

# Barely they float

## Tales of displaced Rahimons & Dewans

JULHAS RIPON

"Duida taka dena bap" (please give me a couple of bucks) chants sixty-year-old Rahimon Bawa, a distressed woman with a melancholic look, as she goes round begging in front of the secretariat building where the top brass of government formulate policies to eradicate poverty from the country.

Dewan Laskar, 50, a freedom fighter living in the city for the last ten years, pulls a rickshaw to feed hungry mouths.

Suravi, 26, a sex worker, roams under the fleeting shadow of sodium lights around the Sangsad Bhaban area every evening looking for customers to prostitute herself in order to avoid being going hungry.

The so-called thriving metropolis of Dhaka has thus turned into a city of rootless, floating masses deprived of all basic amenities of life, and the number is increasing every day at an alarming rate.

According to statistics of the Centre for Urban Studies (CUS), nearly 50 per cent of the city's population are slum-dwellers and a significant number of them, having no permanent dwelling place, live on footpaths, in public parks, railway stations, bus terminals and other open spaces in sub-human conditions.

They cannot even afford two square meals a day, let alone other

basic human needs such as education, housing, healthcare and sanitation.

Rahima Khatoun, 25, who hails from Patuakhali and came to the city two years ago, now lives on the footpath at the city's Karwan Bazar area.

"I am divorced and my husband married another woman a year ago. Now I am passing very painful, uncertain days here and feel very insecure all the time. People around me always try to cheat me. Sometimes I think about committing suicide but only the thought of my innocent children becoming motherless stops me from doing so. It's really a painful life, really painful."

These children such as Rahima's, born and raised in such destitute families, are truly faceless. These hapless children suffering from malnutrition, diseases, illiteracy and a state of constant insecurity are regularly abused and exploited by corrupt elements of the society and will definitely put a burden on the future society.

Their unthinking parents procreate as many children as possible, considering them as collateral for the future and means to support their livelihood. Like Sofia Khatoun and her husband Moti Mia who term their five children as 'money machine', more children mean more earnings for the poor.

Different push and pull factors are at play as regards migration of these distressed people to the capital from the deprived rural areas of the country, consequently resulting into overcrowding of Dhaka City.

From the beginning of the post independence period, the exodus

from villages to country's major cities, especially to Dhaka, was accentuated due to the deteriorating law and order situation in rural areas.

And the availability of statutory rationing whereby the government ensured distribution of staple food at a minimum price was considered as the major pull factor in Dhaka-ward migration.

Also, some other factors such as improved road communication, static rural economy, increased rural unemployment, unequal distribution of land etc., are responsible for it. Natural disaster, especially river erosion, also plays a very important role as a push factor for mass migration of rootless people to the city.

Besides, Dhaka being the heart of all manufacturing, administrative, educational and commercial activities of the country creates a huge labour market in the city's informal sector, which highly demands the floating population.

According to a UN study, Dhaka's population of 1.3 million in 1975 increased to 8.5 million in 1995, and given the steady rate of increase it will reach 20 million by 2015 with a very large number of rootless and floating population among them.

Some experts suggest integrated initiatives to be taken to arrest the increasing migration of rootless people to the Dhaka City. Prof. Nazrul Islam of Department of Geography and Environment of Dhaka University suggested that the government and NGO should take 'integrated plan of actions' with short and long term options in order to curb migration from rural areas.

"We should ensure the basic human needs for the already displaced rootless people in the Dhaka city and at the same time create job opportunities in rural areas through strengthening the rural economy to stop further migration," he noted.



Children take part in a drawing competition at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. The Bangladesh Muktijodha Kalyan Trust organised the competition to mark the Independence Day.

# Govt seeks donors' support for mega-power project

UNB, Dhaka

The government has worked out a mega plan for next five years, needed to meet the growing demand of electricity in the country, whose implementation will cost US\$ 3 billion or Tk 18,000 crore.

Placing the need before the just concluded Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting in Paris, the government sought cooperation from the country's development partners for implementing the plan.

The estimate shows the government is optimistic to invest \$1 billion from its own resources while expects \$1.4 billion from donors and \$ 6 million in private investment.

But the people concerned have doubts about arranging \$1 billion by the government, a fact that will also discourage the independent power producers (IPPs).

On the other hand, they said the donors are unlikely to come forward to assist the power sector if the government does not go beyond mere lip services to deliver something concrete regarding the reform programmes.

Sources at the Power Ministry said the domestic demand of power in the year 2007 would stand at 6,500 megawatt (MW). To meet the demand, production target, including technical reserve margin, has been fixed at 7,800 MW.

To achieve the target by the year 2007, the government on March 13-15 Paris meeting presented before the donors the reforms that have already taken place as well as the future reform programmes.

However, sources said the pace of work that began under the previous government to increase production and expand transmis-

sion and distribution systems as well as to make the system dependable have come to a standstill.

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud would not call it a cessation. He said the new government is correcting the measures, as there were "massive irregularities" in the sector during the previous Awami League government.

At present, work of 700 MW production is in the pipeline and the work is expected to end by 2004. To meet the remaining demand for the year 2007, work will have to be started by 2004, experts said.

With the existing plants nearly 40 years old, the present electricity production capacity of the country in public and private sector is 4,230 MW. The capacity included 3,369 MW by Power Development Board (PDB), 721 MW by IPPs and 140 MW in mixed sector.

The daily original capacity of the power plants is 3,300 MW against the demand of 3,084 MW during the peak period. But load-shedding takes place, especially in DESA areas due to vulnerable distribution system.

# 20,000 girls trafficked to foreign countries a year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 20,000 girls are being trafficked to foreign countries each year, according to the Bangladesh Coalition for Child Rights (BCCR).

Announcing a resolution on the occasion of Child Rights Week that began on Thursday, BCCR chairperson Sharif A Quazi and Secretary Monira Jasmine called for implementing the child rights resolution adopted by the United Nation and incorporating it in the curriculum of all educational institutions.

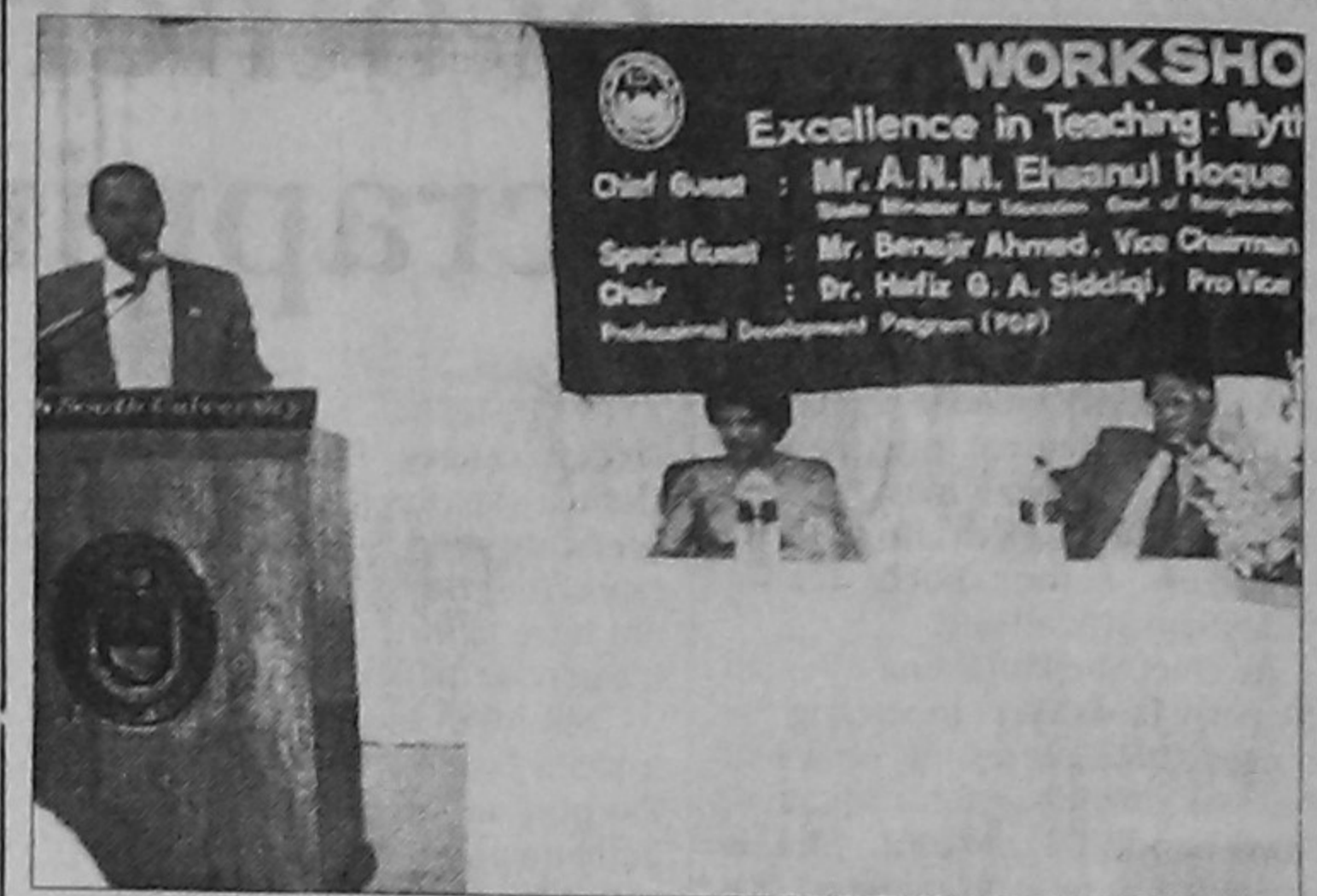
They also urged the government to take effective steps to ensure the rights of children.

The BCCR further claimed that 15 lakh children still do not go to school, 10 lakh work as domestic help, and nearly 5 lakh children work in highly risky environment.

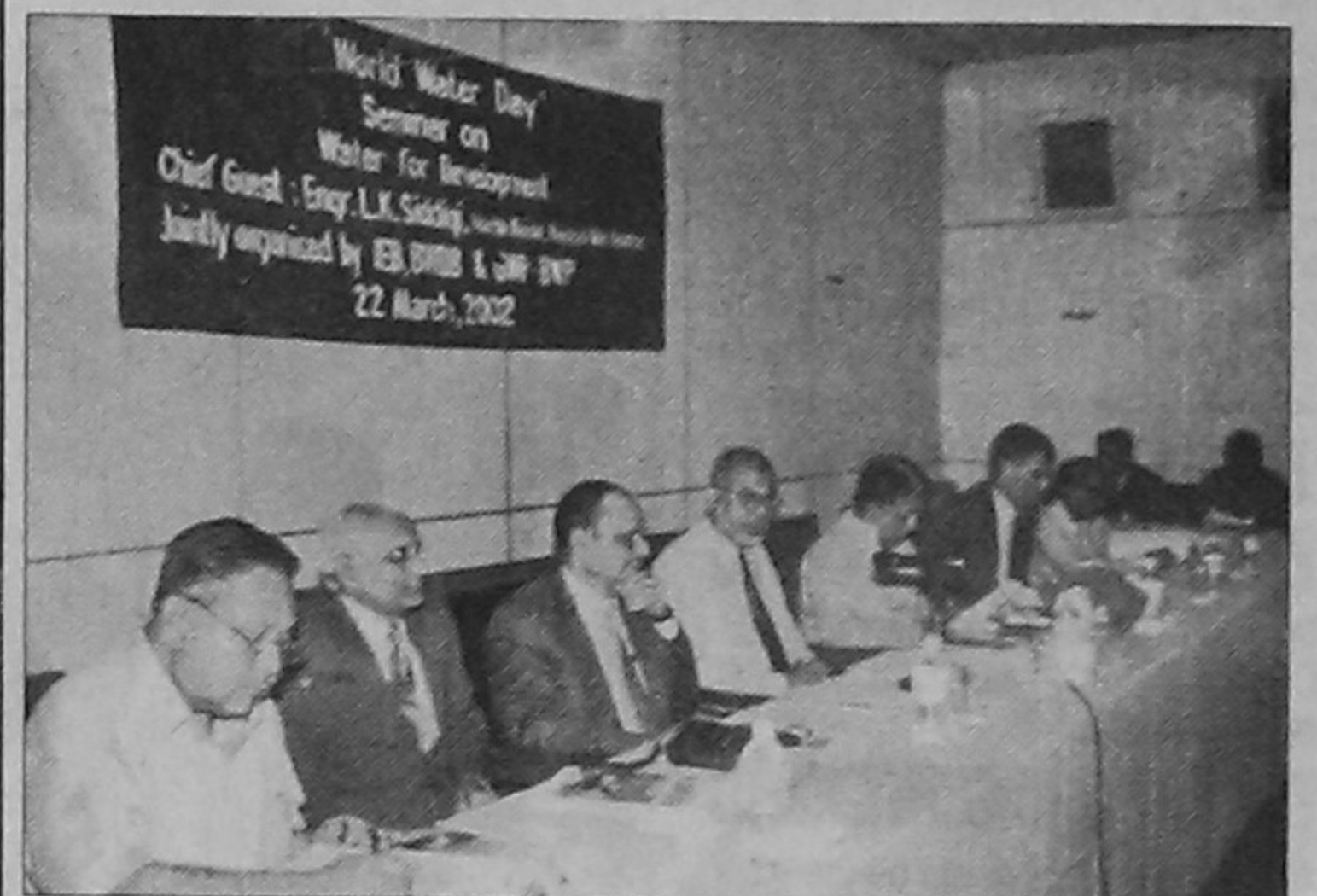
The BCCR officials also mentioned that almost one lakh people are being smuggled to foreign lands each year and 21 per cent of them are girls.

They also stressed the need for taking stern actions against those responsible for child abuse to contain trafficking of children.

They organisation demanded that the birth registration be made compulsory and urged the government to take steps to stop child labour and child marriage.



State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Haque Milon speaking at a workshop on 'Excellence in Teaching: Myths and Realities' at the North South University (NSU) on Thursday. The Professional Development Programme of NSU organised the workshop.



A seminar on 'Water for Development' was held at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) yesterday. Water Resources Minister L K Siddiqi attended the seminar as chief guest. Bangladesh Water Development Board, IEB and GWP-Bangladesh Water Partnership jointly organised the seminar to commemorate the World Water Day.

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**ABM TASLIM UDDIN**  
Asstt. Vice President

# Police, ISA activists clash in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

At least 12 people were injured in a fierce clash between the police and Islami Shasantantra Andolan (ISA) activists in Khulna city yesterday evening.

Police lobbed at least 25 tear-gas shells to disperse the unruly activists of ISA who attacked the Hotel Al-Qadr.

The activists attacked the hotel as its owner Dr Azizur Rahman, a homeopath, allegedly made blasphemous comment recently.

Leaders and supporters of the ISA pelted stones at the hotel, damaging its properties.

They also hurled at least six hand bombs at police who were guarding the hotel.

Several cars, buses, rickshaws and shops were also damaged in the clash that continued for about an hour.

Meanwhile, Khulna Zila Imam Parishad has also demanded arrest of Rahman for his blasphemous comment.

A case was lodged with Sonadanga thana against him on Thursday. He went into hiding.

# Oxford centre director arrives Mar 28

BSS, Dhaka

Dr Farhan A Nizami, Director of Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Oxford, will arrive in the city on March 28 on a two-day visit.

Dr Nizami will visit the Department for Islamic History, Dhaka University, to meet the faculty for discussion on the development of a proposed link programme between the department and the Oxford Centre, UK.

The link programme will be beneficial to the department in the fields of curriculum and capacity building of the department, a press release of the British High Commission said.

Dr Nizami will also deliver a lecture on 'The Role of Islamic History' on March 29 at Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management auditorium, organised in collaboration with the British Council, Bangladesh, under its 'Connecting Futures Initiatives' -- a new development initiative.

This will mark the inaugural ceremony of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Department of Islamic History and Culture, Dhaka University.

Later, Dr Nizami will attend a meeting with Iitash Parishad Bangladesh (History Association) as well as the Islamic History and Culture Alumni Association.

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**Development of hospital microplan based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

UNICEF-Bangladesh invites proposal from established local social research, training & facilitating company to facilitate the hospital staff for development of hospital microplan process based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Interested companies having previous working experience (for minimum 5 years) in relation to organisation development and transformation especially on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with excellent facilitation skills in conducting training workshops, are requested to collect detailed Request for Proposal (RFP) for above-mentioned service from UNICEF, Ground Floor, Right Wing, Dhaka Sheraton Hotel Annex Building, 1 Minto Road, Dhaka-1000 from Saturday, March 23, 2002, between 08:30 to 16:00 hours. A briefing session on the requirement of the assignment will be held on Monday, March 25, 2002 at 14:50 hours in JPG Conference Room, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Central Wing, UNICEF-BCO. The proposal must be submitted on or before 15:00 hours on April 04, 2002 (Thursday) in the "Tender Box" located in UNICEF HR Section.

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