

COUNTERFEIT, SUBSTANDARD MEDICINES

1,997 cases filed in last 15 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mobile courts filed 1,997 cases and realised Tk 5.33 crore as fines for the sale of counterfeit and contaminated medicines in the last 15 months, Health Minister Mohammed Nasim told parliament yesterday.

He said the courts jailed 57 people and shut down 68 organisations across the country for committing the offence.

During the time, counterfeit and contaminated drugs worth Tk 27 crore were also seized and destroyed, he said, adding that 39 more cases were filed with the magistrate court during drives by the drug court.

Replying to lawmakers' queries, he also said the government has taken an initiative to set up "Adorsho Model Pharmacy" at all divisions, districts and upazilas to stop the sale of contaminated, counterfeit and sub-standard medicines.

International organisation Management Science for Health's accredited drug seller is giving the technical support in this regard, he said in a scripted answer.

Nasim also said work was underway to create a separate monogram for the Adorsho Model Pharmacy.

There would be two categories in the project. The upper level would be operated by "grade-1" pharmacists while the next two levels by "grade-2" and "grade-3" pharmacists, he said.

Apart from buying standard medicines from the Adorsho Model Pharmacy, people would also be able to get ideas about their use from there.

The health minister said work was going on also under a project titled "Web Portal and Mobile Application" for letting people report online on the negative impact of drugs and the sale of counterfeit ones.

He said Access to Information Programme of the Prime Minister's Office was providing assistance to this end.

A software developing company was working to make software which would be available "very soon".

Replying to another query, Nasim said the numbers of registered MBBS doctors and dental surgeon in the country are 77,000 and 6,976. The number of nurses is 22,939.

He said an additional 10,000 posts of nurses have been created, while a process was underway to appoint 3,616 nurses to fill the vacant posts.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 6



From left, engineers Diponkor Dutta Partha and Nafeul Islam; Panacea's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Soumik Aswad and Chief Growth officer (CGO) Souvik Aswad; engineers Golam Arif and Rakibul Hasan. Due to their efforts, Renata was able to introduce a new method to verify the authenticity of two of their over-the-counter drugs.

PHOTO: RENATA

Know your medicine

FROM PAGE 1

customers to verify whether a medicine is genuine or fake -- an all too common problem in Bangladesh.

The start-up imprints a unique nine-digit code onto each medicine strip in the manufacturing line of the partner company.

During purchase, a customer sends the code to 2777 in an SMS. If the code matches the information stored in the app, the medicine is genuine.

If it does not match, the app automatically sends a notice of forgery to the sender through a text message.

"Panacea is a technology built to fight counterfeit drugs and we use a mobile app and an SMS service to

accomplish the goal. When partnered with pharmaceuticals, Panacea helps consumers verify the authenticity of that company's medicines," explained Soumik, who is a BBA student at the Bangladesh University of Professions (BUP).

Souvik, the Panacea CGO is a business administration graduate from Dhaka University.

The Aswad brothers, both in their early twenties, came up with the idea as they were troubled by an "alarming" infiltration of counterfeit medicines in the market and the potential life threatening impact on consumers.

Having developed the idea into a full-fledged business plan, the brothers

set up a company called Panacea in 2014.

Since then, the company has won many awards including the first prize at TIE Next Big Bang Challenge, Bangladesh; Second prize at GIST Startup Boot Camp, Bangladesh; first prize at Reconnect Startup Boot Camp, Nepal; and second prize at Start Up Open, Washington, DC in the US.

While awards are satisfying, the real test comes in trying to execute a business plan successfully. To this end, the Aswad brothers solicited the support of pharmaceutical companies in Bangladesh, and Renata limited volunteered to help.

There were big challenges at the very outset. A plethora of information is already printed on the blister foils and the additional printing requirement of the unique code created a new problem.

Company Secretary of Renata Ltd Jubayer Alam told The Daily Star, "Renata uses super-fast blister machines but the online printers were not fast enough to place the unique code alongside the pre-existing information."

"The team searched globally for printers with matching speeds but none could ensure an acceptable loss in the production and thus, the project seemed doomed."

Renata's young engineers -- Diponkor Dutta Partha, Nafeul Islam, Golam Arif and Rakibul Hasan -- then had their own eureka moment to modify the expensive blister machines, recalled Jubayer.

"The retrofitted machines now allow additional printers to be installed to place the unique code without slowing down the packaging. The project took 10 months to complete and has been rolled out recently. Extensive testing has been done to ensure its effectiveness."

Asked, why pharmaceutical companies should make extra investments to check a few medicine adulterers out in the market, Aswad brothers

said, those who make counterfeit medicines often target well-known brands.

The packaging and outer appearance of the fake product appears to be the same as the original one.

Apart from the home market, Renata products are also exported to Afghanistan, Belize, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Guyana, Honduras, Hong Kong, Kenya, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

So, it is obvious that a company like this would give priority to its brand name instead of a little expenditure, added the brothers.

AHSANULLAH KILLING

SC stayed acquittal of 11 accused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed until July 14 a portion of the High Court verdict that acquitted 11 accused in Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master killing case.

Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division of the SC Justice Hasan Faoez Siddique passed the order in response to a petition filed by the government seeking a stay on the acquittal of the accused.

The chamber judge also sent the stay petition to the full bench of the Appellate Division for its hearing on July 14. The government filed the petition with the apex court on

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Illegal toll behind all

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka Zila Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union, an offshoot of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union, allegedly has the blessing of Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan. It occupied the office of the Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union early Monday.

Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union had been controlling the terminal for the last 15 years.

Even though no exact figure of the money collected each day is available, statements from workers shed some light on how the complex "system" works and how the entire road transport sector is dictated.

Tk 60 is collected from each bus every day. Of which, Tk 10 goes to the Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, considered the umbrella organisation of all trade unionism in the road transport sector.

The rest Tk 50 goes to the union fund, terminal management committee and others.

Both groups claim stakes in the Tk 50 that is collected from each bus, said some leaders of workers union seeking anonymity, adding that around 2,000 buses operate from Sayedabad to 35 districts daily.

According to Abul Kalam, president of bus owners association of the terminal, the workers union collects about Tk 1 lakh a day at the terminal.

Karam Ali of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union denied that they collect illegal toll. He, however, said they collect Tk 10 from each bus and hand it over to Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation.

Talking to The Daily Star, leader of a transport workers organisation Mohammad Ali Reza said every day Tk 10 is collected from each bus plying

between the capital and other districts.

The Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation gets Tk 54 crore a year from all the buses.

Talking about the particular case of Sayedabad terminal, Reza said around Tk 2.16 crore are collected annually from the terminal and it too goes to the fund of the Federation.

Terming the money collection illegal, he claimed that the Federation takes the money year after year but it does not spend any for the welfare of workers.

But over the last three months, an internal feud developed inside Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union and it has severed its ties with Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, he said.

That is why the feud has reached this new height.

He claimed that the Dhaka Zila Sarak

Paribahan Sramik Union, with the blessing of the shipping minister, took over the office of the Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union early Monday.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, executive president of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, termed the ongoing feud "an internal issue" of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union.

He refuted the allegation that Dhaka Zila Sarak Paribahan Union enjoyed his blessing. He also refuted the claim that his federation receives Tk 54 crore a year from various transport workers' unions.

"It is just a few lakhs of Taka," he said. And as to what workers' welfare they spend the money for, Shajahan said the money is spent for legal battles, compensation for workers' death and for the operations cost of the federation.

Blood

FROM PAGE 1

as an ineffective means to ensure people's safety. We are exactly facing such a situation in Bangladesh.

Extrajudicial killings by the law enforcers had initially been considered as a necessary and short-term expedient during the past BNP-led government to improve law and order in 2004.

This was revealed by the then second-in-command of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) during a June 2005 conversation with some US embassy officials in Dhaka, according to a US diplomatic dispatch from Dhaka.

They had met Chowdhury Fazlul Bari, additional director general of Rab, to get some insights into the situation following domestic and international outcry against the unlawful killings by the law-enforcement agencies including Rab since 2004.

The then US ambassador in Dhaka Patricia A Butenis sent the cable to Washington in April 2006, which was leaked and posted on whistleblower website WikiLeaks in 2011.

Brigadier General Bari was an influential figure during the 2007-08 tenure of military-backed caretaker regime.

What Bari described a "short-term expedient" in 2005 seems to have become a permanent practice.

On average, 150 people were killed in extrajudicial means every year in last 12 years in the name of measures to improve law and order.

But the killings of around 1,800 people that way in last 12 years could not ensure a sustainable improvement. The latest spate of secret killings has rather put people in a state of panic.

And in such a situation, the unlawful action of extrajudicial killings has been taking place in the country. As many as 14 people have so far been killed in "gunfight" this month. Of them, seven were militant suspects.

The long-term negative impact of extrajudicial killings on the country's legal system and governance is immense.

According to the existing legal system, it is the mandate of the judiciary to determine who is a criminal and who is not and punish the criminals according to the offence they have committed.

But in case of every extrajudicial killing, the country's legal system has been made redundant. The state brings down itself to the level of alleged criminals and militant suspects to punish them unlawfully, exposing a fragile state of governance.

This is acceptable nowhere in the world.

'Robber' killed in 'gunfight' with police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

An alleged robber was killed in a "gunfight" between police and his cohorts in Sarail upazila of Brahmanbaria early yesterday.

The dead is Abdus Sattar, 30, of College Para village in the upazila.

Rupok Kumar Saha, officer-in-charge of Sarail Police Station, said acting on a tip-off that some robbers, including Sattar, were preparing to commit a robbery in Gonara village, police raided the village around 1:30am.

Sensing the presence of police, the robbers opened fire on them. The law enforcers then returned fire, triggering the "gunfight", the police official added.

Sattar was caught in the line of fire and died on the spot. Others managed to flee.

Four policemen, including Sub-inspector of Sarail Police Station Rakib Hasan, were wounded during the gun battle. Two of them were admitted to Sarail Upazila Health Complex, while two others took first aid, the OC said.

Police also claimed to have recovered a firearm, one bullet and several sharp weapons from the spot.

According to police, Sattar stood accused of eight criminal cases, including robbery, with Sarail Police Station.



The father, relatives and neighbours of Mukul Rana, a key suspect in Avijit Roy's murder case, wait for the body of Mukul at his home in Baluigachhi of Satkhira yesterday. Mukul was killed in a "shootout" on Sunday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED