

Dhaka Day by Day

A Slum Woman Defends Her Liberty

by Nikesh Das

Sufia Akter, a widow lives in a 15 by 12 sq feet shack at Maniknagar, located in the south-eastern part of Dhaka city. About 10 years back Sufia migrated to Dhaka after her husband's death and subsequent devouring of her village home by the erosion of the mighty river Padma.

Then began for her the unequal battle, to defeat the vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation. At first, Sufia started working as a housemaid for the well-off families in the neighbourhood. There she had to work round the clock to satisfy her masters.

As a housemaid she worked for different housemasters and mistresses and in the process had her life experience enriched and also made her conscious about her social status. She knows how horrifying experiences some housemaids face in their work places. She says, "Sometimes housemaids have to face severe physical and mental assaults including sexual abuses by the housemasters."

"She believes all the house masters are not bad or merciless but the housemasters are to satisfy so many masters in one family — father, mother, sons, daughters and even relatives. So it is almost inevitable to face humiliation in some form or other. Sufia tried to adjust herself to the situation changing masters in the hope that a new family might suit her but her efforts all went abegging. Frustrated and bewildered Sufia quit her job as a housemaid and has started making paperbags (packed) known as *thonga* ever since. She earns about Tk 1000 (US\$25) monthly from preparing paperbags and selling them to the grocery shops. After paying rent for the shack (common latrine and bathroom, for three families) amounting Tk 550 (US\$13.7), she along with her daughter Runa Akter 12, try to keep



Sufia and her daughter working to earn freedom.

body and soul together with the rest of the money.

In her present occupation, Sufia thinks, she has no obligation to anybody or there are any authorities or daunting eyes to intimidate her. She feels easy in her work and life style.

In replying to the question why she quit the previous job, Sufia says, "That is simply because of freedom! In my present job, unlike the previous one, if I get tired or fall ill I can have a sleep or rest as I like without fearing of being fired," she added.

This self-conscious woman does not have academic education but the stark reality of life has taught her the value of education in the race for survival. She says, "If I had known the value of education, my present days might have been different." Naturally, "I like to get my daughter educated, which is the only possible means for dignified survival," she added. Her daughter, Runa, is studying in class VI with the financial assistance from World Vision, and international voluntary organization.

We all meet Sufias in our everyday life but unfortunately most of us don't try to respect them as a mother, wife and relative of someone in our society, let alone recognise their right to enjoy freedom with dignity.

As the 21 century is about to dawn, the women of Bangladesh in general are painfully slowly conceiving the basic elements of human dignity. Against such a backdrop, when such a lofty concept illuminates the heart of a slum woman and make her determined to continue struggle for defending her rights and liberty, it appears not everything has been lost for Bangladesh.

Magnitude of illiteracy colossal: Sircar

Education Minister Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar yesterday underlined the need for combating illiteracy through a multi-pronged strategy in which both formal and non-formal education have a complementary role, reports UNB.

The magnitude of illiteracy in the country is colossal and progress in achieving universal education very slow, the minister said, adding that the government sees its eradication as one of the very important aspects of our nation-building efforts.

The Education Minister was inaugurating a three-day meeting of officials in-charge of literacy and adult education.

Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO organised the meeting in collaboration with Rabat-based Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO).

Secretary of Primary and Mass Education Division Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed presided over the function held at Hotel Purbani while Secretary of Education Division Irshadul Huq was present as special guest.

It was also addressed, among others, by UNESCO National Commission Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed and ISESCO representative Ahsan Ullah Helal.

The Education Minister said, "In this decade, we have to make considerable strides in increasing both the absolute number of literates and the literacy rate through UPE as well as through non-formal literacy programmes."

Partnership among govern-

ment and non-government agencies and communities was necessary to achieve significant and sustainable progress towards eradicating illiteracy, he added.

Sircar observed that women, unskilled youths and drop-outs should be the particular targets for eradicating illiteracy in the country.

He said literacy programmes should address issues such as health education, child care facilities, vocational training and agricultural extension activities.

The Education Minister urged educationists and policy makers to work with resolve for creating a world where all individuals have the opportunity to contribute to the educational as well as economic development.

Irshadul Huq said importance of literacy has now become vital in the process of development. "Literacy is clearly essential in all societies — rich and poor — for economic, social and political progress."

Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed in his presidential speech pointed out that almost two thirds population in Muslim countries are illiterate.

Smuggled goods recovered

KHULNA, July 20: A patrol squad of the Bangladesh Navy yesterday recovered smuggled goods from a power boat from the river Pashur at Mongla, an ISPR release said, reports BSS.

The recovered goods included electrical appliances which were deposited with the local customs authority.

Biswas, Khaleda greet King, PM of Belgium

President Abdur Rahman Biswas has felicitated King Baudouin of Belgium on the occasion of his country's national day, reports BSS.

In a message to King Baudouin, President Biswas wished him good health, happiness and long life and the people of Belgium progress and prosperity.

In a separate message Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has greeted Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, Jean-Luc Dehaene, on the occasion of his country's national day.

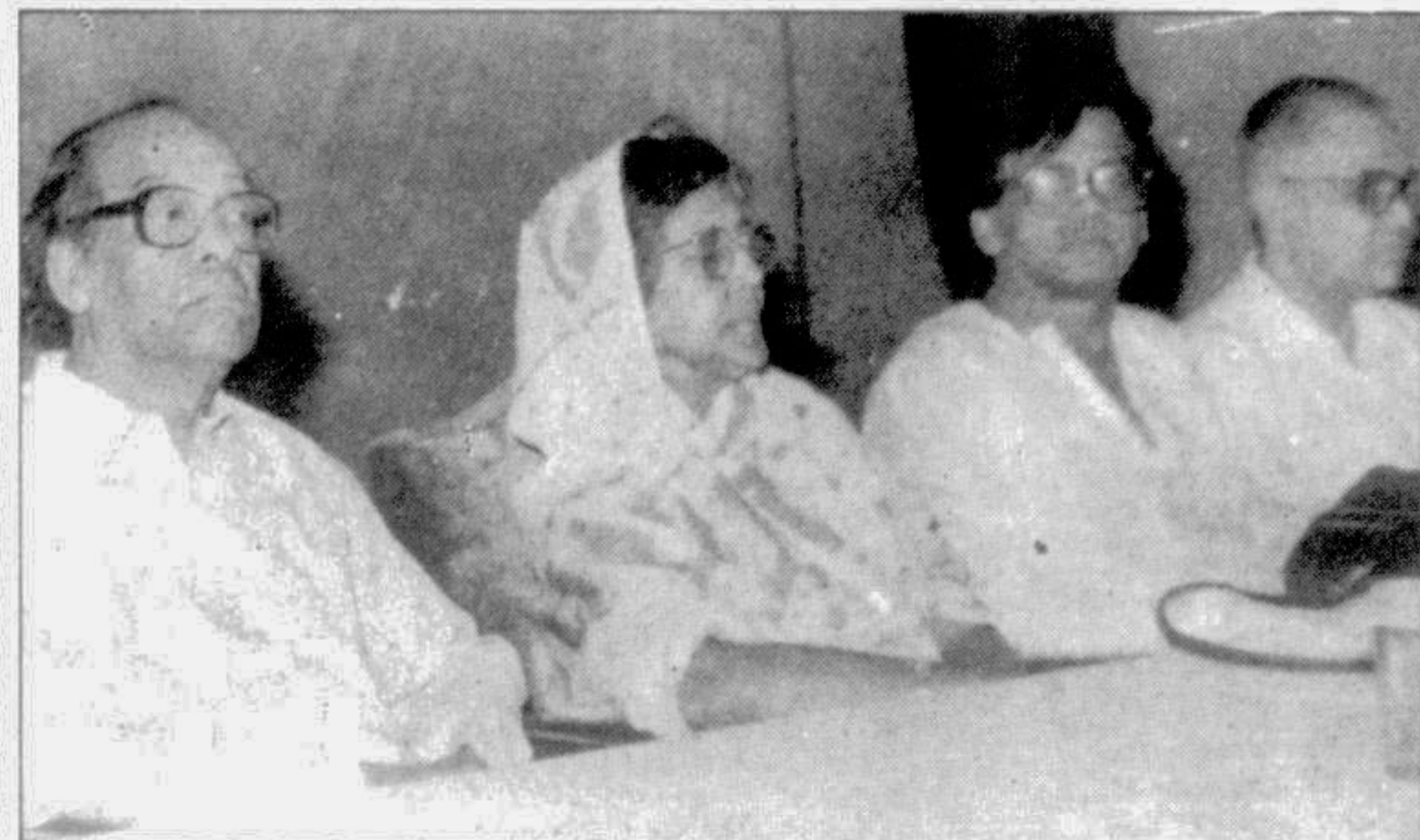
Begum Khaleda Zia expressed her conviction that the bonds of friendship and cooperation that so happily characterise the bilateral relations between the two countries would be further developed and strengthened in the coming years to the mutual benefit of the two peoples. Begum Zia also wished him good health, happiness and long life and the friendly people of Belgium continued peace, progress and prosperity.

79 held on various charges

Police rounded up 79 people, including seven wanted criminals, from different parts of the city in last 24 hours, a DMP press release said Tuesday, reports UNB.

The arrested also include one under the Anti-Terrorism Act, one under the Arms Act, one charged with robbery, two accused of burglary and five of stealing.

All the arrested people were produced before court, press release added.



Jahanara Imam, Convenor of the Ekattarer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Samannya Committee, speaking at a discussion in observance of Col Taher's seventeenth death anniversary organised by Taher Sangsad yesterday at TSC auditorium. Eminent educationist Prof Ahmed Sharif on her right and Kazi Aref Ahmed and Khaliquzzaman Bhuiyan on her left. —Star photo

'Politicians fail to resist rebirth of anti-liberation forces'

By Staff Correspondent

Different political personalities yesterday urged the pro-liberation minded political parties to unite and reinforce the movement against anti-liberation forces which were getting stronger in the country with "the help of the ruling party".

In a discussion on the "War of Liberation and the dream of an exploitation free society" organised by Colonel Taher Sangsad to mark the 17th death anniversary of Colonel Taher, Bir Uttam, the speakers said that the country had deviated from the path of an exploitation free society as the politicians had failed to resist the rebirth of the anti-liberation forces.

Chaired by Dr Ahmed Sharif, the discussion was addressed, among others, by Col Taher's elder brother Abu Yusuf Khan, Bir Bikram, Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Menon, MP, BSD leader Khalekuzzaman Bhuiyan, Nirmul Committee Convenor Jahanara Imam, eminent lawyer Advocate Gaziul Haq, CPB leader Mujahidul Islam Selim and freedom fighter Harun Habib.

Taher used to say that there is no wealth better than a fearless mind," Jahanara Imam said, adding "we should not give up this wealth which brought us victory in 1971". She also observed that there is no reason to be afraid of the rise of the Jamaat-Shibir axis.

She said that the court's verdict on the citizenship of Jamaat leader Golam Azam could not be a demoralising factor in the anti-Golam Azam movement as this movement always demanded trial of Golam Azam as a war criminal but not the identity of his citizenship.

Jubo Dal Demra Unit meeting held

An emergency meeting of Jatityatabadi Jubo Dal Demra Thana unit was held yesterday with Sohrab Amir in the chair, reports BSS.

Jubo Dal leader Nasruddin Patwary attended the meeting as chief guest.

The meeting observed that those who called hartal could not be the friends of the people. It urged them to participate in the development activities of the country instead of destructive ones.

Meanwhile, President of Dhaka City Jubo Dal Abu Syeed and General Secretary Giasuddin Choudhury in a message have condoled the death of Ahmed Ali, father of Jubo Dal leader Wahid Murad.

Govt college teachers continue strike

Teachers of 233 government colleges observed a two-hour token strike and staged demonstration across the country for the third day yesterday, reports UNB.

The associations of lecturers and professors of the government colleges embarked on their action programme to press home a 12-point demand, including higher scale, creation of new teacher's posts, promotion and removal of anomalies in pay structures.

The leaders also stressed the need for new strategies of movements against the Jamaat-Shibir axis.

Col Taher was hung by a Martial Law court tribunal in July 21, 1976.

Cardphones inaugurated

Two card phones provided by Telephone Shilpa Sangatha (TSS) were inaugurated at Jatrabari here yesterday, reports BSS.



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- Other Qualifications/Experience, if any
- Names and Addresses of two Referees.



Hawk's Multipurpose Cooperative Association brought out a procession in the city protesting repression on them. —Star photo

Weather

Moderate rain likely

By Staff Correspondent

Weather forecast for the next 24 hours commencing 6 am today (Wednesday) says, light or moderate rain or showers accompanied by temporary gusty wind may occur at many places over Barisal, Chittagong and Dhaka divisions and at a few places over Khulna and Rajshahi divisions with heavy falls at places over the regions of Sylhet and Chittagong.

The Met office forecasts, day temperature is likely to fall by one to two degree Celsius over the Chittagong division and rise by one to two degree Celsius elsewhere over the country.

The country's highest temperature yesterday of 34.5 degree Celsius was recorded at Ishwardi and the lowest 21.3 degree was recorded in Rangamati.

The chief amounts of rainfall recorded during day-time yesterday across the country were: Sylhet 49mm, Srimangal 42mm, Rangamati 25mm, Rajshahi 17mm and Dhaka 13mm.

The sun sets today (Wednesday) at 6.47 pm and rises tomorrow (Thursday) at 5.23 am.

The maximum and the minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some of the major cities and towns of the country yesterday were:

Cities/Towns	Temperature in degree Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	9 am	6 pm
Dhaka	31.7	24.2	88	82
Chittagong	30.1	22.7	93	92
Rajshahi	34.3	26.2	88	97
Khulna	33.5	26.8	86	78
Barisal	33.0	24.0	87	88
Cox's Bazar	31.0	24.5	90	90
Sylhet	24.6	23.5	100	100
Dinajpur	32.2	26.0	89	75