

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 Rajshahi city.



**MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT**

Clockwise from left, unsorted medical waste resemble a hillock at Nowdapara landfill. A worker separates recyclable items there without any safety gear, putting herself at health risk. The city's lone incinerator at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital is not fully functional; its chimney has broken down recently.

PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

# Inaction making situation worse

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

State-run Rajshahi Medical College Hospital has coloured-bins at all of its wards for separating hazardous and infectious medical waste from general ones.

The separation, which is a mandatory for safe disposal, becomes meaningless. Because, at the end of every day when the hospital staff collect the bins, they mix most waste up and dump those at a designated point inside the compound.

The situation is worse in case of the private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres as they dump unsorted waste at another selected point at the city's busy C&B intersection. Besides, those are also dumped in public dustbins.

In this way, all the city's 205 healthcare establishments have not been safely disposing medical waste. The authorities concerned are not taking any action either.

It happens despite the fact that more than half of around three tonnes of medical waste generated daily are infectious and pose health risks, said health and environment officials.

For any healthcare facility, not having an incinerator, autoclave and effluent treatment plant to dispose of hazardous waste is a punishable offence, said Dr Gopendra Nath Acharya, regional director of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Rajshahi.

"They [hospital, clinic authorities] do not arrange those on the plea of inability," said the official.

He said coloured containers are provided to government institutions while private ones are asked to arrange those on their own.

"They separate those waste, but the move doesn't bring results due to absence of proper disposal system," said Dr Gopendra.

Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) has been managing medical waste since 2001 although not in proper way, he said.

RCC Mayor AHM Khairuzzaman Liton said, "Medical waste management has been a matter of concern for years. We only took responsibility of carrying the waste to Nowdapara landfill."

For a better management, the city corporation signed an agreement with PRISM in March. The NGO is likely to

go into operation next year, he added.

**SURVEY ON MEDICAL WASTE** Neither the RCC nor the DGHS has authentic data on the quantity of medical waste.

Before signing the deal, PRISM conducted a survey, said its Programme Coordinator Majharul Islam.

The survey has found that 205 healthcare facilities -- four government hospitals, 21 private hospitals, 95 general and dental clinics, 80 diagnostic and pathological centres and five blood banks -- generate at least 10.31 tonnes of general waste and 2.77 tonnes of medical waste on a daily basis.

Around 52.53 percent of the medical waste are infectious. Among the rest, 1,203 tonnes, 43.45 percent, are recyclable plastic waste, and 0.112 tonnes, 4.03 percent, are sharp objects.

**RMCH INCINERATOR ITSELF A RISK** Only RMCH had set up an incinerator and all other medical institutions depend on it. But, the incinerator itself poses health risks as it is located between two wards inside the hospital, said Dr Gopendra Nath.

Besides, the incinerator's burning capacity came down to 300 degree Celsius from required 3,000°C, said health experts.

Hospital sources said the incinerator had gone out of order many years ago and recently its chimney broke down.

**RCC'S MANAGEMENT** Chief Conservancy Officer Sheikh Md Mamun said they manage 400 tonnes of clinical waste on an average.

Two supervisors ensure collection on rickshaw-vans from 205 medical units and then a group of workers transport those at the landfill by a truck. They bury amputated parts of human bodies.

While visiting, this correspondent found medical waste stored inside a room at the selected point inside RMCH, and on a road in front of it. The RCC staff were collecting those without wearing gloves.

The stored waste included bloodstained cottons, gauges, bandages, saline bags, pipes and syringes that were supposed to be segregated at the hospital.

Shariful Islam Masum, an RCC supervisor, said the hospital staff

dump the waste on the road instead of the designated room to avoid serious odour.

He said they collect such waste from private hospitals and clinics in the same way.

Shadhin Islam, driver of a truck, said workers sometimes get hurt with sharp objects while loading the vehicle.

At the landfill, The Daily Star found several boys and girls collecting recyclable items as soon as an RCC truck dumped medical waste.

Later, one Asadul Islam from the city's Kalur Mor was sorting those out and putting them in sacks.

Asad said he collects per kg of such items at Tk 50 from the children and sell those to factories at Tk 60. "It's my business and I do it to make a living," he said.

This correspondent also saw medical waste in open dustbins in the city's Beel Shimla, Laxmipur and Terokhadia.

**DOE NOTICE OVERLOOKED** Mizanur Rahman, deputy director of Rajshahi regional office of Department of Environment, said the hospital staff

## Nation left frustrated by AL council: Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday alleged that the nation has been left frustrated by the 21st council of Awami League as no direction regarding "restoration" of democracy and resolving the country's problems came from it.

"Awami League has been working for a decade to restore one-party governing system by ignoring the constitution... the nation expected this council will show a path to restore democracy, but that didn't happen. So, the nation has become frustrated," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

He came up with the remarks while talking to reporters after a milad mahfil at BNP Nayapaltan central office.

Fakhrul alleged that the ruling party also failed to give any direction from its council for the country's economic, social and political development, and resolve persisting crises.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been reelected the president of Awami League while Obaidul Quader its general secretary at the second-day of the party's two-day national council yesterday.

Fakhrul said AL council only showered praises on an individual and a party instead of focusing on national issues. "They're moving ahead with their goal to restore one-party rule, ignoring people's plea for democracy," he alleged.

Asked when BNP may hold its council, he said they are facing various problems in carrying out political activities due to an adverse political situation and for lack of democratic space.

Fakhrul also criticised some ministers for blaming BNP-Jamaat for the errors in the list of Razakars, saying it is a strategy of the ruling party to shift blame onto others to hide their own failures.

## Three die in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Three people died in two road accidents across two districts this weekend.

A motorcyclist was killed in a road accident on Thakurgaon-Dinajpur highway at Jagannathpur village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon, reports our Thakurgaon correspondent.

The victim was identified as Asaduzzaman (42), son of late Tasimuddin of Begunbari village under the same upazila. The victim was an office assistant of Thakurgaon upazila administration office.

Officer-in-Charge of Thakurgaon Police Station Md Ashkur Rahman said the accident occurred

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## Nation needs 'sustainable security' for continued dev

Says home minister

BSS, Dhaka

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday stressed the need for a "sustainable security" to continue the country's development and ensure a safe abode for future generations.

"We're working sincerely under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to this end," he told the agency.

The home minister said Bangladesh has achieved millennium development goals (MDGs) and it will also succeed in attaining the sustainable development goals (SDGs) within the stipulated period.

"Without peace and stability, no country or region can prosper and achieve goals. Our aim is to make the country a developed and prosperous one by achieving the SDGs," he said.

Kamal urged all to work together for a world of "peace and stability".

He said law enforcement agencies are

becoming more efficient to maintain law and order situation in the country.

The home minister said intelligence agencies keep vigilant to deal with security issues and they are capable of thwarting any kind of militant activities and rooting out extremism from the country.

Pointing out the government's zero tolerance policy against terrorism, militancy and drugs, Kamal said the government is continuing drives to eliminate these social menaces.

The minister said the government has clamped down on domestic extremists, adding that the drive against narcotics and other crimes will continue.

"Our law enforcement agencies are pledged-bound to control drugs and militant activities in the country," he said, urging all to generate awareness on these social menaces.

Kamal also mentioned that the home ministry is working on creating mass awareness against drugs and militancy.



Law enforcers stand guard as RMG workers demonstrate for arrears, blocking both sides of Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Abdullahpur of Uttara yesterday. Hundreds of workers started the agitation around 11am, halting vehicular movement on the highway for over five hours. They said the factory they worked at shut down without any prior notice and clearing their salaries of three months. Workers withdrew the protest in the afternoon with assurance from the owner of meeting their demands, said police.

PHOTO: STAR



Children pose with high-ups of Bank Asia and eminent artist Mustafa Monwar at an art competition organised by the bank on the occasion of its 20th anniversary at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Man's body found in Narayanganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj.

Police recovered the body of an unidentified man from Buriganga river in Fatullah area of Narayanganj's Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

Mizanur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Fatullah Model Police Station, said they received information from locals that a body was seen floating in the river. Police rushed to the spot and recovered the body from the river bank in Munshikhola area of Fatullah.

The body was sent to Narayanganj General Hospital morgue for autopsy and they are trying to ascertain his identity, said the inspector, speculating that the man is aged around 35. There were no injury marks on the body and the exact cause of death can be known after autopsy, he added.

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