

Dhaka Day by Day

The Mystery of the Missing Children

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

ON the 4th of September at 6 pm a strange scene was witnessed by people passing by the Sheraton Hotel. A van full of policemen pulled up outside the hotel and picked up 18 children between the ages of seven and thirteen and drove off, their ears immune to the pathetic cries of protest and bewilderment. Who were those children? Why were they taken? Where were they taken to? To most people the answer was probably — who cares? After all were they not just troublesome street urchins who pestered the passengers of every car, rickshaw or scooter that stopped at the traffic lights, insisting that their measly flowers be bought? Good riddance to nuisance some might say. At least this seemed to be the attitude of the person who had enough influence to make a van full of police rush to the scene with just one phone call to the Ramna thana.

The story gets even stranger after this. While the parents of these children were going berserk trying to find their siblings, the crying infants were being taken to Mirpur Bhabagur

immediate. They called up the Ramna thana and as soon as they knew where the children were, they rushed to Mirpur Bhabagur. The end result was that ASK members successfully got the release of the children registered with them.

The action of the police was not only arbitrary but also dangerous in that since they had not verified the children's addresses and the names of their guardians at the time of picking them up, the vagrants' home is left with the responsibility of determining the bonafides of anyone who turns up to reclaim a child. Such people could well be agents of traffickers. In the case of a little girl Fatema, not registered with ASK, the Home turned away the girl's mother when she came to take her child away. She had to return following Saturday with an affidavit sworn before the magistrate before the child was returned. In the meantime a seven-year-old spent 4 days in strange surroundings weeping for her mother. One cannot fault the Home for taking such



Displaced children at ASK.

— a vagrancy home. But these children were neither destitute nor vagrants. They were children who had parents, who worked for a living. Some of them even went to school and almost all of them supported their families by selling flowers. It is understandable that people get annoyed when these children stick their hands into the car and practically force their flowers on the weary passenger. But does that justify the fact that policemen can just pick up little children indiscriminately, without any warning and take them to a strange place, not bothering to even find out if they have parents or homes to go to? They may live in the most abject conditions in a makeshift hut in a 'bust' but to them this is home. No living creature would want to be uprooted from its home, certainly not a child. Why is there no concept of the rights of children in this country? Why are law enforcing agents so concerned with disciplinary actions against little children when criminals, 'mastaans' and eve teasers run loose on the streets? These are the kind of questions raised by members of Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), the source of this strange story.

What is ASK? It is a Dhaka based legal resource centre which works with the poor and the under-privileged. The emphasis is on helping women and children in both rural and urban areas. It was originally because of ASK's involvement with working children that this incident was reported to them in the first place. Six of the children picked up that day were registered with this programme and attend monthly workshops. The day after the incident, some of the children who had managed to escape the police came running to the ASK office in Shantinagar to report it. It may be mentioned that during one of the workshops these children had developed a close relationship with the members of ASK. ASK, therefore, was the only place for them to turn to. The mothers of the missing children, too, come to the office for help. The response from the ASK members was prompt and

precautions. The police, however, should not be able to haul off young children without first informing their parents and recording their names and addresses.

ASK's promptness in releasing these children is just a small example of the extent of its concern for the underprivileged. ASK consists of a group of lawyers, educationists and social workers who provide people with more than just legal advice or legal representation. The most important function ASK performs is providing people with support services. In the case of legal court issues, say divorce, ASK tries to settle it outside the court. A member of ASK's executive committee who is also a lawyer points out, "We provide a neutral forum where issues can be settled through mediation." This certainly reduces a lot of the emotional strain and suffering of the parties concerned. Says another member, "Often just a single letter can produce very positive results." This was a reference to a case where the divorced wife of a rickshaw puller was being denied custody of her two-year-old son. The husband responded to ASK's letter to mediate the mother and eventually the child was returned to his mother.

ASK has also brought out a publication called 'Esho Ain Shikhi', a magazine designed in simple Bengali to educate people especially women and children about their rights and legal procedure. Issues cover a whole range of subjects, from child marriage, dowry, child custody, laws to wife and child abuse.

ASK is working like other legal aid organisations for the basic rights of women and children. It still needs, however, to be supported by other sectors especially the media so that these issues are projected and recognised by more than just a handful of people. Legal organisations like ASK perform an important function in society of creating awareness of people's rights and then taking constructive actions to help assert them.

Dr Kamal for consensus on vital issues

Eminent lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain called for a national consensus to consolidate democracy and solve the challenging problems of the nation, reports UNB.

In a statement Friday, Dr Hossain, Vice Chairman, Bangladesh Bar Council said "our people should demonstrate their unity by casting their votes in favour of the amendment in the coming referendum on September 15".

Referring to campus violence vitiating the academic atmosphere he advocated "normal functioning of educational institutions". Kamal Hossain said "there is imperative need to free the educational environment from arms and violence."

He impressed upon the necessity of restoring law and order effectively and workers demands resolved peacefully.

An accountable parliament and sovereign parliament which was the united demand of the people during the historic popular movement has now been established through the adoption of the 12th Constitution Amendment Bill, he maintained.

"Our Constitution recognises that power belongs to the people and the Constitution is the ultimate safeguard of the supremacy of the people," Dr Hossain said.

He deplored violent incidents taking place in the country and asked all to rise above all differences, shun violence in order to create "a congenial political environment to achieve national goals and consolidate democracy".

Chief Justice off to Australia

The Acting Chief Justice, Justice M H Rahman, left Dhaka Friday afternoon for Perth, Australia to attend the Fourth Asian Chief Justices conference and "Law Asia conference opening there tomorrow September 15, a Supreme Court press release said, reports BSS.

The Acting Chief Justice will return here on September 24, after attending the six-day conference, the press release said.

People urged to give verdict for Parliamentary democracy

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain Friday called upon the people to give verdict in favour of the Parliamentary form of government to consolidate democracy in the country, reports BSS.

He was addressing a series of public meetings in Daudkandi and Chandina upazilas of Comilla District.

The meeting was addressed, among others by Redwan Ahmed MP, local BNP leader Abdul Khaleq Sarker, Jubodal leader KM Khalif and Chattral leader Zomera Chowdhury Polin.

Dr Mosharraf Hossain said coming referendum was very important to establish the long cherished hope of the people for a parliamentary form of government. He called upon the people to cast 'yes' votes in the referendum to help consolidate democracy. He also urged the political leaders and workers to encourage the people to make the referendum a success.

What's on today . . .

Gonosangskriti Parishad

Gonosangskriti Parishad will hold a discussion on 'Mao Tse Tung and changes in the socialist world' at the National Book Centre auditorium in observance of the 15th death anniversary of the great socialist leader today (Saturday) at 4.30pm.

Badaruddin Omar, AFM Mahbubul Haq, Ayub Reza Choudhury, Dr Sayeed-Ur-Rahman, Dr Nurul Amin Bepari, Abdul Matin Khan, Dr T. Ali, Noor Mohammad, Syed Abul Kalam, Hamdul Islam, Shah Atul Islam and other will speak on the occasion.

Babu's death anniversary



The first death anniversary of noted lyricist Nazrul Islam Babu will be observed today (Saturday).

In observance of the day, Nazrul Islam Babu Smriti Parishad has arranged a discussion on Babu and a musical soiree with the songs composed by him at the auditorium of Shilpakala Academy in the city at 6.30pm.

Dr Ashraf Siddiqi will attend the programme as the chief guest while Latifur Rahman Sircar and Gias Kamal Chowdhury will be special guests on the occasion.

Renowned television and radio personalities will also attend the programme.

Janata Dal founding anniversary

The first founding anniversary of Bangladesh Janata Dal will be observed today (Saturday).

To mark the day, the party will hold a discussion at 23/5 Asad Avenue in the city at 4 pm. Earlier at 6 am, party and national flags will be hoisted atop the party office at Asad Avenue.

Party chief KM Obaidur Rahman will chair the discussion while other central leaders will address.

Jatiyatabadi Palli Dal

Jatiyatabadi Palli Dal will hold a token hunger strike in front of the Jatiya Press Club today (Saturday) demanding equal broadcast in TV and Radio in support of "Yes" and "No" vote.

3-member team leaves for Nepal to attend SAARC body meet

A three-member delegation led by Planning Secretary Syed Ahmed left Dhaka Friday for Kathmandu to attend the first meeting of the high level committee on Economic Cooperation among the SAARC countries beginning on September 15 in the Nepalese capital, reports BSS.

The committee during its two-day deliberations will discuss the matter relating to expansion of economic cooperation among the SAARC countries. Particularly in the fields of trade, manufacturing and services.

The other delegation members are Joint Secretary of Commerce ABM Siddique and Joint Secretary of Industries A H M Nurul Huda Chowdhury.

The delegation will return home on September 18.

One killed in road mishap

By Staff Correspondent

A pedestrian was killed and another sustained serious injuries in separate road accidents in the city on Friday.

An unidentified man died on the spot while trying to cross the road near the Rajlakkhi Complex in Uttara when a speeding truck struck him at around 4.30 am and fled from the scene.

The body was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and a case was registered with the Uttara Police Station.

Another pedestrian, Hussain Khan (70) was seriously injured when a passenger bus struck him at the Dhaka-Chittagong highway near Shonir Akhra at around 11 am.

He was admitted to DMCH and a case was registered with the Demra Police station. The driver managed to escape along with the bus.



Col (Retd) Abdur Rashid, Co-chairman of the Freedom Party addressing a press conference at party's central office Friday.



Saturday

- 5.00 Opening announcement: Al Quran
- Programme summary
- 5.15 Reading from the Tripitak
- 5.20 News in Bangla
- 5.30 Sports World
- 5.55 Documentary Film: A day in the life of a woman.
- 7.05 Banshari
- 8.00 News in Bangla
- 8.30 Chennasur
- 9.00 Bhuli Kemoney
- 10.00 News in English
- 10.30 Drama series: Dalius
- 11.30 Khabar/The News
- 11.45 Closing

Relief for flood victims

The Ministry of Relief has so far sanctioned 625 metric tons of wheat, 465 metric tons rice, 7,350 pieces of saree, 7,200 pieces of lungi, 6,765 tons biscuit, Taka 12 lakh and 75 thousand in cash and other relief goods as gratuitous relief for the flood affected people of the country, reports BSS.

The ministry has also sanctioned 1065 metric tons wheat as Test Relief (TR) and 16 thousand special vulnerable group development (VGD) cards for the flood victims.

Weather

Moderate rain likely

By Staff Correspondent

Rain or thundershower accompanied by temporary gusty wind, is likely to occur at many places over Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong districts and at a few places over Khulna division during the next 24 hours.

Moderate rainfall is likely to occur at one or two places of the districts. Meanwhile, rain or thundershower occurred at most places over the country on Friday. Day temperature changed slightly.

Outlook for subsequent two days: Little change. Extended outlook for another five days: Rainfall activity likely to increase.

The temperature and humidity of some cities on Friday were:

Cities/Towns	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity	
	max	min	9 am	6 pm
Dhaka	28.4	26	95	90
Chittagong	32	26.2	95	80
Rajshahi	34	24.8	81	88
Khulna	32.4	25.2	86	93
Rangpur	33.2	26.7	79	88
Sylhet	31	23.8	98	x
Jessore	32.8	25	x	x



CPB, NAP, Sammayabadi Dal and Gano Azadi League jointly brought out a procession in the city Friday urging people to cast 'Yes' votes in referendum. — Star photo

'Suitable environment for press freedom exists'

Minister for Education and Culture Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury said in Dhaka Friday that a newly launched newspaper could only survive by its quality, in practising unprejudiced and objective journalism, reports BSS.

Exaggerated and motivated news confuse the readers and do not bring any welfare to the nation. The Minister said while addressing the publication ceremony of the weekly "Muktir Sangram," as the chief guest, at the National Museum auditorium.

Chaired by eminent cardiologist Dr M A Malik, the function was addressed by

PM visits injured policeman, JCD leader at DMCH

Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia Friday directed the Dhaka Medical College Hospital authorities to ensure best possible medicare to constable Abdul Quader who received bullet injuries on September 11, reports BSS.

Begum Zia gave the directive while visiting the DMCH to see the condition of the injured constable.

The attending physicians told the Prime Minister that the condition of the injured constable was improving.

Constable Quader was seriously injured when some unidentified gunmen shot at him while he was on duty at the Science Laboratory Police Box on the evening of September 11.

Constable Quader was rushed to the DMCH and was operated upon. He is now undergoing treatment at the intensive care unit of the hospital.

Begum Zia also talked to the family members of constable Quader and enquired about their welfare.

Later the Prime Minister visited Saiful Islam Potu, Chhatra Dal VP of Dhaka College, who is also undergoing treatment in the same hospital. He was injured on September 11 when some unidentified miscreants hit him with lethal weapons.

JU employee commits suicide

Nurul Islam alias Sundar Ali, a lower grade employee of Kamaluddin Hall of Jahangirnagar University, committed suicide swallowing insecticide 'basudin', witnesses said, reports BSS.

According to reports, Nurul Islam had an affair with a girl and he wanted to marry her but his elder brother Ali refused to accept it. Nurul Islam exchanged not words with his brother Ali on Wednesday last after failing to convince him. Immediately after that he swallowed a huge amount of liquid insecticide 'basudin'. He was rushed to "Ganasathya Kendra" where he died Thursday night.

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR TOEFL EXAMINEES

Examinees who register for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in Bangladesh will be required to present a valid passport as identification, beginning with the November 16, 1991 test administration. No other form of identification will be accepted at test centers in this country.

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ECONOMIST REQUIRED

The World Bank Resident Mission in Bangladesh requires the services of a well trained Bangladeshi Economist to be recruited as a Local Consultant. The contract will be initially for a period of nine months and is renewable. The resource person will work as part of a team of three resident Economists and is expected to make a significant contribution to the building up of a comprehensive socio-economic data base and setting up of a quantitative framework for macro-economic analysis and projections. Data gathering and compilation will therefore be an important part of the assignment. Candidates with at least a Masters degree in Economics from a foreign University, good academic results and less than 35 years of age are encouraged to apply. Adequate knowledge of the Bangladesh economy and local institutions and sources of data, sufficient familiarity with computer-based data processing and econometric techniques and some research experience are important requirements. Candidates are requested to apply to the Economics Unit of the World Bank Resident Mission, 3A Paribagh, Dhaka with detailed curriculum vita and evidence of qualifications and experience by September 25, 1991. The selected candidate is expected to commence work by mid-October.