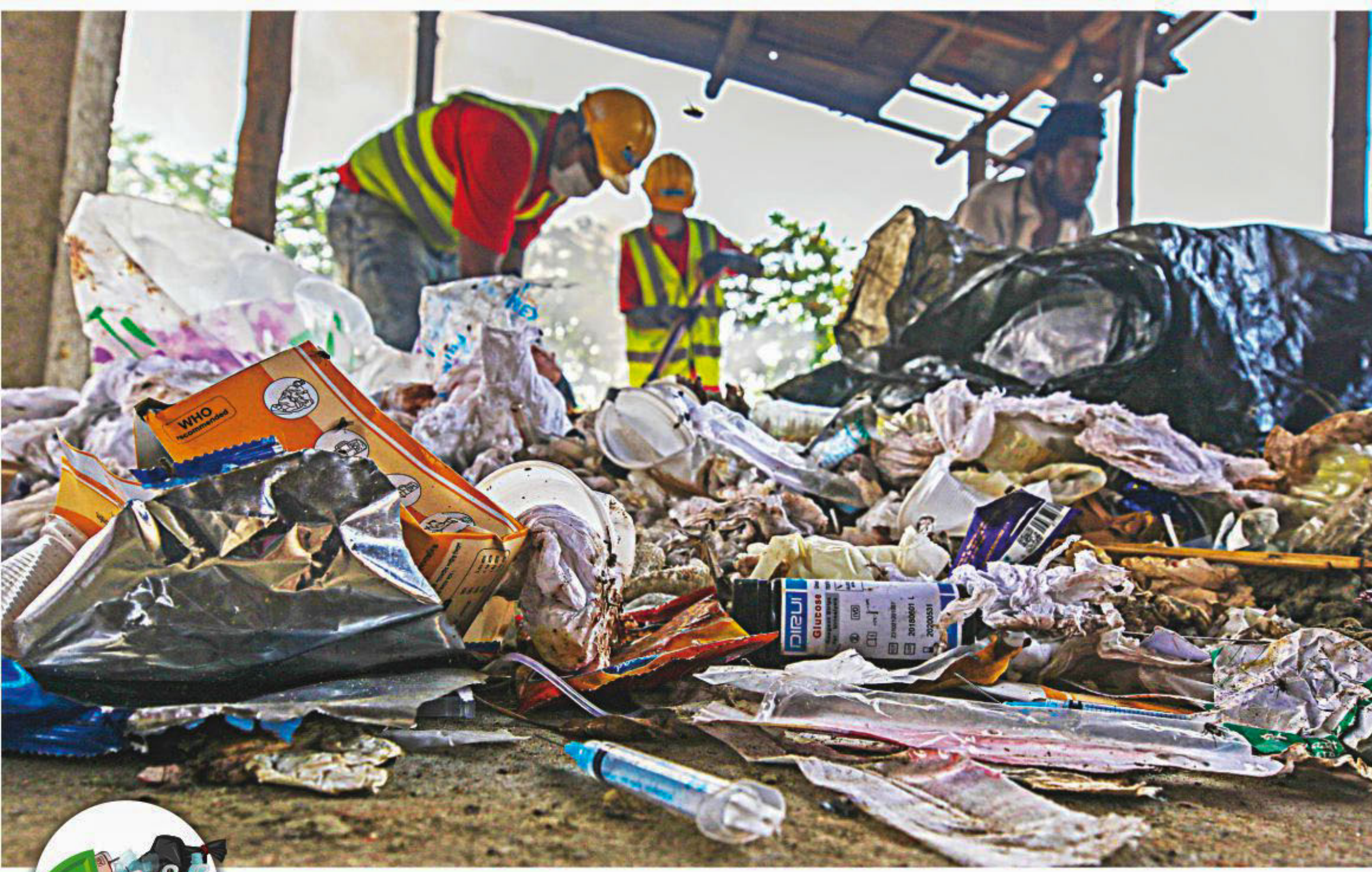


Piling up medical waste discarded thoughtlessly at landfills in city corporation areas pose serious threat to public health. Divisional cities, excluding the capital, have around 1,380 healthcare establishments -- public and private -- that produce over 20 tonnes of medical waste every day. To draw attention to this alarming issue, The Daily Star has started a series on medical waste management in major cities across the country. In this instalment of the series, we look at medical waste management in Chattogram city.



MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

Workers of Seba Sangstha, a non-government organisation, pick up medical waste to burn those in open-pit method at Ananda Bazar of Halishahar area in the port city. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

88 hospitals, 182 diagnostic centres ZERO incinerators

Arun Bikash Dey, Chattogram

Not a single hospital or diagnostic centre in Chattogram has the capacity to dispose clinical waste properly, posing serious health risks.

Even the lone private organisation entrusted by Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) and Department of Environment (DoE) to dispose medical waste in Chattogram, does not have an incinerator.

According to health service officials, a total of 88 hospitals and 182 diagnostic centres are operating in Chattogram.

Sources said none of the hospitals and diagnostic centres have their own mechanism to incinerate clinical waste.

Even Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and Chattogram General Hospital (CGH), the two main government hospitals of the city, do not have incinerator machines.

According to experts, clinical waste must be collected separately, and should be disposed with incinerator to avoid any public health risks.

Contacted, Dr Serajul Islam Chowdhury, a former professor of dermatology at CMCH, said if hospital waste is not disposed separately, it may pose risk of communicable diseases and infections to others. Pneumonia, diarrhoea, tetanus, hepatitis B and C and even HIV/AIDS are common diseases contaminated due to improper waste management, he said.

Only one private organisation, Chattogram Seba Sangstha, has been working to dispose

clinical waste since 2015, after signing a memorandum of understanding with CCC.

The organisation collects clinical waste only from those hospitals and diagnostic centres that have signed contracts with it. According to officials, 60 percent hospitals and diagnostic centres operating in the port city have signed contract with them.

However, this organisation does not have an incinerator machine, and disposes the waste in a designated place on the CCC landfill in Halishahar, using some local machines and manual process.

Upon a visit to the spot recently, workers of the organisation were seen using pit-hole method to burn the wastes, causing air pollution.

Meanwhile, the 40 percent hospitals and diagnostic centres which do not have contracts with Seba Sangstha continue to dispose of medical waste together with general waste.

The 1,313-bed CMCH -- that accommodates over 2,500 patients a day -- generates seven and a half tonnes of waste a day, including general waste.

The hospital is equipped with three clearly marked, covered bins across the building -- red for sharp objects, yellow for infectious but non-sharp objects and black bins for general waste.

During a recent visit there, clinical waste was seen being mixed with general waste and dumped in the central garbage bin of the hospital, with dogs and crows spreading those around.

Asked, Dr Akhterul Islam, deputy director of CMCH, said they initiated the process of buying an incinerator but could not due to its high price. "It will cost Tk 10 crore," he said, adding, "Instead, we have signed a contract with Seba Sangstha to collect and dispose our waste at a monthly charge of Tk 79,000."

Asked about dumping clinical waste mixed with general waste, he said sometimes patients' attendants put general waste in red bins, mixing it up with medical waste.

"We have instructed staff at wards to monitor it, but despite this, it cannot be controlled," he said.

CMCH has at least signed a contract with Seba Sangstha for waste disposal. Chattogram General Hospital has not even done that. During a visit recently, it was seen that gauge and saline sets were put in open garbage bins, with a murder of crows gathered around it.

Contacted, Dr Asim Kumar Nath, superintendent of CGH, said they burn clinical waste once a week through the pit-hole method.

Asked why they did not sign a contract with Seba Sangstha, he said the organisation charged a high price, which -- as government hospital -- they "could not afford".

The same situation prevailed in Jameson Red Crescent Maternity Hospital in Anderkilla. Clinical waste including saline sets and blood transfusion sets were seen in the dumpster in front of the hospital.

Locals said street children often collect saline

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Birangana faces eviction in Chuadanga as nation celebrates Victory Day

U nB, Chuadanga

A young Shukuronnessa picked up arms to liberate the country from Pakistani occupation forces in 1971. But nearly five decades after independence, her struggle to find a permanent home for herself and her family continues.

She has been living in a shack on a government land by the Kumar river in Alamganda since independence. Water Development Board has recently served her a seven-day eviction notice.

Shukuronnessa was only 22 years old when she was brutalised by the Pakistani army for helping freedom fighters but the ordeal did not stop her from fighting for the country.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman honoured women abused by the Pakistani army and their collaborators with the title "Birangana" in 1972. A process to rehabilitate them also started at his initiative, but it was stalled after his assassination.

After a High Court order in January 2014, the process to recognise Biranganas as freedom fighters started. For the first time, in October 2015, Bangladesh declared 43 Biranganas as freedom fighters. Shukuronnessa was among them and

has been receiving government benefits.

Monirul Islam, a resident of Alamganda, said Shukuronnessa's recognition came after a long struggle. The 70-year-old was living with her 10-member family on the river bank but was recently ordered to vacate the place, he said.

Shukuronnessa is at a loss. "I spent 50 years of my life on the bank of the Kumar river. I have been living here with my four children since my husband's death," she said.

"This hut is the only home we have," she said in a broken voice. "If I'm evicted, I'll be forced to live on the streets with my family at this age. I'm worried and can't sleep at night."

Former commander of Alamganda Muktijoddha unit, Shafiqur Rahman Jowadar, sought the prime minister's intervention for arranging a permanent home for the Birangana.

Chuadanga Deputy Commissioner Nazrul Islam Sarkar said the government has taken several projects for the homeless which would facilitate thousands of people.

"It's unfortunate that a woman who endured untold cruelty and fought for our flag is now struggling to find a space she can call home," he said. "I've instructed the upazila nirbahi officer to take necessary steps to resolve the matter," he added.

Narendra Modi lauds Bangladesh's progress

Cites Sheikh Hasina's dynamic leadership as reason at meeting with outgoing Bangladeshi envoy

U nB, Dhaka

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday commended Bangladesh's remarkable progress in every sector under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He made the remarks when outgoing Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Syed Muazzem Ali made a farewell call on him at his office.

During the 30-minute meeting, Modi conveyed his regards to Sheikh Hasina and expressed his appreciation for inviting

him to Bangladesh for the birth centenary celebrations of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman next year.

"I look forward to attending the ceremony," Modi told the envoy.

He also thanked the outgoing high commissioner for his contributions to promote India-Bangladesh relations during his five-year tenure.

The envoy presented Modi a framed nakshi kantha, as a symbol of traditional Bengali craft.



Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Syed Muazzem Ali made a farewell call on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the latter's office in New Delhi yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED



To mark the Victory Day, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and Bangladesh Charushilpi Sangsad organised a day-long painting event on Liberation War history. PHOTO: STAR

Art camp on Liberation War at National Martyrs' Memorial

Our Correspondent, Savar

Marking Victory Day, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and Bangladesh Charushilpi Sangsad organised a daylong art camp on Liberation War history at the National Martyrs' Memorial premises yesterday.

At least 30 renowned painters and artists displayed their Liberation War-themed works at the event.

The event was attended by thousands of people from all walks of life, who came to the memorial premises to pay tribute to the Liberation War martyrs.

This was the first time such an event has been organised, AM Mostak Ahmed, deputy director of the fine arts department of Shilpakala Academy said.

The art camp aims to highlight Bangladesh's cultural tradition, Saifur Rahman, a freelance artist, said. The country develops culturally when more people

participate in events like this, he added.

Among the issues and scenarios portrayed in the art camp were Bangabandhu's 7th March speech, the early days of the war, common people's search for safety, and Pakistan army's surrender on December 16.

Visiting the event, Abdul Momin, a 65-year-old farmer from Manikganj, said, "This event should be organised all over the country to help spread the real history of the Liberation War, especially to the new generation."

A representative of this new generation, third-grader Mukta, said the event inspired her enough to go home and start painting on similar topics.

Meanwhile, Dhaka district police and Shilpakala Academy organised another day-long cultural programme at the National Martyrs' Memorial premises, where renowned singers and dancers performed.

Will drive out infiltrators from AL: Quader

U nB, Dhaka

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said infiltrators in the party, if any, will be driven out during the next AL council.

The road transport and bridges minister made the remark while paying homage to martyrs of the Liberation War at the National Memorial on Victory Day.

"We won't compromise with anti-liberation forces and their successors," he said. "Only those who are pro-liberation can join AL."

Country to experience shorter, warmer winter again: experts

Climate change, lack of greenery blamed

U nB, Dhaka

With winter getting gradually warmer in Bangladesh for nearly a decade, meteorologists and climate experts say this winter will be even much warmer and shorter than previous years, as the mercury is not falling as expected.

According to statistics provided by Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), people of Bangladesh are experiencing lower intensity of cold this winter.

The temperature is higher than it was in previous years during December. Besides, the Met office

said, the length of this winter is likely to be shorter as it may end in early February when days will start getting longer.

According to a recent report released by Global Climate Risk Index 2019, Bangladesh is the seventh most affected country in the world due to "extreme weather events" over 20 years between 1998 and 2017.

The report also said 407 people died in Bangladesh in 2017 due to extreme weather-related events, while the country suffered an economic loss of about US \$2,826.68 million during

the period.

Bazlur Rashid, a meteorologist at Bangladesh Meteorology Department, said the country has been experiencing relatively warmer winter for a decade, with the gradual fall in cold intensity while the country's overall temperature has increased around 1.2 degrees Celsius during the period.

"There's no exception this winter as well. The mercury is not falling to the level it should be at this time. The average temperature is 1-2 degrees Celsius higher than previous

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Amid festivity, Victory Day was celebrated nationwide yesterday. Clockwise from top, children rejoice at Shaheed Minar in Sylhet. A procession brought out on the occasion in Kazir Dewri area of Chattogram city. People in droves take part in a colourful parade in Mymensing's Shombhuganj bridge area. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR, COLLECTED

