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Uncertain future

Angry sex workers march in a procession in the city to protest the government plan to "rehabilitate" them.

—Star photo by A K M Mohsin

## Sex workers slam eviction

Basic rights are the need, they say

By Ehsanul Haque

Sex workers from different parts of the country yesterday renewed their plea to the government not to evict them from brothels in the name of rehabilitation programme.

Instead, they urged the authorities to take up a programme, which would ensure education, health and vocational training for the sex workers across the country.

The call came at a rally organised by a coalition of 49 non-government organisations (NGOs), demanding human rights for sex workers of Tanbazar and Nimtoli brothels and

to express solidarity with them.

The rally organised at Osmany Uddyan in the city yesterday was attended by several hundred human rights activists and sex workers from Dauladia, Tangail, Madaripur, Faridpur, Jessore, Tanbazar and Nimtoli. A section of floating sex workers, who were previously inmates of now defunct Kandupati brothel also participated in the rally.

The sex workers holding placards read: We do not want eviction in the name of rehabilitation. Give security of sex workers. We want to live in a

peaceful manner etc.

The coalition includes: Naripakha, Coalition for the Urban Poor, Ain-O-Shalish Kendro, Bangladesh Human Rights Coordination Council, Ganasastha Sangstha, Association for Social Advancement (ASA), Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed, Proshika, VHSS, Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition (WHC) and Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR).

The rally was addressed by the representative of three organisations of the sex workers —

Durjoy, Ulka and Mukti Narishangha, Tanbazar brothel Women and Children Organisation, Human Rights Journalist Association and Co-ordinator on Tanbazar movement' solidarity programme.

Snubbing the rehabilitation plan as a political game, Shathi, a sex worker from Tanbazar questioned, "Why our places should be the first target of the proposed rehabilitation programme leaving 12 other such brothels with 50 thousands inmates across the country."

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## Errant legislators

MPs owe T&T 7 crore in unpaid bills

By Gobinda Bar

People's representatives are expected to set precedence for people to follow. But the huge outstanding telephone bills of the lawmakers tell a different story.

The members of parliament (MPs) belong to different political parties, big and small. They include those from the ruling Awami League, the preceding incumbents Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jatiya Party and the minor parties like Jamaat-i-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote.

Members of parliament owe 7.26 crore taka to the government. Each of the MPs are entitled to get Tk 4,000 every month as telephone allowance. But they do not feel the need to pay the outstanding bills after repeated reminders by the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB). Some of them did not pay the bills even after 20 years.

A total of 217 lawmakers of the current (seventh) parliament alone, have outstanding telephone bills of over Tk 1.85 crore, according to a list updated till March, this year.

The 217 MPs of the current parliament, who have their telephone bills outstanding, received over Tk 3.12 crore as telephone allowance in the last three years.

The amount of outstanding bills of the MPs range from a minimum of Tk 1,011 to a maximum of Tk 5.41 lakh.

A list of the outstanding bills of the MPs of current parliament, prepared by the BTTB was obtained by The Daily Star.

The bills remained outstanding despite the fact that 459 MPs of third, fourth and fifth parliaments have outstanding bills of over Tk 5.51 crore.

A total of 178 MPs of the third and fourth parliaments

and 281 others of the fifth parliament owed the amount to the government.

No action was taken against the defaulters except issuing letters to realise the huge amount of outstanding bills.

Usually, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) disconnects the line of any defaulting subscriber if bills are not paid within 60 days.

"We have to succumb to the pressure from the MPs as they are strong enough to victimise us in different ways," a BTTB official said. "Each MP is paid Tk 4,000 from the government exchequer as telephone allowance every month. Why don't they pay the telephone bills?" he asked.

When contacted Minister for Post and Telecommunications Mohammad Nasim yesterday said letters were issued to all lawmakers who had defaulted.

"Some of the MPs responded to the letters, some did not," the minister said. Asked whether there was any other move to collect the huge outstanding bills, the minister replied in the negative.

A BTTB high official said the decision of issuing letters to the defaulting MPs was made by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Post and Telecommunications in the middle of 1998. The letters were signed by the minister.

Some of the MPs paid a good amount of the outstanding telephone bills, the official said. But he said, "It would take time to let the press know the exact amount of telephone bills recovered."

The BTTB chairman Khondakar Abdul Matin was not available for comments. (See page 11 for the list of defaulting MPs).

## Offshore quake kills 4, hurts hundred

COX'S BAZAR, July 22: Four children were killed and more than 100 people injured today when an earthquake rocked Maheshkhali island in the Bay of Bengal, officials said here, reports BSS.

Red Crescent officials said the tremor hit the offshore island at 4:45 pm and lasted several seconds damaging more than 200 houses and government office buildings.

The officials said the children were killed when a wall of a home collapsed.

The officials said further details of the damage caused by the tremor could not be known immediately but a police search was ordered to know if there were any more casualties.

Witnesses said the tremor also triggered a limited water surge in the Bay of Bengal.

## Ansars go berserk

PATUAKHALI, July 22: At least 30 people were injured, 15 with bullets when security guards opened fire on the passengers on board a launch in river Amkhola today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said two people, identified as Mizan, 25, and Hanif, 30, who jumped into the river during the indiscriminate firing were missing till filing of this report at 9 pm.

Witnesses said the incident took place when the passengers of Galachipa-bound launch Sagar-II got agitated as the Ansar personnel locked a couple in their cabin and snatched Tk 4,000 from them.

Three of the injured — Sohrab Sarder, Arman Gazi and Mahboob — were rushed to Patuakhali Sadar Hospital and later shifted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

The rest of the injured were admitted to the local Galachipa Thana Health Complex.

On information, police seized the launch from Charga-badi area and arrested five Ansars along with five rifles and ammunition. They are Syed Ali, Selim, Kalam, Biren and Sarif Ali.

## Divided they rule

AL seems mired in intra-party squabble

By Nurul Kabir

Interneine conflicts in the ruling Awami League seem to have reached a serious stage with many ministers, party MPs and district level leaders accusing one another of various misdeeds.

Any one having discussions with the party rank and file is bound to discover a common allegation against many ministers that they have isolated themselves from their electorate as well as party MPs.

Some ministers privately admit that the relation with local MPs and activists have been strained. But they explain the 'bad relations' by 'honesty' that does not permit favouritism to the party activists.

The interneine conflicts which are regularly being discussed among the party rank and file as well as the mid-ranking AL leaders these days include the reported clash between Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and his deputy in the ministry Abul Hassan Chowdhury, strain between

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim and Housing Minister Mosharraf Hossain, dispute between State Minister for Land Rashed Mosharraf and five party MPs from Jamalpur, State Minister for Social Welfare Dr. Mozammel Haq and his Bagerhat district unit leaders and so on.

Besides, some local problems in Sylhet, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Bhola are sources of dissatisfaction of many party activists who love to see the party to run smoothly.

However, the recent media reports over the strained relation between the foreign minister and his deputy in the ministry seems to have disappointed the party activists most.

"An aged, experienced minister and a bright, young state minister should make a wonderful combination to build a positive image of the country abroad. But as things unfold, it appears that the combination has proved rather counterproductive," a mid ranking leader

of the party said. "One can justify the state minister's absence in the official talks with the visiting foreign minister of Myanmar, as a visiting foreign minister is supposed to feel comfortable with his Bangladesh counterpart. But how come the deputy minister is not even allowed to attend the dinner hosted in honour of the foreign guest, especially when the state minister is the chairman of the BIMSTEC?"

BIMSTEC is a five nation regional forum for economic co-operation formed in Bangkok in 1997. The member countries include Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Explaining reasons behind the dispute between the foreign minister and his deputy, a senior AL leader went further. "This is what Samad Azad is. He is reluctant to tolerate others when it comes to leadership. Look at the entire Sylhet scenario. He is not even ready to

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## Accused in multiple murder cases held

By Staff Correspondent

An accused in 26 cases, including four murder cases, was arrested from inside a club in the city's Narinda area Wednesday.

Police identified him as Abu Haider Babu, 29, son of Kabir Hossain, a resident of Badda area.

A team of Gulshan police led by DC north S M Mizanur Rahman raided Narinda Club and arrested him at about 7:30 pm. Police also recovered a pistol and a grenade from his possession.

Police said Babu is an accused in four murder cases, including businessman Harun and AL activist Azad murder cases.

Harun was shot dead in front of Badda Club on June 7 and Azad was gunned down outside the district court premises in See page 11 Col 2

## Comilla continues to reel under Gumti water

Improvement forecast for other areas

By Special Correspondent

The flood situation remained unchanged in Comilla yesterday, where at least 300,000 people in five thanas remained marooned since the Gumti burst its embankment about two weeks ago.

The situation elsewhere in the country is likely to improve as the weather was fair and the major rivers were falling yesterday because of a less active monsoon, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said.

The Padma and the Meghna were falling but remained above their respective danger levels at two places. The Padma was however flowing 6 cm above red marks at Bhagyakul and Munshiganj. The river fell by 3 cm at Rajshahi and Hardinge Bridge point and registered slight fall at Pankha and Goalundo. The flood situation in Padma

basin areas from Goalundo to Bhagyakul may improve slightly.

The Jamuna and the Brahmaputra, both flowing below their danger levels at all major points, are falling.

The situation in the Meghna and the South-Eastern Hill basins may also improve, the FFWC said.

The Meghna rose by 5 cm at Bhairab Bazar where it continued to flow above the danger level. The Surma and Kushiara recorded fall but continued to flow above their danger levels.

In the South Eastern Hill basin, all the rivers marked fall and were flowing below their danger levels.

The FFWC in its forecast for the next 48 hours said that the Padma is likely to fall at Bhagyakul and flow 1 cm above the danger level. But the

Meghna may rise by 1 cm and flow 17 cm above the danger level.

At least 600,000 people have been badly affected by floods in Comilla. An old bridge on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Nimsar near Comilla cantonment is threatened by flood water. A Bailey bridge has been kept ready in case the bridge collapses, district officials said.

The Comilla-Brahmanbaria highway remained under water from Devpur to Kangshanagar. Flood water also submerged a section of the Comilla-Chandpur road at Bijoypur, they said.

Vast areas in seven unions under Chauchadgar, Laksam and Kotwail thanas in Comilla district went under water yesterday with the rise in water levels of Dakatia and Kanri rivers.

## Ruthless theft of public money

Rains run through Tk 11 cr renovations at DMCH

By Naimul Haq

Wall and roof plasters are falling while water is leaking at some points despite the just completed Tk 11 crore renovation work at the biggest and busiest government hospital in the country!

Though it may sound incredible, it is happening at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Six heads of departments at the DMCH showed this correspondent during spot visits how plasters were falling in wards, operation theatres (OTs), Intensive Care Unit (ICU), doctors' rooms, bathrooms, corridors and other places.

"I have never seen such a situation during my five years at this hospital. Think about the quality of renovation work completed. They have misap-

propriated a big amount money," said one of the department heads preferring anonymity.

Another departmental head said, "Water leaks through walls in the operation theatres (OTs). It is worse during rains. We are compelled to stand in OTs with water all over on the floor and carry on surgery. Can you imagine that?"

A senior doctor said, "They had planned to misappropriate public money in the name of renovation work. It is easy to embezzle funds this way."

Similar allegations were made by doctors and other staff in surgery, casualty, neurosurgery, Gynaecology & Obstetrics, urology and ENT depart-

ments and burn unit and ICU. All of them alleged that the renovation was not done as per the work order.

The DMCH director also expressed utter disappointment over the quality of renovation work done.

According to sources in the health ministry, Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided a loan of about Tk 11 crore for the renovation work. The loan was one of the sub-components of the ADB-assisted Second Health and Family Planning Services.

The Project Management Unit (PMU) under the health ministry was asked to supervise the entire renovation work, done by a private firm.

According to PMU, renova-

tion work started in 1993 and was completed last month.

When contacted, an official concerned in the firm that carried out the renovation work — DDC — claimed, "We never compromise on quality. The work done at DMCH matches the standard maintained by any other reputed construction firm in the country. The allegations are baseless."

PMU Director Nazrul Islam, when contacted, said, "The allegations have no ground. Although the work, our engineers were present to inspect. Until the users (doctors) were satisfied, we insisted on repeating certain repair work. So there is no question of low quality work. DDC had to comply with

the plans submitted by it earlier and we made sure that the work was done properly."

He also said, "I often visited the hospital but there were no complaints."

Asked why wall and roof plasters were falling, he said, "It can happen and can be repaired."

During a spot visit recently, this correspondent saw rain waters in the room of Prof Mazid, head of surgery department. Furniture had to be moved from the room.

The DMCH director said, "I am very disappointed at the quality of work. During rains, the situation turns too bad. Water leaks through the walls. How worse can it be?"



This AFP file photo, taken on December 10, 1960, shows US President John F. Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline Kennedy holding their son John F. Kennedy Jr. during the chaste ceremony at the chapel of Georgetown University. Kennedy Jr., his wife and his sister were killed in a plane crash in the Atlantic Ocean.

## Kennedys bury grief in sea

WOODS HOLE, Massachusetts, July 22: The Kennedy family took its grief to sea Thursday to scatter the ashes of yet another fallen son, reports AFP.

The remains of John F. Kennedy Jr., along with those of his wife Carolyn Bessette and sister-in-law Lauren Bessette, were scattered at sea in private ceremony on the USS Briscoe in the waters off Massachusetts.

Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy led some 15 family members early Thursday morning aboard the navy destroyer for the ceremony near the site of the plane crash that ended the lives of the three July 16. Television networks broke

off their regular transmissions early in the morning to broadcast live footage of the Briscoe, taken from local news helicopters.

The son of the slain US president was at the controls of the Piper Saratoga plane, with his wife and sister-in-law aboard, on Friday night when the aircraft, apparently out of control, slammed into the waters off the coast of this northeastern state.

It was his wish to be buried at sea, news reports said. The Briscoe steamed to a point in the vicinity of where Kennedy's single engine plane plunged into the Atlantic Ocean, and the burial service was conducted with immediate

family members in attendance. After about 45 minutes at the site, the Briscoe turned back toward Woods Hole.

Private boats and ships were prohibited from entering a 16 kilometre (10 mile) radius around the Briscoe. It was not disclosed what extent navy custom was incorporated into the ceremony. Navy tradition for burials at sea usually involves a benediction, 21 rifle shots, and a salute by assembled officers accompanied by a bugle playing "Taps."

The burial and memorial arrangements were reportedly made by the Kennedy clan's pa-

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