

A STARK CONTRAST

Well-equipped, yet not fully functional in a year



NAT'L BURN INSTITUTE

Coping with patients five times its capacity



DMCH BURN UNIT

A TALE OF TWO INSTITUTIONS... the 500-bed national burn institute (left) is yet to be fully functional due to a lack of workforce. Right across the street, the 100-bed burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital struggles to handle the rush of patients five times beyond its capacity. As a result, patients and their attendees are often seen staying in the corridor or beside the staircase of the unit (right). The photos were taken recently. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, SHAHEEN MOLLAH

SHAHEEN MOLLAH And HASAN MEER

With its clean and calm ambience, the institute looks like a privately-run one, well-equipped to provide treatment to patients.

This public institute -- Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery -- was inaugurated on October 25 last year by the prime minister.

Although more than a year has gone by, the 15-storey 500-bed institute on Dr Mohammad Shahidullah Sarak in Chankharpool is yet to be fully functional, due to lack in recruitment and a resultant manpower crisis.

Meanwhile right across the street, doctors, nurses and staff are struggling to cope with the rush of patients as the 100-bed burn unit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital remains severely overcrowded.

The national burn institute, which brought hope for improvement of a situation so dire, was expected to be operational within six months.

An estimated 2,200 staffers, including doctors, nurses, technicians, ward and administration staff members, had been allocated to the institute.

"Right now, we have over a hundred doctors, 70-odd nurses and some technicians on deputation, as per the ongoing first phase of the government allocation. We are yet to get other staff members, which will be assigned to us in a total of three phases," Dr Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator of the burn institute, told The Daily Star yesterday.

During a recent visit, the institute looked almost deserted with only a

handful of patients at the outdoor unit. There was no one at the reception, while many pieces of equipment were seen still in their packaging.

Dr Partha Sankar Paul, resident surgeon (outdoor) of the institute, said they have started treating patients regularly since September 15 this year.

"Once we start the emergency service, we'll be able to treat and admit more patients," said Dr Paul, who used to be the resident surgeon at DMCH burn unit (outdoor).

"We have some 200 patients admitted currently," Dr Sen told this newspaper yesterday, adding that some 40 to 50 patients are taking treatment there every day.

"With the manpower we have, it's

plastic surgeons to meet the country's requirements, said the eminent surgeon.

This institute will ease the pressure on DMCH when the two will start operating simultaneously, he said. The burn specialist also said for the last couple of months, they had been treating dengue patients to help DMCH out.

Contacted, Dr Md Belal Hossain, director (admin) of the Directorate General of Health Services of the health ministry, yesterday told this newspaper that the recruitment process of a few hundred third- and fourth-class employees has already been started, and more recruitment will be done eventually.



difficult to start the emergency service. But we are pushing to get it started by December," he told this newspaper.

Once fully functional, this institute will help treat burn patients and train

THE INSTITUTE AT A GLANCE

With state-of-the-art equipment and technology, the national burn institute, located next to

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SHAHEEN MOLLAH And HASAN MEER

Sitting on the floor by her son, Nurunnahar gently moves Ibrahim's head upwards and helps him drink water.

Ibrahim flinches. The mother softly asks him if he wants to eat anything, then carefully rests his head on a mattress on the floor of the corridor of the 100-bed burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

With 62 percent burns, Ibrahim Sarker from Satkhira Sadar had been undergoing treatment at the unit for over two months when this newspaper visited the unit.

On the night of August 15, while sleeping at his home, the 21-year-old brick kiln worker suffered injuries caused by a fire originating from an oil lamp.

He was taken to Khulna Medical College Hospital right away, where he stayed for 16 days. As his condition deteriorated, doctors referred him to DMCH.

At DMCH, Ibrahim had to stay at the burn unit's ICU for two months. With his condition improving, he was later shifted to the corridor on the third floor.

"My son is doing better now," said Nurunnahar. "Doctors said he needs one more surgery," she told this newspaper.

Not only Ibrahim, but many others are also staying with their families -- either on the floor or makeshift beds -- often crammed together in the corridor or by the staircase of the third floor.

"At present, we have over 500 patients admitted here," said AFM Nabin, resident surgeon at the



burn unit. "We know it's beyond our capacity, but we try to provide treatment to everyone who walks through our gate," he added.

Nabin continued, "That's why you see so many patients on the corridor."

One such patient is Jahangir Hossain.

On September 27, the 30-year-old rickshaw-puller was having tea at a roadside stall in Lakshimpur Sadar upazila. Suddenly, a scuffle broke out. Someone kicked the frying pan next to the stall and hot oil spilled on him.

Jahangir was referred to DMCH from the district hospital. His family members admitted him to the burn unit the same day. He is now staying at the unit's corridor. According to doctors, he needs another surgery. His brother and mother are also staying with him.

Four-year-old Sohona from Jamalpur and 14-year-old Rumi Akter

of Mymensingh are also being treated at the unit, among many others.

While talking to this newspaper at the hospital, their family members expressed concerns about patients' wellbeing. At the same time, they were worried about continuing treatment as it is already taking a heavy toll on them. Many had to borrow money, sell property or leave work to stay with their loved ones at the hospital.

A CONTINUING CRISIS

Since its inception in December 2003, the burn unit has lacked manpower, especially support staff. It has been depending mostly on irregular "staff members" who learnt everything on the job, including delicate procedures like dressing.

Around 70 such "staff members" have been providing services in exchange for tips from patients' families.

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All fun and games in the middle of the road

DNCC launches weekly 'Car Free Street Uttara'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finding an open space for children to play in Dhaka is an arduous task. Deprived of playgrounds, young ones living in the city often find themselves too busy with electronics, to the point that it raises concerns for their health.

Keeping that in mind, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam and lawmaker Advocate Sahara Khatun yesterday inaugurated a section of Sonargaon Janapath road in Uttara, which will be free of traffic every Friday from now on.

The initiative of DNCC, in association with Surf Excel Bangladesh, also aims to reduce traffic congestion and carbon emission by daily commute of private cars

and public transportation.

From 8am to 11am, children and parents can have fun on the street on the weekends. A part of nearly 200-metre road will remain open for the purpose every Friday, where participants can join numerous activities including painting, badminton, and basketball. Organisers will provide the sports equipment to the children.

On the first day, people of Uttara came to see the event and enjoyed the car free street. There were playpens, seesaws, swing sets and slides for toddlers.

College students also came to play badminton on the free road.

"My father called me in the morning and said 'Hey, go and see what's happening on

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'Myanmar brought it upon itself'

Says rights defender on legal steps against his country at int'l conference on genocide

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A human rights defender from Myanmar yesterday said recent legal steps against his country with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) over Rohingya issue were something the country's regime "brought upon itself".

This issue is regarded "very sensitive" in Myanmar, said Khin Zaw Win, also the director of Tampadipa Institute in Yangon.

"Don't touch it, it's not your problem" -- this is how Rohingya issue is being treated in Myanmar, he said. "But it is," Khin told an international conference on Bangladesh's genocide at Bangla Academy.

"People in Myanmar are forgetful. Not only the Rohingya but other ethnic and religious minorities are also suffering since the country's independence

in 1948," said Khin, who was a political prisoner there.

"So, we tackle it now or otherwise it will be like a chronic ailment that will never end," the activist added.

Gambia, on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, recently filed a case at the ICJ, accusing Myanmar of genocide in its treatment of the Rohingyas.

The ICC has taken a move recently to probe the alleged acts of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed by the Myanmar military on Rohingyas.

Khin said the Myanmar regime should cooperate in investigation "as much as it can" but feared that it would not allow international fact-finding missions to even enter the country.

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GYANTAPAS LECTURE

Prof Nazrul Islam to speak on urbanisation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Nazrul Islam, honorary chairman of Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) and former chairman of University Grants Commission, will deliver a lecture on "Urbanisation in Bangladesh: Past, Present and Future" at 4pm today, at the Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium of Dhaka University's Social Sciences Faculty.

Gyantapas Abdul Razzaq Foundation is organising the lecture, titled "Gyantapas Abdul Razzaq Distinguished Lecture: Series-2 Lecture-2", said a press release.

National Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury, the vice chancellor of University of Asia Pacific, will chair the session.



Children and adults alike enjoy three hours of playtime on a car-free Sonargaon Janapath Road in Uttara yesterday. From now on, one side of the road will be free of traffic every Friday from 8am to 11am, as per a DNCC initiative. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Ban Ki-moon in city

UNB, Dhaka

Former UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon arrived in city last night on a brief visit, his second to Bangladesh this year, after leaving the United Nations.

He will attend the 13th convocation of Brac University, to be held at the Army Stadium this afternoon, an official told the news agency.

President Abdul Hamid is also scheduled to attend the convocation ceremony.

Ban Ki-moon arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 8:45pm. Vice-Chancellor of Brac University Professor Vincent Chang and senior foreign ministry officials were at the airport to receive the former UN chief.

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen will hold a meeting with the former UN chief at 11am today, an official told UNB. The meeting will be held at Hotel Radisson Blu, Dhaka. Ban will leave Dhaka at 6:30pm today.

In July, Ban Ki-moon attended the "Dhaka Meeting of the Global Commission on Adaptation" held in the capital.



Community clinic services in Bangladesh exemplary for developing countries: expert

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Community clinics are now serving 50 million rural people of the country, which is "indeed exemplary for other developing countries", an eminent surgeon and public health professional said yesterday.

Prof Syed Modasser Ali, former adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and chairperson of Community Clinic Health Support Trust, Bangladesh, made the remark while inaugurating a symposium at a city hotel.

The three-day "2nd International Symposium on Community Health Workers (CHW)" has been organised by International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b).

Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Brac James P Grant School of Public Health and Save the Children have collaborated for the initiative.

Welcoming the participants, Prof Modasser -- considered a pioneer of community ophthalmology, said community health workers have an outstanding history of providing vaccination, and essential health and family planning services in Bangladesh.

In his speech, Dr Iqbal Anwar, scientist and project director at icddr,b, said 71 percent of people who die each year across the globe lose their lives due to non-communicable diseases.

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