

# Dhaka Day by Day

## Fighting Society, Not Men

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

Men haters! Antagonists of marriage! Un-feminine, hard women! These are only some of the allegations used whenever the word 'feminists' is mentioned. Such comments kept reverberating in my ears as I meandered through the tiny alleys of Madhubazar for my interview with 'Nari Pakkha', a feminist group, or rather a pro-women's group. I reached the office after getting lost a few times — it is truly amazing how people on the street insist on giving wrong directions with such alacrity! As soon as I had uttered the word 'Nari' (woman) an old man nodded vigorously and soon I found myself outside a family planning clinic. Talk about one track minds!

The lady (I later found out her name was Fazila Banu Lily) greeted me with a sweet smile and looked very feminine in her cool cotton sari. Before I could find my elusive sheet of questions, the little room was filled with vibrant, self-assured women. They included Ferdous Azim, Parveen Hassan, Rina Sengupta, Mahbuba Mahmud, Bahar Jaan and Rubi Gaznavi. Noticing my momentary blankness as I racked my brains to remember the first question, Ferdous Azim took the initiative and started to talk about when and how 'Nari Pakkha' was formed. The conception of 'Nari Pakkha', she said, took place when a group of women (mainly friends and classmates) decided to form a study group to read and discuss.

among other things, literature. This idea fizzled out along with an attempt to bring out a publication. But in 1983 on the 13th of May, an international workshop for women took place and was attended by about 40 women from different organisations (mainly NGOs). This is when one of the group members, Shirin Huq, first made the others aware that there was the need for a proper organisation where issues concerning and related to women (such as health, employment, family planning) could be addressed. As Ferdous Azim pointed out "the main objective was to draw on our own experiences and come to stand points on various issues out of the workshop, through an exchange of views". The seeds for 'Nari Pakkha' had been sown and it was only a matter of time for it to become a recognised entity. Now 'Nari Pakkha' has a total of 66 members in Bangladesh with 31 from Dhaka.

"So what does Nari Pakkha do?" I asked. The basic activities of the organisation, the members told me, centre around bringing up relevant issues concerning women and discussing them. Apart from regular meetings 'Nari Pakkha' holds what is called a 'Mukta Forum' (free forum) where any topic, not necessarily women's issues, worth discussing can be brought up. This forum is usually attended by 40-50 people including non-members. In addition to verbal discussions, Nari Pakkha members project their ideas through writing. Their main objective is to create awareness "to bring women's questions to the forefront at the national, political and personal level."

"Is it true that you, i.e. Nari Pakkha members, are against the very idea of marriage?" I asked. This was followed by a burst of laughter. "We are not against marriage, most of us are

married with children and are very domesticated", they said. "What we object to is the fact that for a woman marriage is the only choice, the only option, an option that must be adhered to at any cost, even at the cost of her life". Nari Pakkha's view on marriage is that it should be a sharing of a life between two equal partners. It should not be a form of slavery. During the women's movement demanding the hanging of Munir and Khuku in the Rima murder case, the stand that 'Nari Pakkha' took was quite different. The question that it raised was that why should we solely blame Munir and Khuku for Rima's death? Why should we not blame the society which expects a woman to put up with unbearable mental and physical cruelty just for the sake of keeping the marriage? Parents are guilty of instilling such false values into their children from the time they are born and so should also be held responsible for such tragic consequences. Nari Pakkha has held several panels of discussion and writing seminars on the issue of women and violence. This issue, Nari Pakkha says, should not be looked upon as a law and order situation but as part and parcel of women's position in society.

The members then brought up another issue — the testing of a new form of contraceptive implant on village women. The contraceptive includes 5 capsules which are injected into the arm and supposedly prevents pregnancy for 5 years. What Nari Pakkha protests against, is the fact that this drug is untested and its side effects are not known since it takes some time before they show up. The women are in effect, treated like guinea pigs, often pressurised into taking these shots whether they like it or not. Nari Pakkha's stand, which it has projected through writing, is to hold responsible the agency that is administering the drug without proper follow ups, for such unethical behaviour.

"And how do your husbands feel about your involvement in 'Nari Pakkha'?" I asked. One of the members answered this with, "My husband is a little sceptical sometimes, and resents the amount of time I have to spend even after work for 'Nari Pakkha', but on the whole, he is very supportive especially in times of a crisis." Others expressed similar sentiments.

The activities of 'Nari Pakkha' are by no means limited to just discussion and writing seminars on women's issues. Other projects include one named 'Phulke' (started by Surya Huq) which has established 24 child care centres in Bangladesh, and a documentary film on the SAARC 1990 girl-child year.

With meetings and seminars to attend, cultural shows to put up to raise funds, services to NGOs, projects to initiate while meeting the demands of their own professions and families, these women, I realised, spend a tremendous amount of time and effort for a cause they believe in. This cause is to establish a women's identity, independent of her role as a mother, daughter, sister or wife, to make us see her as, above all, an individual, a human being. The sight of three young female medical students zooming past me in mopeds as I went home, seemed to me, a good omen towards such an end.

Mahbub, the inaugural function was also addressed by the Additional Secretary in-charge of Women's Affairs Ministry, K M Hossain and Project Director of Women's Affairs Department Dr Nizam Uddin Al-Hossaini. Later, the State Minister planted a sapling at the premises of Women's Affairs Department. Meanwhile, the destitute women have been supplying the saplings from their nursery at 'Destitute Women's Training Centre at Savar', a vocational project of the department.

## BCL demands repeal of Indemnity Act

The Bangladesh Chhatra League BCL (S-A) Thursday demanded repeal of the Indemnity Act as incorporated in the Fifth Constitution Amendment to pave the way for the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, reports BSS.

BCL (S-A) organised a rally in front of Madhu's Canteen in observance of 'national mourning day' Thursday on which day in 1975 Sheikh Mujib and his family members were killed. The rally was addressed by Shahe Alam, Ashim Kumar Ukil, Jahangir Sattar Tinku and SM Kamal Hossain.

The BCL leaders said without the trial of the killers of Mujib rule of law and democracy could not be established adding that it was needed to establish rule of law and stop the politics of coups and killings.

The leaders demanded scrapping of the Indemnity Ordinance and appealed to all for creating public opinion in favour of its repeal. The leaders expressed their firm determination saying the merger of BCL and JCL would implement the ideals of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to build a country free from all sorts of exploitation and injustice.

## None expelled in RU on JCD demand

RAJSHAHI, Aug 15: The Rajshahi University authorities did not expel any activist of Chhatra Oikya Parishad as demanded by the Jatyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) recently, university officials said, reports UNB.

The RU unit of JCD in a memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor had demanded expulsion of six Chhatra Oikya Parishad activists — Babul Khan, Ayub Ali, Md Mohsin, Karim Sikder, Subrata and Shaful Islam — for their alleged involvement in campus violence.

## Role of VOA during democratic movement lauded

The National Federation of VOA Fan Clubs-Bangladesh Thursday accorded a reception to Masuma Khatun, a news caster of Voice of America-Bangla service, reports BSS.

Held at the USIS auditorium, the function was presided over by the Chairman of the federation and noted journalist Gias Kamal Chowdhury.

The speakers lauded the role of the VOA in presenting objective news during the mass upsurge of 1990 and the parliamentary polls of 1991 of Bangladesh.

They also expressed their opinion on different programmes broadcast by the VOA.

## Editor's Council polls Aug 18

The election of the executive committee of Bangladesh Council of Editors will be held on August 18 from 3 pm to 6 pm at the Press Institute of Bangladesh here, a council press release said, reports BSS.

Only the president and five vice-presidents of the council will be elected on the day as other members of the executive committee have already been elected unopposed, the press release said.

## Friday

### Morning Session

- 8:00: Opening announcement, Al-Quran, programme summary
- 8:10: News in Bangla
- 8:15: Drama series — Chronicles of Narina
- 8:45: Natan Kuri — Dance
- 10:00: News in English
- 10:05: MacOyver
- 11:00: Moner Mukurey
- 12:22: Closing

### Evening Session

- 3:00: Opening announcement, Al-Quran, programme summary
- 3:10: Recitation from the Tripitak
- 3:12: Aor Dishari
- 3:32: Movie of the week — Thelegend of Rustum
- 5:20: News in Bangla - Remaining part of movie of the week
- 6:00: Shikkhangon
- 6:25: Jiban-o-Prajukti
- 6:40: Durdarshan
- 7:00: Malancha
- 8:00: News in Bangla
- 8:30: Film — Cosby Show
- 9:00: Drama — 'Manoshi-je-Amar'
- 10:00: News in English
- 10:25: Film — L.A. Law
- 11:30: Khabar/The News
- 11:45: Closing



Slum dwellers holding rally in the city Thursday in support of their demands. — Star photo



Md Shahjahan-brn-Alam, Convenor, Cultural function committee of 'Harano Diner Sangeet Mancha' handing over a cheque for Tk 28,001/- to Sheikh Hasina, Leader of the Opposition for relief work.

## DPRK keen to expand trade

The Ambassador of North Korea in Bangladesh Kang Dal Fon called on Commerce Minister M K Anwar Thursday, reports BSS.

They exchanged views on the existing bilateral trade and economic relation between the two countries.

Fon expressed his keen interest to expand the volume of trade with Bangladesh.

The Minister assured him of all possible cooperation for further strengthening the relationship between the two countries in the field of trade and commerce.

Fon also handed over an invitation letter from his government to the minister for attending the G-77 ministerial meeting

## Appointment of women MPs as Palli Rationing Chairmen slated

An Awami League MP A S M Feroz on Tuesday took strong exception to appointment of women MPs as Chairman of Palli Rationing Committees, reports BSS.

Feroz said it was a matter of regret that the Ministry of Food has circulated a notice in the House stating that women MPs have been made chairmen of the Palli Rationing Committees in their respective upazilas. He said this House has 300 elected members and the appointment of women MPs as chairmen of the Palli Rationing committees has breached the privilege of the elected members of the Sangsad.

The Deputy Speaker said parliament was not the place for the circulation of any government notice and wanted to know who had circulated the notice. "Since the Sangsad did not circulate the notice we

disown it," he added. As the Deputy Speaker was making his observation on this issue, MPs from Awami League, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and other groups stood on their legs and started protesting the issuance of the circular at the top of their voice.

The Deputy Speaker was heard saying that the circular had been circulated without the knowledge and permission of the Speaker.

At this stage State Minister for Food Nazmul Huda took the floor and said since the House was going to be prorogued, the notice in question had been circulated to remove the tension and confusion of the MPs.

Intervening, the Deputy Speaker again wanted to know under whose permission this notice has been circulated in the House. "I am going to take action," he said.

Nazmul Huda said a lot of

things do take place in the House. So what has been done is not harmful, he added.

He, however, hastened to add that if the MPs opposed the notice he would withdraw it Wednesday.

Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali directed the members not to issue any circular in this way. All circulars will have to be routed through the Sangsad secretariat, he added.

Workers' Party leader Rashed Khan Menon said after the announcement of the budget prices of essentials had started shooting up, much to the hardship of the people.

He said though the VAT was now in vogue in many countries, the people of this country could not accept it because of its application in an unplanned way.

Menon said the economic system of this country was being run under the prescriptions of the World Bank, the IMF and the donors. The economic management of this government is not much different from that of the past government.

He said the Finance Minister had himself admitted that his hands were tied. He urged the Finance Minister to place the policy papers and documents on economic issues before the House.

The Finance Minister must state what strings the donors had attached to foreign aid, he said adding if Pakistan, Indonesia and other countries could reject the dictations of the international financial institutions, why Bangladesh could not do so.

## What's on today...

### Rabindra Sangeet Sammilon

Jatiya Rabindra Sangeet Sammilon holds a day-long programme in connection with observance of Rabindranath Tagore's 50th death anniversary. The day's programme will begin at 9.30 am today (Friday) with holding of a discussion on Tagore. Dr Khan Sarwar Murshid and Manjur-i-Mowla will participate in the discussion to be chaired by poetess Begum Sulfa Kamal. The discussion will be followed by rendering chorus dance and recitation from poems.

The second session, include a musical soiree and staging of a number of dramas, at 4.30 pm.

Noted singers, recitists actors and dancers will participate in the session.

### BCIC Gold Medal '91

The 'Chairman Gold Medal - '91' introduced by the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) for the children of the BCIC employees will be awarded today (Friday) at 4.30 pm at a function at the BCIC auditorium. The medals will be given only to those who secured star marks in the SSC examinations. Industries Minister Shamsul Islam Khan will distribute the awards as chief guest, Industries Secretary Shaful Alam will also be present as special guest.

### Drama at Guide House

Drama Circle, the oldest group theatre of the country, will stage two one-act plays written by Banaphul today (Friday) at 7 pm at the Guide House auditorium in the city. Today's show will be held in aid of Dhaka Deaf Association on invitation only. Besides, the regular show of the plays will be held tomorrow (Saturday) at 7 pm at the same venue. All members of the theatre group have been requested to witness the show.

### NWF press conference

National Workers Federation has convened a press conference at the Press Club today (Friday) at 11 am. Central leaders of the federation will address it.

## ... and tomorrow

### City Corporation budgets

Mayor of the Dhaka City Corporation Mirza Abbas MP will present the corporation's new budget of 1991-92 fiscal and the revised budget of 1990-91 fiscal at a press conference at the Gulshan Mayor Bhaban tomorrow (Saturday) at 11-30 in the morning.

### PIB discussion

The Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) will hold a discussion on 'PIB's role in development of professional standard of the newspapers' at the National Press Club auditorium tomorrow (Saturday) at 4.30 pm. The discussion will be followed by a tea-party. Compiled by NA

## BNP interviews 82 candidates

The BNP central election-catering committee Thursday interviewed 82 candidates seeking BNP nominations to contest the bye elections to 11 constituencies on September 11, reports BSS.

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleida Zia presided over the interview session held at Prime Minister's Sugandha office.

Bye elections in 11 constituencies are being held following the vacation of four seats each by Begum Khaleida Zia and former President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, one seat each by Abdur Razzak and Tofael Ahmed of Awami League and one seat due to the death of Awami League member Ilyas Ahmed.

A BNP source said the highest number of 25 applications were received for Dhaka 9. The number of applications received in other constituencies are 15 in Dhaka 5, three in Chittagong 8, 10 in Bogra 7, four each in Rangpur 1, 2 and 6 while three in Rangpur 5, 8 in Mardaripur 1, three in Mardaripur 2 and three in Bhola 2.

Begum Zia vacated Dhaka 5, Dhaka 9, Chittagong 8 and Bogra 7, Ershad vacated Rangpur 1, 2, 5 and 6, Abdur Razzak vacated Mardaripur 2, Tofael Ahmed vacated Bhola 2 and Mardaripur 1 was vacated due to the death of Awami League Member Ilyas Ahmed.

BNP sources said the BNP candidates would be finalised within a day or two.

## Visit successful says Hunger Project VC

Dr. Peter Bourne, Vice-chairman of Global Board of Hunger Project and former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations Thursday said that he was impressed to see the activities of the government after the recent devastating cyclone, reports BSS.

Addressing a press conference at the National Press Club, Dr. Peter Bourne said that he had found people talking good about the present democratic government of Bangladesh.

He also described his three-day visit to Bangladesh very successful, a press release of the Hunger Project said.

## Salam Talukder blasts armed attack on CU halls

BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukder Thursday condemned the attack of some armed outsiders on Chittagong University Wednesday, reports BSS.

In a statement he said the armed miscreants during the attack on the university also detained Chhatra Dal leader Shamim Ibrahim and others. Expressing his concern over the attack, Talukder warned that the present democratic government would not allow any attempt of the vested quarters to vitiate the peaceful atmosphere in the educational arena by turning the campus into battle field.

**ড্রামা সার্কল**  
— এর ১৫তম  
প্রযোজনা  
বনফুলের হাসির নাটক  
কবয়ঃ ও নবসংস্করণ  
পাইড হাউস মঞ্চে শনিবার  
১৭ আগস্ট সন্ধ্যা ৭টায়।

## 'Plant 3 trees against cutting one'

State Minister for Social Welfare and Women's Affairs, Tariqul Islam, Thursday urged the women to plant saplings widely for checking environmental degradation and keeping trees as valuable asset, reports BSS.

He was speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural function of a week-long tree plantation programme, organised by the Women's Affairs Department here.

The State Minister said, valuable perennial trees would also help the owners financially in future.

He advised the mothers to

plant at least five valuable trees like teak and mehant per girl child, so that their grown up children after twenty years may be the owners of those trees.

Islam urged all conscious people to plant three at least against cutting one.

Presided over by the Director of Women's Affairs Department, Mrs Guile Afroz

Mahbub, the inaugural function was also addressed by the Additional Secretary in-charge of Women's Affairs Ministry, K M Hossain and Project Director of Women's Affairs Department Dr Nizam Uddin Al-Hossaini.

Later, the State Minister planted a sapling at the premises of Women's Affairs Department.

Meanwhile, the destitute women have been supplying the saplings from their nursery at 'Destitute Women's Training Centre at Savar', a vocational project of the department.

## Weather

### No change in temperature

By Staff Correspondent  
Light or moderate rain or shower is likely to occur at many places over Chittagong, Khulna, Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions during the next 36 hours commencing 6pm on Thursday, reports Meteorological Department.

The day temperature till Saturday morning may remain nearly unchanged over the country. On Thursday, the highest temperature recorded at Jessore was 34.1 degree Celsius while the lowest temperature was 24.6 degrees recorded at Fenil.

Outlook for subsequent two days: Little change. Extended outlook for another five days: No marked change. The sun sets today (Friday) at 6.32 pm and rises tomorrow (Saturday) at 5.35 am.

Temperature and humidity in some cities and towns on Thursday were:

Cities/Towns	Max	Min	Humidity in percentage
Dhaka	30.5	27	83
Chittagong	33.6	26.6	82
Rajshahi	33.4	26	86
Khulna	32	24.8	82
Barisal	30.4	26	80
Feni	30.8	24.6	83
Sylhet	27.8	25.4	96
Jessore	34.1	26.5	86
Rangpur	30.5	25	85
Dinajpur	31.2	26.3	90
Mymensingh	28.8	25.2	97

## Course on editorial writing begins tomorrow

A one-week training course on editorial writing will begin tomorrow at the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB), a press release said, on Thursday, reports BSS.

Twenty assistant editors of the daily newspapers from outside Dhaka will participate in the course.

The course contents include the art and craft of editorial writing, evaluation of editorial comment as a distinctive part of journalistic practice, collection and maintenance of data and material for editorial writing, press laws and ethics.

Senior journalists, university teachers and legal experts will conduct different sessions of the course.