

## FOCUS

## Law and Our Rights

## Breast-Feeding

## An Inseparable Right of the Children

by Rasheda Rahman

We are accustomed to a very common scene which we come across everyday, a poor beggar woman with sick, malnourished child in her arms sometimes trying to pacify her hungry baby or



South Asia has a quarter of the world's children and half of its malnourished ones.

sometimes sitting with an expression of indifference on her face. We really can not imagine how long we have to bear this painful sight. Can we not think or dream of a better situation for this child and the mother. The basic reason for this is, ignorance of the poor mother, her own malnourishment and lack of nutrition adds to this terrible state. She does not even know that only breast feeding can save her child's life, her own milk can provide the baby with necessary nutrition.

Nutrition is defined as a process whereby living organisms utilise food for maintenance of life, growth and the normal functioning of organs and tissues and the production of energy (WHO 1973). Hunger and

malnutrition are tragedies for modern mankind and these take away human values, dignity and productivity.

The elimination of hunger and malnutrition was one of the goals of the 3rd United

children of lesser age group remain malnourished and neglected.

To prevent such a situation the first step which has to be taken is, elimination of absolute poverty from the root of our society. Another step which would help us is, educating the people with proper health education.

## Advantages of Breast Feeding

Breast milk can help the growth of a child both physical and mental. All the requisite food values that are needed for a child to prevent diseases, is provided by mother's milk. Lactose is the most important element of breast milk and this element helps the growth of mental faculties of a child. Breast feed is very convenient and is not at all troublesome and free of all expenses. Bottle feed can attack a child with bacteria and germs but mother's milk is free from all this.

## Bangladesh Context

A recent survey by "Monitoring the International code of marketing of breast milk substitute" has shown that 80% of the mothers of Bangladesh are not giving breast feed to their children till they are 5 months old. Right after the baby is born the first drop of breast milk is the most nutritious and healthy food for the child as it contains a very important element named IgA, which is known as the first vaccination of the child. But most infants are deprived of it due to ignorance and superstition.

People belonging to the upper class of the society generally have an inclination to give the child artificial feeding. Another factor which hampers breast feeding in our country, is the propaganda by the multi-national companies of artificial baby food. Bangladesh government has passed an ordinance in 1984 to prevent the marketing of formula milk and cereal by such multinational companies. But powder milk does not fall into this category. Actually this rule is not being followed rather the marketing of such products is in full swing and is going on an unrestricted way.

Very recently the government has taken some important steps to propagate the value of health awareness. Such a step is the observance of world breast feeding week which began from August, 1st 1997. National Vitamin 'A' week was also observed.

## Working Mother

According to the World Alliance For Breast Feeding Action (WABA), an American Organisation speaking for the rights of working mothers — to allow a working mother to breast feed her child in her basic right. The employers throughout the world are considering different policies to facilitate the working mothers regarding this matter. But it is unfortunate that some countries including Bangladesh are not at all paying any attention to this.

In Bangladesh working mothers face a lot of difficulties to give their child breast milk as they are not given any kind of facilities like other mother of developed countries. Only 2% working mothers can somehow give breast feed to their child. At present only 5 exist in whole of Bangladesh, besides this, some governmental and non-governmental agencies have come up with the idea of establishing day care centers which is quite appreciable.

## Deficiency of Iodine

A survey done in 1993-94 has shown that 5 crore (approx.) children all over the world has suffered mentally and physically for the deficiency of iodine.

To meet this problem now-a-days iodised salt is being produced in most of the countries of the world. Even in Bangladesh 62% of the salt is iodised. But a survey done by BSTI has shown that now-a-days ordinary salt has been packed in a iodised salt labeled packet. This problem can be solved if BSTI takes proper steps to examine the salt regularly and to create awareness among people.

## A Reform Agenda

The governmental and the non-governmental agencies can take into active consideration

the following points:-

1. Whether the provision of the code laid down by WHO in 1981 which are enforced in our country is rightly implemented or not, has to be monitored by the Ministry of Health and other concerned authorities.
2. Community based propaganda is at present very popular throughout the world e.g. community policing, community voting etc. In the same manner, health awareness can be propagated by effective community networking. Local government

can play an important role here. The government must ensure that this kind of nutritional propaganda is included in the regular activities of Union Parishad and in thana and district level as well.

3. The celebrities of our country can be a role model in such propaganda. They can play an important role to create awareness of health among general people due to their popularity.
4. Existing laws have to be enforced strictly to prevent the marketing of baby food in

5. The media at present is playing a vital role to popularise breast feeding and nutrition which should continue more effectively.
6. The Department of Information can arrange the demonstration of slides, based on health and nutrition in the villages.

7. Experienced and educated ladies can reach the mothers of their own area and help them to gain knowledge about health and nutrition of themselves and their children.
8. The government can assist the concerned NGOs to solve the nutrition problem more effectively. For example if our government can assist BRAC to implement their plans and programmes regarding nutrition then it would be more effective.

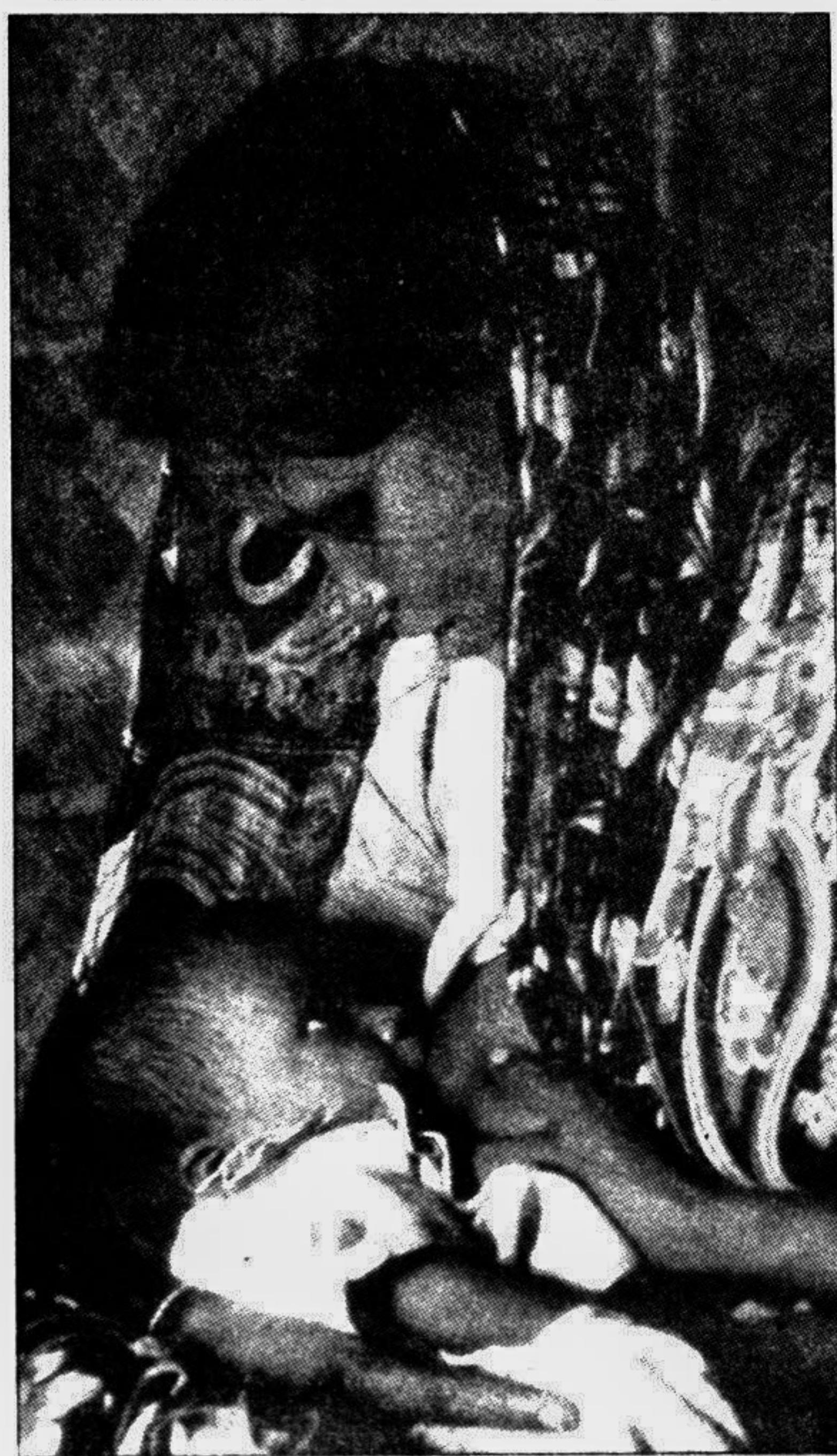
9. Health workers must be given proper training and education so that they can render their services properly. The staff of each and every clinic also should be trained about mother and child care so that the patients can be well taken care of.

10. Moreover the govt. must

properly facilitate the working mothers so that they can breast feed their babies and can take good care of them.

If the above steps are carried out in a well planned and effective manner then our goal can be reached. Breast feeding has been always a tradition of our country. Here most of the people live under the poverty level so it is easier for them to breast feed their child rather than purchasing powder milk. In such a case we can say that breast feeding can be quite more popular in our country. A recent survey shows that 54% of the mothers of our country breast feed their child which is of course a positive side. Mother's milk is the birth right of every child. So depriving a child of its right is not only a wrong but also a crime. So to ensure their right, the contribution of the whole nation is indispensable.

The writer is the Finance Secretary of Law Watch, an alternative platform for legal and human-rights studies and action. This is the revised version of the paper presented in the Round Table organised by Law Watch in collaboration with UNICEF on the 14th August 1997.



A woman breastfeeds her baby in Bangladesh. UNICEF and WHO recommend that babies be exclusively breastfed for about six months and receive complementary foods alongside breast milk thereafter.

## LAW WATCH

## Legal Notice Against Land Grabbing in Dhanmondi

BANGLADESH Environmental Lawyers Association today served a legal notice on 3rd September 1997 upon the Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works, the Chairman, RAJUK, the Chief Engineer, Public Works Department (PWD), the Superintendent Engineer, Public works, Circle 1 and the Chief Executive Officer, Dhaka City Corporation for failure to protect the public properties from illegal encroachment in Dhanmondi residential area.

The notice pointed out that the PWD conducted a survey in the Dhanmondi residential area and found illegal encroachment by 32 allottees/lessees of plots who have unlawfully encroached 91 Kathas of public land resulting fast degradation of atmosphere and residential characteristics. No effective initiatives by PWD has been taken to recover these public property from unlawful occupation. The PWD served notices upon the aforesaid encroacher between 1992-93 to vacate their unauthorized occupation of land but neither the notices were complied with nor appropriate actions have been taken against them. Still the lands are under unauthorized occupation depriving the people of crores of taka.

The notice stated that the alleged illegal encroachments ranging from lowest 28 kathas to highest 8.00 kathas, have seriously affected the lake, frustrated the Master Plan of the City and threatening the environment and encouraging the trend of encroachment. Any lenient actions of the responsible authorities will encourage further encroachment on the public land in Dhanmondi as well as other areas.

The notice requested the authorities to take appropriate measures to recover the encroached land and take necessary measures to prevent further encroachment and inform it within 30 September 1997, failing which appropriate legal actions will be taken to uphold the public interest.

## Metropolitan

## Bangla-British ties discussed

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, now on a visit to Britain called on Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Robin Cook at the latter's office on Thursday, according to a message received in Dhaka Friday reports BSS.

The two ministers discussed the entire gamut of bilateral relations.

Azad addressed a gathering at the Royal Institute of International Affairs on the state of Bangladesh-India relations.

The foreign minister was the guest of honour at a dinner hosted by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean.

Azad and Baroness Symons held talks on Bangladesh-Britain relations.

The foreign minister yesterday inaugurated Banglatown, an urban concentration of Bengali expatriates on Brick Lane at London's east end.

He was presented with the tower hamlets crest at the Poet Nazrul Centre.

## Remarks on War of Liberation by Muslim League leaders condemned

Masterda Surjosen Parishad condemned the remarks made by some Muslim League leaders and its front organisations about the War of Liberation, independence and Masterda Surjosen at a recent function organised in observance of the death anniversary of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, reports BSS.

In a statement yesterday Justice Kamaluddin Hossain and Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, president and general secretary respectively of the Parishad, deplored comments of the Muslim League leaders that the Liberation War of Bangladesh was a feud between two brothers and that Jinnah had rightly declared Urdu to be the only state language of Pakistan.

They said that the Muslim League leaders had not only demeaned the sacrifices of the 30 lakh people who died in the Liberation War, but also exposed themselves as anti-Bangladesh elements.

The parishad leaders also condemned the League leaders for describing Surjosen as a dacoit.

They demanded exemplary punishment to those responsible for the criminal remarks.

Meanwhile, vice-president of the Bangabandhu Jibon Parishad Abdul Jalil Bhutiani and general secretary Rezaul Karim Khan Reza expressed indignation at the remarks made on independence and War of Liberation at a meeting to observe Jinnah's death anniversary.

In a statement yesterday they said that any utterance against the War of Liberation and independence is a violation of the constitution and equivalent to anti-state activities.

They demanded exemplary punishment to the persons responsible and remarked that the presence of the acting high commission of Pakistan in such a function was regrettable.

Bangladesh Mujibnagar Karmachari Kalyan Sangsad also strongly protested the derogatory remarks made about the War of Liberation, Language Movement and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at a recent meeting organised in observance of Jinnah's death anniversary.

In a joint statement, A Latif Khan and SM Jahangir Alam, chairman and secretary general respectively of the Sangsad, alleged that the BNP had formed alliance with the fundamentalists to oust the pro-liberation government.

They also demanded trial of those responsible for making such remarks.



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## Most Rajshahi city roads in bad shape

The lovebirds were desperate to get married. They wanted to be done on their own. Both their parents made it clear that there was no question of marriage until both completed their university studies. Joy, 23, (not his real name) was doing a Masters degree and Ema, 21, (not her real name) had just started her university studies after A levels.

One fine morning last week, the couple accompanied by two female relatives, went to Lalmatia Kazi Office, the marriage registrar licensed by the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs.

"Is it a love marriage?" asked the bearded assistant

Joy looked at the elderly relative, expecting her to reply the kazi's question. But her silence prompted him to reply in the affirmative with a slight nod with his head.

"Does your father own a house in Dhaka? Does he own a car?" the kazi now inquired.

Joy's confirming response made the kazi turn to Ema.

"Do you have a certificate to

prove your age?" he asked.

"I have my passport with me," she replied.

"Passport is not a valid document to prove one's age, is it?" continued the kazi. "You have to produce your academic certificate."

After getting the academic certificate, the assistant kazi sent the couple to the third floor of the building to see the chief kazi because he was the person to solemnize any love marriage.

"Very difficult situation," declared the senior kazi on the third floor.

"But we are both mature people, there should not be any problem for the marriage," said a frustrated Joy.

"Oh no, I cannot be the kazi for you," he left the room as he muttered the words.

In the corner of the room, a bearded man now came to the rescue of the dejected couple.

"Love marriages are always difficult, a lot work to be done," continued the old man with a dubious smile on his face. "I can arrange the matter if you are willing to pay Taka 4,500."

Joy wanted to get out of the

place as soon as possible. The senior kazi appeared within two minutes after the amount was handed over. The process of registration was completed within fifteen minutes. Joy and Ema left the kazi office as husband and wife. Their *den mohar* was agreed at Tk two lakh.

Later when this correspondent visited the kazi office, an assistant kazi said as per law his office could charge people half a per cent of the total *keabean*. But, he said for any marriage the minimum charge

was Tk 1,000 and then at least one per cent of the whole amount of *keabean*.

When asked whether they gave any receipt for the transaction, he replied, "Yes, but we will only mention the lawful amount of half per cent of the *keabean* in the receipt, not the amount we have realised."

He said the minimum age for a female to get married is 19 years and for a male 21 years.

"For love marriage, the amount depends on the deal we make," said the busy assistant kazi, surrounded by a host of people seeking his services.

## Women Repression Complaint Cell meet held

A meeting of Women Repression Complaint Cell was held yesterday at 29 Minto Road official residence of the Leader of the Opposition, reports UNB.

The meeting presided over by BNP vice-chairman and former MP Farida Rahman, discussed the progress of the cases of Selina Khatun of Pabna and Mosamat Parvin of Dhaka.

## Weather

## Moderate rain forecast

Light to moderate rain or thundershows with temporary gusty wind may occur at many places over Dhaka, Chittagong, Barisal and Sylhet divisions and at few places over Rajshahi and Khulna divisions during the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Moderately heavy falls may occur at places over Chittagong and Barisal divisions during the period, the Met Office said and forecast slight fall of day temperature over the country.

The country's highest temperature was recorded 31.7 degree Celsius at Rajshahi and the lowest 23.3 degrees at Sitakunda.

The sun sets today at 6.04 pm and rises tomorrow at 5.45 am.

Maximum and minimum temperatures and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity in Percentage		
Max	Min	Morning	Evening	
Dhaka	30.5	24.5	95	88
Chittagong	31.7	25.7	88	92
Rajshahi	31.2	26.5	84	-
Khulna	29.0	25.4	91	95
Barisal				