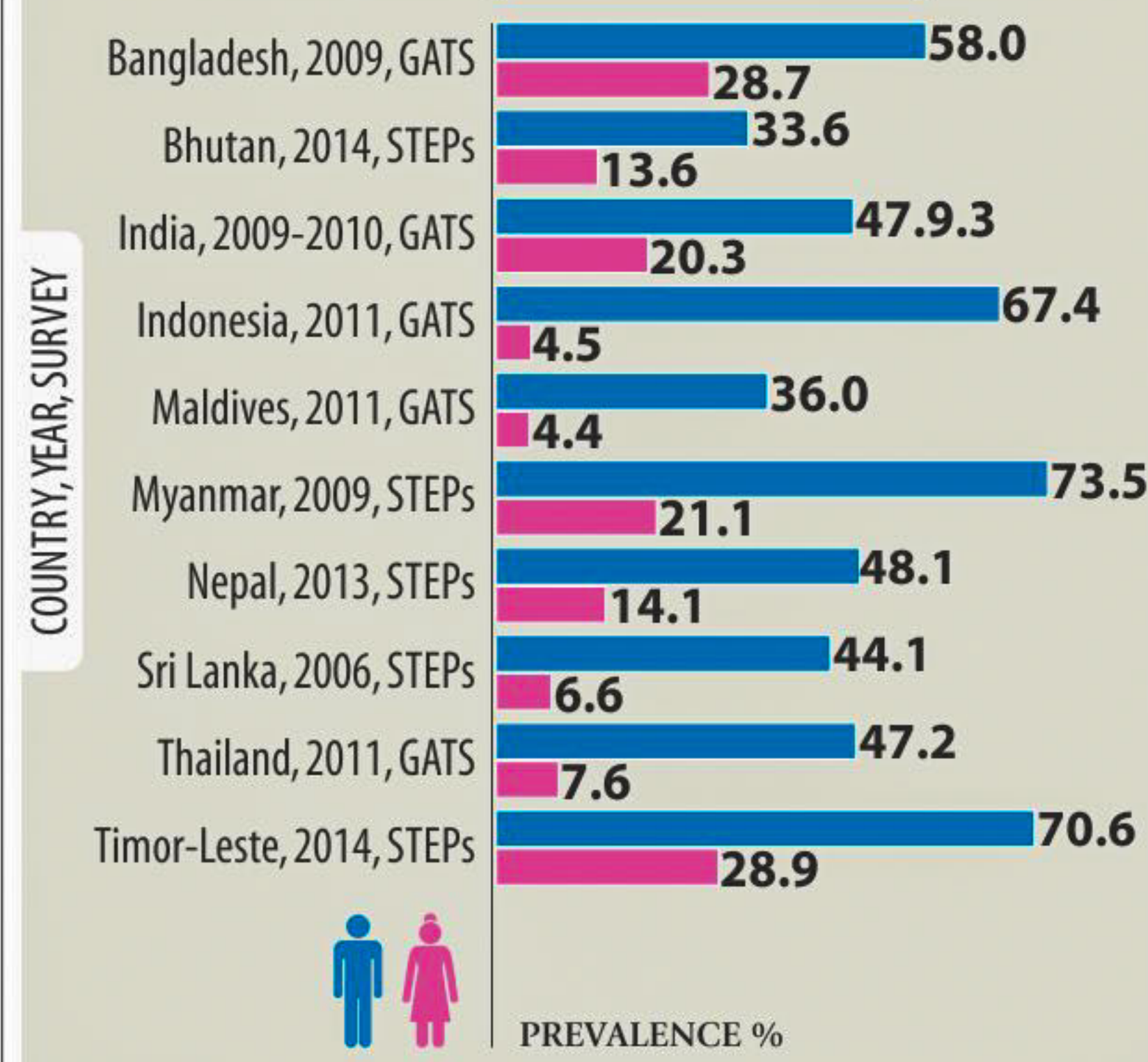
Police yesterday arrested two alleged human traffickers from Shah Parir Dwip in Teknaf upazila.

The arrestees are -- Dil Mohammad, 45, and Yunus, 35. Both of them are residents of Shah Parir Dwip.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided their house and arrested them. Both of them are accused in several cases related to human trafficking, Ataur Rahman Khandaker, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Dil Mohammad is one the 11 international human traffickers on a home ministry list, the OC added.

## Prevalence of tobacco use among adults in selected member states of the Southeast Asia Region



term smoking may cause gangrene that leads to disability.

"Tobacco use is the leading cause of [millions of] preventable deaths," said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, regional director for the WHO Southeast Asia region.

She was speaking at the opening of the 68th regional committee meeting in Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, on September 7. Global health experts and health ministers, state ministers, officials and journalists from the 11 member states of the region attended the five-day meeting, which discussed the regional health issues and ways to tackle them.

Tobacco was high on the agenda this year.

According to 2009 data, in Bangladesh nearly six in every 10 men aged 15 years and above and three in every 10 women of the same age group use tobacco, whether smoking or smokeless.

That's the fourth highest consumption rate in Southeast Asia region of the WHO, where about 500 million people use tobacco and about 1.3 million die due to tobacco use every year.

The region is now one of the largest producers of tobacco products because cigarette companies are shifting their factories to this region, as a growing number of people in the developed world quit smoking.

A 2004 research by WHO Bangladesh found 57,000 people die in tobacco-attributable diseases in the country every year. There hasn't been any similar research since then.

In 2012, 21 percent of the global population aged 15 and above smoked tobacco. Globally, tobacco kills around 6 million people each year. That's one death every six seconds.

FLAWED TAX SYSTEM  
Raising tobacco taxes is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing tobacco use. Higher tobacco prices are especially effective in cutting tobacco use by vulnerable section of the population and the youth.

However, although tobacco tax in Bangladesh is fairly high (about 70 percent), the tax system is complicated and far from best practices, S Mahfuzul Huq, technical officer (tobacco control) of WHO Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

In 2010, it came down to 46 percent and 1.2 percent respectively.

Smoking has been banned in selected public places and public transports. Promotion and advertisement of tobacco products are also prohibited under the Tobacco Control Act-2005. The law was amended two years ago with provisions for stronger control and harsher punishments, though action on the ground is far from visible.

By March next year, cigarette companies are legally bound to use pictorial warnings on the packets, showing the damages tobacco can cause. The National Tobacco Control Cell (NTCC) with technical assistance from the WHO has finalised nine graphical warnings that the companies will have to use in turn.

But challenges remain, as the number of tobacco users is increasing with the rapid population growth. The biggest challenge will come from the most obvious place: tobacco companies.

And Zahid Maleque, state minister for health who led the Bangladesh delegation at the WHO meeting, knows it.

Addressing the delegates on September 7 in Dili, he reiterated the government's commitment to cut tobacco use, but warned: "Industry influence is also a reality in Bangladesh, working as a barrier [in the fight against tobacco]."

# French jihadist 'killed' in Syria

AFP, Washington

French jihadist David Drugeon, an alleged bombmaker for an Al-Qaeda affiliate, has been killed in a coalition strike in Syria, a US official said Friday.

Drugeon has been described as a key figure in the Al-Qaeda offshoot Khorasan group, which operates in Syria and which American officials say is a dangerous militant outfit planning to attack the United States and other Western countries.

US officials previously thought Drugeon had been killed in a November 2014 drone strike, but the claim was later disproved.

# Hajj to go ahead

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in stampede after the incident, according to the ministry press release.

Nizamuddin, a pilgrim from Chandanaish of Chittagong, was undergoing treatment yesterday for head injuries and he has to stay at hospital for a few more days. The rest of the injured were released after primary treatment, the envoy said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sent a condolence message to King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, expressing her deep sympathy for victims and their family members.

The foreign minister also sent a message to his Saudi counterpart.

Yesterday, sympathy and tributes were offered by people from around the world. Saudi Arabia received condolences from Arab leaders as well as from Britain, Canada, India and Nigeria.

This was not the first tragedy to strike Makkah pilgrims, though the hajj has been nearly incident-free in recent years.

In 2006, several hundred died in a stampede during the Stoning of the Devil ritual in nearby Mina, following a similar incident two years earlier.

Friday's accident took place as the Grand Mosque prepared to welcome the millions of pilgrims who will gather there later this month for Islam's annual Hajj pilgrimage, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world.

The crane struck a third floor area on the eastern side of the Grand Mosque around 5.45pm, while the building was packed with the 6.30pm Friday prayers approaching. The crane's arm crashed into the top edge of the building and, crumpling under its own weight, the top



Muslim pilgrims walk in front of construction cranes as they arrived in Makkah of Saudi Arabia to perform hajj yesterday, a day after a crane collapsed at the Grand Mosque killing more than 100 people. PHOTO: AFP

section smashed down into the roof.

Several cranes surround the mosque to support an ongoing expansion and other construction work that has transformed the area around the sanctuary.

The \$60 billion redevelopment is being carried out by the Saudi Binladin Group - owned by Osama Bin Laden's family.

The huge complex covers more than 88 acres and includes indoor and outdoor prayer areas. It is open 24-hours a day.

Steep hills and low-rise traditional buildings that once surrounded the mosque have in recent years given way to shopping malls and luxury hotels -- among them the world's third-tallest

building, a giant clock tower that is the centrepiece of the Abraj al-Bait complex.

The Binladin family, which also built the Abraj al-Bait project, has been close to the ruling Al Saud family for decades and oversees major building projects around the country, writes Independent.co.uk.