

Sisters share in South Asian solidarity

Largest delegation of Indian women activists completes a five-day tour from Kolkata to Dhaka

SULTANA RAHMAN

"We don't want walls of hatred. We want open skies for friendship." Giving priority to this slogan, 'Women's Peace Bus' with 34 renowned female activists from India returned on Tuesday after completing a five-day long peace campaign travelling from Kolkata to Dhaka.

Under the auspices of 'Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia' (WIPSA) the Women's Peace Bus toured between May 14 and May 20. In Dhaka, they were received at Kamalapur Station by a large number of host organizations. They also participated in several special programs and met political leaders and grassroots female workers.

The 34 women came from different parts of India from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu. Among them were journalists, artists, filmmakers, writers, academics, peace and human rights activists, former female parliamentarians and students. They came with the goal of articulating women's common understanding and aspirations in Bangladesh and India for peace and security in the region. "We came to establish that

women have had the highest stakes in peace. The time has come for women of South Asia to lead their respective governments and societies towards not only a conflict free region, but also a haven of peace" announced Mallika Sen Gupta, an Indian feminist poet and writer.

The mission was preceded in March 2000 by a Women's Peace Bus from Delhi to Lahore right after the Kargil war. Two Women's Peace buses returned with Pakistan women from Lahore to Delhi in April 2000.

At the end of five days intense interaction, WIPSA affirmed a common commitment, including an understanding of the particular difficulties of communities living in border areas. They also said no to wars in the region or any part of the world. They demanded a nuclear free South Asia and world for future generations.

"The journey to Bangladesh is neither the beginning nor the end. Similar journeys will continue back and forth between the two countries as well as in all countries of South Asia to create solidarity for peaceful resolution of all our problems, and for a future of friendship amongst all countries," they hoped.



Students short-changed by outages

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

With the Higher Secondary School (HSC) examination beginning on May 29, hundreds of candidates across the city are spending sleepless nights in anxious anticipation of the biggest moment of their student life.

The impending exam apart, another thing is keeping them awake - the notoriously fickle electricity supply, which has become a constant nuisance for students whose preparation is badly affected by frequent power outage and load-shedding.

Add to this the sweltering heat and mosquito menace and you get a vivid picture of the plight of an HSC examinee in Dhaka.

The power outage usually is at its worst during the evening. However that is the time when most parents want their sons and daughters to study.

"Yes, we sometimes force them to study in the evening even if there's no electricity. But we do understand the discomfort they face while reading under candle or charger light. The heat too can become unbearable. Yet, they have to study because the exam is just around the corner," said Altaf Ahmed, father of a student.

"Not everyone can afford an IPS. How long can somebody study under candlelight and without a fan," said a visibly

frustrated Ayon Ahmed who is taking HSC exams at Dhaka College.

The city has experienced continuous load shedding since the beginning of summer. However, Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) had claimed earlier that power outage was only due to a shortage of proper transmission lines. DESA Chairman M A Rab has even gone on record as saying in newspapers that substations will be set up at Lalmatia, Green Road, Moghbazar, Sayedabad, Madartek, Taltala, Bashundhara, Joarsahar and Uttara which will bring considerable relief for the city dwellers. But that promise had remained in words only till date.

"DESA people will go on making these lofty pledges but won't do anything concrete. Do they understand our sufferings?" asked examinee Riaasat Hossain.

As if load shedding is not enough, Mosquitoes are also making life miserable for candidates.

"We heard 'fascinating' stories like anti-mosquito medicine to be sprayed from aeroplanes. Even the Mayor of Dhaka pledged to eradicate mosquito once and for all and said that the aero-spraying would happen soon. It seems now as if he has forgotten that promise already," quipped Nobina Yasmeen as she put a mosquito coil underneath her study-table.

Passport touts take you for a ride



Touts waiting for business outside Passport Office Bhaban.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

No fewer than 50 people wait on both sides of the road -- all carrying papers in hand. Their eyes home in on potential clients. Once detected, a question sounds: "Want to have your passport done?"

People who pass through the area to go to work or back home hear the refrain and face the push of the gang. The everyday hassle defines a different vista in front of the Passport Office Bhaban in Agargaon.

The guys are none other than brokers waiting for their prey to 'make things easier for them' -- in euphemistic words.

A passport official said: "We are not spared either. Not all brokers know us. They approach us, asking the same question. Sometimes, they even ask the director general of passports if he wants to get a passport. You can imagine?"

The brokers try to talk the interested people into purchasing forms, which can be bought from the select Sonali Bank branches. If people end up in the hands of the brokers, they have to pay extra sums besides official fees.

For individual needs, the government fixed the fees in three categories -- Tk 2,000 for three month's processing, Tk 3,000 for one month and Tk 5,000 for six days. If applicants seek brokers' assistance, they can obtain their passports a little earlier.

What one has to do is pay a broker an

additional Tk 1,000, said the official. Three months will then come down to 25 days, one month to 12 days and six days to two days.

The brokers sometimes do good to the people who cannot fill in the passport form on their own. The provision to get the forms attested by a first class government official make things difficult. Moreover, police verification is a must. "That's why applicants tend to seek help from brokers," said the official.

"Certainly, they help people but this business is done without any legality. They should get the status like C&F agents," said a source.

The brokers are sometimes accused of swindling clients. "Most brokers have stamps to duplicate the signature of higher officials," said another official who preferred anonymity.

"A few days ago, a person applied for renewal of his passport. We found that a broker renewed the passport himself, not submitting it to passport office. If a passport is more than ten years, the holder has to collect a new passport. Although his passport was issued ten years ago, the broker renewed it with fake official stamps. The man even travelled to the US and the UK," said the official.

"To avert swindles, the brokers should be given legal status. It's easy to catch the registered brokers, if they are accused of swindling. We have tried hundred times to drive them away. But it didn't work. They come back after a few days," said the official.

No more in the open

Hazardous pit toilets in slums to go from May 24

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (LGED) has decided to remove open pit toilets in the city slums as part of a cleanliness programme.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) will start setting up hygienic toilets in those areas

from May 24.

According to sources at the LGED, about 9,600 temporary sanitary toilets will be built in the city slums. Most of the open toilets in the slums are causing serious environmental pollution and health hazards including water borne diseases. These open toilets are also a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

According to Nagar Gabeshana

Kendra, an NGO working in slum communities, there are some 3,000 slums in the city -- 679 on government land and 2,328 on private land. The statistics show that these slums have occupied over 1,038 acres of important city land, housing 22,900 families or 30 lakh people, sometimes huddled 5-7 in a room.

"In the absence of hygienic toilets, many people are polluting the city's environment and spreading serious diseases," Secretary of Local Government Division AYBI Siddiqui said.

Female slum dwellers often use a polythene bag to relieve themselves while men urinate in the open. Most of the city slums have no sanitary latrines and even if there are a few, they allow women little privacy.

"There is only one filthy toilet for about 150 people of 20 families in our slum. We have to line up before it every morning," said Rowshanara, 35, a resident of Tikkapara slum.

"Finding no other alternative we use polythene bags inside our house while the men urinate in drains," she added.

Prof. Nazrul Islam of Dhaka University, who specialises on urbanisation, said the major concern for slums is sanitation. Diseases, especially water-borne ones, spread very rapidly due to the filthy and unhygienic living condition.

marketprice **telephone numbers & citybus route**

MARKET PRICE

Vegetables (Tk Per Kg)

Tomato- 14-17	Onion- 12
Potato- 10	Garlic- 36
Borbot, Beans- 18-22	Ginger- 30
Dherosh, Okra-16	Jira- 120
Jhinga- 20	Dhania- 30
Chichinga- 16	Daruchini- 140
Jali Lau- 25/Piece	Salt- 11
Lau- 25/30 (Midium/Big)	Soyabean- 46-49/Litre
Patol- 16	Butter oil- 210
Lemon- 5/Piece	Ghee- 280
Peas- 10/14 (450 gm packet)	Mustard oil- 70
Saja-25	Dalda- 50
Eggplant-16(Black), 20 (White)	Tea- 120-160
Koralla- 20	Sugar- 28
Pudina Leaf- 120	Wheat- 15
Cabbage- 15	Masur Dal- 42
Green banana- 10 (Hali)	Pulse- 20
Green papaya- 10	
Lati- 16	

Salad

Cucumber- 16	Jackfruit- 150-200/piece
Tomato- 16	Watermelon- 30/50-60/piece
Lettuce- 2/Piece	Mango (Indian)- 70/kg
Carrot- 12	Green Mango- 20-25/kg
Onion Leaf- 30	Grapes- 120/kg
Capiscum- 180	Apple- 80/kg
Spices	Orange- 80-90/dozen
Green Chili- 20	Banana-35/dozen

Fruits

Pineapple- 25-35/piece,	National Museum- 8619396-9
Papaya- 25-30/piece	Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday 3 pm- 8 pm, Thursday closed
Futi- 30-40/piece	Muktijuddha Jadughar- 9559091
Beti- 15-20/piece	Open: 10:30 am 6:30 pm, Sunday Closed
Jackfruit- 150-200/piece	Bangabandhu Smiti Jadughar- 8110046
Watermelon- 30/50-60/piece	Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday closed
Mango (Indian)- 70/kg	Ahsan Manzil
Green Mango- 20-25/kg	Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday: 3 pm - 7 pm, Thursday Closed
Grapes- 120/kg	Shishu Jadughar- 9666466
Apple- 80/kg	Open: 10 am- 6 pm, Sunday Closed
Orange- 80-90/dozen	Sonargoan Jadugha
Banana-35/dozen	
Ata-50-55/kg	
Jamrul-35-40/hundred	

TIPS

Do not use mobile phones while you drive

OUTING

COURIER SERVICES

LIBRARY & INFO-

CITY BUS ROUTE

Air Borne Express- 9561371,	Central Public Library- 8626001-4,
9561372, 9550724	Shishu Academy- 9564128
Air Couriers Int'l (BD) Ltd.-8815970	Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
9558003, 9559582, 9565075	Airspeed Express- 9563494
	Asian Courier Services Ltd.- 8313543
	Baishakhi Courier Service- 9558606
	Banmgladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114
	Bangladesh Courier Service- 9563989
	Bengal Express- 9560642,
	Community Development Library- 9552666
	Bangladesh Int'l Courier- 953636
	Continental Service Ltd.- 9552948,
	9558425
	DHL Worldwide Express- 9881703- 7,
	9886305-9, 9882057
	Enem Express- 9330699
	Fedex Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd- 9565114

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