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# Mercury in skin care products

Test on 16 imported products finds mercury beyond permissible level

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

If you want to buy skin-whitening cream online, especially those advertised to have been imported, think twice.

Because a new global study has found presence of high level of poisonous mercury in the cream, posing a risk to human health.

The study, titled "Dangerous, Mercury-leaden and Often Illegal Skin Lightening Products: Readily Available for Online Purchase," tested 16 samples of imported skin-whitening creams at two international labs and found all of those had high mercury level than the permissible level set by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI).

All the 16 products had mercury levels ranging from 49 parts per million (ppm) to 129,433 ppm, much higher than the local permissible level set by the BSTI, the report says.

In 2015, the BSTI set a standard for skin cream allowing a maximum 1ppm of mercury concentration.

Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG), an international coalition of more than 110 environmental and health NGOs from over 55 countries, conducted the study in October.

Environment and Social Development Organisation (ESDO), a Bangladeshi organisation, revealed the study

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Workers of nine state-run jute mills in Khulna and Jashore industrial belt observing an indefinite hunger strike for the fourth consecutive day yesterday. They are staging the protest to press home their 11-point demand. The photos were taken outside Platinum Jute Mills in Khulna's Khalishpur area.

PHOTO: STAR

# HUNGER STRIKE Over 100 jute mill workers fall sick

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

At least 100 jute mill workers, observing an indefinite hunger strike for four days, were admitted to different hospitals and clinics in Khulna yesterday.

The workers have been protesting since Tuesday to press home their 11-point demand, said Shahana Sarmin, president of Platinum Jute Mill Employees Union.

Along with the hospitalised ones, around 31,000 workers of Jashore-Khulna industrial belt were demonstrating work abstention under the banner of CBA and non-CBA Amazon Parishad to press home their 11-point demand, she said.

Their demands include payment of regular wages, cancellation of public-private ownership, necessary fund for jute sector, insurance for families of deceased workers, provident fund and gratuity facility for retired workers and regularisation of temporary workers, she added.

Sailendranath Biswas, resident medical officer of Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH), said workers who were admitted to KMCH hospital suffered from acute dehydration.

"If workers remain starved for longer period of time, they may face heart attacks and even get killed," he added.

Contacted, Boniz Uddin Miah, liaison officer of Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, said, "The government mistakenly passed the wage board. No institution that is recurring loss gets wage board."

Asked why he did not visit the protesting workers and try to get them off the hunger strike, he said, "I do what I am ordered to do."

BJMC Khulna informed

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**PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 14**  
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 5-15 12-45 3-45 5-19 7-00  
JAMAAT 5-50 1-15 4-00 5-22 7-30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

# Lost in despair

Families of Keraniganj fire victims in grief as dear ones suffer burns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the heaviest of hearts, Nazrul Islam, a rickshaw puller from Kurigram's Nageshwari upazila, was narrating how the Keraniganj factory fire had shattered all his dreams in the blink of an eye.

Nazrul's eldest son Shahajul Islam, 19, a student of Kurigram High School, is receiving treatment at the ICU of Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery with 70 percent of his body burnt in the Wednesday fire.

An indomitable Shahajul had been working at the factory alongside his studies to support the family, Nazrul said, adding that Shahajul was also saving money for his sister's wedding.

"Groaning at the hospital bed, he was telling me that he would never work at a factory again if he could recover this time and that he wants to continue his studies," the father told The Daily Star yesterday as tears rolled down his face.

Some nine other victims of the incident have been kept on life support at the ICU of the institute while eight others have been admitted to the high dependency unit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital's (DMCH) burn unit.

All of them are in critical condition with 50 to 100 percent of their bodies burnt,

doctors said.

Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator of the institute, said he had never experienced such extent of burns in a single fire incident.

"I have witnessed many fire tragedies in my career, but never received this kind of patients with severe burns in a single fire incident.

"All the injured have inhalation burns with third-degree burn injury in their body," said Dr Samanta, who has been in this profession for decades.

After the incident, 31 patients with severe burns were admitted to DMCH's burn unit. Twelve of them died on Thursday.

Relatives of the fire victims demanded stern action against the factory owner for failing to ensure fire safety and a better work environment.

"My husband would not have suffered so severely had there been another exit of the building," said Nazma Begum, wife of factory-in-charge Firoz Islam, 38, who was admitted at the ICU of Sheikh Hasina institute.

Around 300 people worked in two shifts at Prime Pet and Plastic Industries in Keraniganj's Chunkutia area. Around 150 people, including many women, were working when the fire broke out on Wednesday afternoon.

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# Sangram office vandalised

Police take editor into safe custody

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mob yesterday vandalised the office of The Daily Sangram in the capital's Boro Moghbazar over running a report which termed executed war criminal Abdul Quader Molla a "martyr".

Police took its Editor Abul Asad into safe custody, said Sub-Inspector Tamij Uddin of Hatirjheel police station.

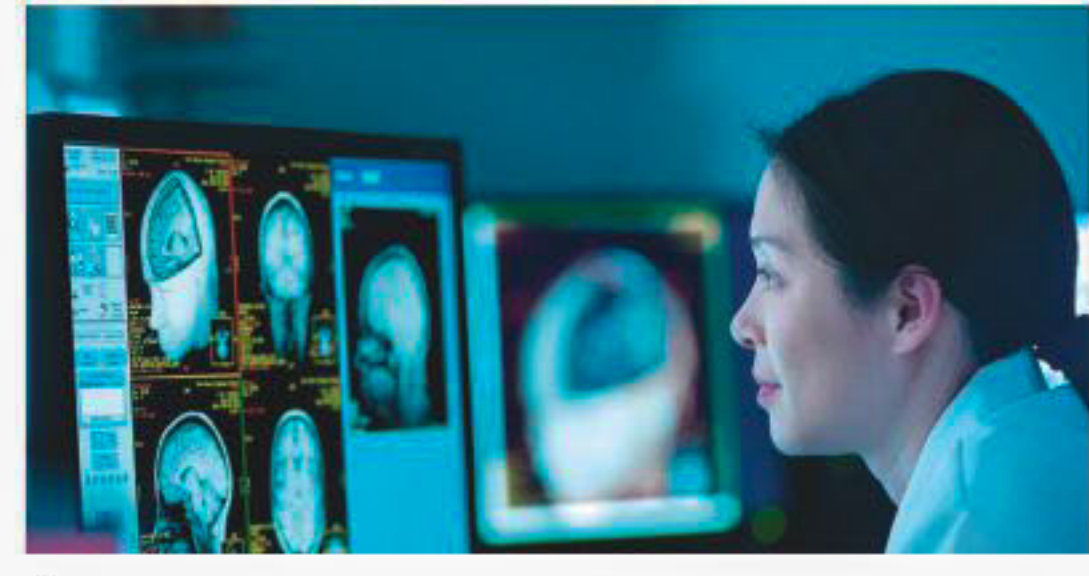
Quader Molla, former assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, was hanged at the old Dhaka central jail in 2013 in a case over committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

On Thursday, the newspaper ran a report under the headline "Today is the sixth martyrdom anniversary of Shaheed Abdul Quader Molla".

Angered by the report, Muktijuddho Mancha announced that it would lay seize to the newspaper

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# Scientists devise 'lifespan clock'



AFP, Paris

An Australian research team say they have come up with a "lifespan clock" which provides accurate maximum age estimates for vertebrates, a key variable in the study of both living and extinct animals.

The scientists identified specific areas -- called CpG sites -- in DNA which have been linked to lifespan and then checked them against existing databases of animal ages, according to a paper published in the journal Nature Research.

"Using 252 whole genomes and databases of animal age and promoter sequences, we show a pattern across vertebrates," they said.

"We also derive a predictive lifespan clock... (which) accurately predicts maximum lifespan in vertebrates."

The scientists, led by Benjamin Mayne at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in Western Australia, said

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# 3 die after drinking toxic spirit

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Three youths including a player of Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishthan (BKSP) died of toxic spirit consumption in Kushtia town early yesterday.

The dead are basketball player Zihadur Rahman Sazid, 19, of Aruapara, his friends Fahim Hossain, 23, of Kuthipara, and Pavel Rahman, 23, of Thanapara areas in the town, said police.

Zihad and his friends gathered at Kushtia Public Library ground on Thursday afternoon to celebrate his birthday, said Golam Mostafa, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kushtia Model Police Station.

They bought some spirit from a Rafi Homeo Pharmacy in Station Road area, and mixed it up with a locally manufactured "energy drink", said the OC quoting the deceased's friends.

As six of them fell sick after drinking it, others took them to Kushtia General Hospital, he

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A new bridge is being built alongside the existing Dhaleshwari bridge on Dhaka-Mawa highway in Munshiganj. The new bridge, likely to be opened in June next year, will facilitate smooth flow of traffic on the highway after the inauguration of Padma bridge. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Eight lakh yaba pills seized

4 members of a drug gang arrested in Cox's Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

They are the members of the "father-son syndicate" of yaba trade.

They dominated the drug trafficking business for over the past decade in Teknaf. In the last 10 months, they smuggled at least 30 lakh yaba pills into Bangladesh and continued drug dealing amid a country-wide crackdown.

Finally, Rab held all four members of the syndicate. Nur Alam alias Nur Hafez, 30, Md Sohel, 27, Syed Nur, 27, and Nur Alam alias Kalu, 35, were arrested in Hnila union of Teknaf early yesterday.

Alam, whose name appears on the home ministry's list of top yaba dealers, was the kingpin.

A Rab-7 team arrested them with 8.10 lakh yaba pills in Rangikhali area after midnight, Mashrur Rahman, assistant superintendent of police, told The Daily Star.

Officers also seized six firearms and 70 bullets from their possession.

The arrestees are the second generations of yaba traders in their families, Mashrur said.

Kalu's father Dalilur Rahman died two years ago while the fathers of the rest are on the run, he added.

Yaar Mohammad, Sayed Hossain, and Sabbir Ahmed, fathers of Alam, Syed, and Sohel ran yaba trafficking gangs in Teknaf for a decade, the officer claimed.

On October 28, a Rab-15 team arrested a Rohingya man and recovered 8 lakh yaba pills from his possession.

During interrogation, Alam yesterday admitted that the consignment was supposed to be delivered to him, said

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