

## 20,000 Bangladeshi women, children smuggled a year

### Altat tells regional workshop on human trafficking

#### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite efforts to check human trafficking at various levels, between 10,000 and 20,000 women and children are trafficked from Bangladesh every year, said Home Minister Altat Hossain Chowdhury yesterday.

Expressing concerns at the upward trend of such trafficking, the home minister told the inaugural session of a three-day regional workshop on human trafficking in the city that traffickers were not getting punished in the South Asian region.

Addressing the South Asia Regional Workshop for Sharing Information Education and Communication (IEC) tools and Media Advocacy Initiatives at the BRAC Centre Inn as chief guest, the minister noted, poverty, illiteracy, natural calamities, lack of awareness, polygamy, gender discrimination and wars, among other factors, were responsible for human trafficking.

"Human trafficking is a million-dollar trade in human misery," said Chandni Joshi, South Asia Programme Director of United Nations Development Fund for

Women (Unifem) at the workshop participated NGO and media representatives from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Jointly organised by Unifem, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) the workshop aims at creating awareness of the government, NGOs and media on the magnitude of the trafficking in the region and to establish higher recognition of women's rights.

Naivety and denial are two basic reasons behind human trafficking, said the mission Director of USAID Bangladesh Gene V George. Now is the time we need to move beyond mere awareness raising against trafficking to prevention through effective mechanism.

"Human trafficking is a big business and usually powerful people are involved in it," said the ATSEC Regional Co-ordinator Enamul Huq Chowdhury. "Trafficking has thrown a big challenge to humanity."

He urged the government for proper execution of existing legislation to combat trafficking.

### KUSHIA-1 BY-POLLS 11 in race to win BNP ticket

AMANUR AMAN, Kushiya

Eleven aspirants have so far shown interest to run on BNP ticket for the upcoming by-elections of Kushtia-1 (Daulatpur) constituency slated for February 29.

A highly placed source of the party said the aspirants include the late minister Ahasanul Haq's wife Maleka Parveen Haq and son Reza Ahamad Bachhu, organising secretary of Daulatpur upazila BNP, former ambassador Mir Rezaul Karim, Advocate Abdur Mannan, Union Parishad chairmans Dulal Mollah and Golam Mustafa, BNP Sadar upazila unit President Altat Hossain, its General Secretary Sahid Sarkar Mongol and businessman-cum-columnist Musa Kamal.

Besides, industrialist Nasir Uddin Biswas and Iyusuf Choudhury may also run the race, the sources added.

Sources said a frantic race is on among the ruling party leaders for getting the nomination. Even a coalition led by upazila BNP President Altat Hossain has emerged against Reza Ahmed Bachhu.

On the other hand, main opposition AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil on Tuesday said his party is considering boycotting the by-election keeping in mind the 'rigging' by the BNP-Jamaat coalition in the Netrokona-3 by-poll last year.

"The situation across the country does not permit any election under BNP-Jamaat coalition to be fair. They (the coalition) even have started gathering criminals in the upazila unless violence during the voting," said Afaz Uddin, convener, Daulatpur upazila Awami League.

Afaz stands a good chance of getting AL ticket, according to party sources. He lost to former state minister for post and telecommunication Ahasanul Haq Mollah in four consecutive elections including the last parliamentary election by 3,400 votes.

### High Court rules BB directives to downsize bank boards illegal

#### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday declared two Bangladesh Bank (BB) directives on size and criteria of private banks' boards of directors as illegal and unconstitutional.

To streamline the banking sector and curb malpractice by the family-dominated bank boards, the central bank last year asked all the 30 private banks to cut the number of the directors down to 13 and barred inclusion of more than one director from a family.

But a High Court bench comprising Awlad Ali and Tarikul Hakim yesterday announced both the directives issued through a circular as illegal. Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud represented Bank Association of Bangladesh that challenged the BB circular.

In dealing with an amendment of the Bank Company Law that limits the tenure of a directorship to six years in two consecutive terms, the court asked the central bank to formulate a regulation to make it effective.

Last year 22 private banks downsized their boards of directors in line with the BB circular while the rest could not do so due to legal complications.

According to the circular issued on April 26, 2003, each of the private banks were asked to restructure its board of directors by adopting a new constitution in the first annual general meeting (AGM) held after the circular's date.

The central bank made the move as directors of the same family by sheer number were alleged to control many private banks and manipulate the banks' lending from the public deposits for their personal gains.

### Judicial council

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October 1 last year alleged that Additional Judge Syed Shahidur Rahman took Tk 50,000 from a client for fixing a bail from the court of a fellow judge in a woman repression case.

As per a presidential directive, the chief justice formed the first ever Supreme Judicial Council on October 29 to probe the allegation. The council heard deposition of eight persons including the additional judge, Bar president and the client concerned. During the council sittings, Shahidur cross-examined all the witnesses.

Nasim Sultana Kona, daughter of a retired High Court judge, allegedly gave Shahidur Tk 50,000 for fixing bail for a relative. But he could not arrange the bail. Kona then informed the Bar president about it.

Shahidur all along denied the allegation. He also submitted a written statement to the council.

According to Rakanuddin, when the judge sought money from Kona, she was first hesitant to pay as he was no longer a lawyer. But he assured her that the judge in the case concerned was his close friend and that he could easily manage the bail.

Shahidur was appointed additional judge on April 24 last year amidst objections from the Bar association senior lawyers of the Supreme Court. They alleged that he had siphoned off association funds while he was its office bearer.

## JS body chairmen

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the recommendations," said another chairman, who was also a cabinet member.

"We will demand that the government amend the rules of procedure to pave the way for implementation of recommendations," he added.

"We will also call for upgrading our status and providing facilities, enabling us to carry out our duties in line with the constitution," another chairman said.

The chairmen will submit a memorandum to the speaker and the prime minister (leader of the House), requesting them to take steps to shore up the committees, said a senior lawmaker, who heads a vital standing committee.

The Jatiya Sangsad has 51 committees: lawmakers head 44 committees and the speaker, the deputy speaker and the chief whip head the rest.

The Public Expenditure Review Commission and Transparency International Bangladesh made similar observations that the

House failed to ensure accountability and transparency of the government as the parliamentary standing committees could not exert their power.

But the committees succeeded in at least detecting corruption in some ministries, including the communications ministry in the latest in a series of findings.

The committees found irregularities in most ministries and organisations, including fisheries and livestock ministry, environment ministry, Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority, Power Development Board and Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Limited, except for finance and foreign ministries.

But each time, the ministries concerned rejected the findings of the committees instead of taking remedial action and were found reluctant to provide documents, Monday's meeting was told.

The chairmen feel the committees need research cells and more staff to make the bodies function effectively.

## BNP bigwigs wary

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after the October 1, 2001 polls and again to bring a no-confidence motion against former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury on June 10-20, 2002.

BNP Chairperson and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will chair the crucial meeting scheduled for a 4:00pm start.

Since then it has not met although parliament passed its 10th session.

Khaleda is likely to seek suggestion from party MPs about the proposed amendments to the constitution to enhance parliament seats from 300 to 450, including 50 reserve seats for women and give constitutional recognition to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and late president Ziaur Rahman as national heroes of the War of Liberation.

A number of BNP MPs told The Daily Star that they would take up some vital issues like alleged corruption of some ministers, trimming down the jumbo cabinet, improving law and order, curbing price hike, closing communication gap between the party and its government functionaries, infusing dynamism in the administration, bringing opposition back to parliament and other issues of national and international concern.

They said although they are not sure if they would be allowed to speak on the issues, several lawmakers said they would try their best to touch the issues.

ABNP policymakers said the chair might ask the members to confine their discussion only to issues of constitutional amendments and she might ask certain MPs to come up with suggestions should the members try to break discipline.

However, another policymaker said it would not be wise on the part of the chair to bar the MPs from speaking on anything and felt the party should allow maximum number of MPs to speak on all the issues.

"It would be better if the meeting was held over two days as in that

case some lawmakers could give their opinion on constitutional amendments and other issues related to governance," he added.

Sources within the ruling party said the lawmakers have long been frustrated with the lack of parliamentary practices within the party due to non-holding of BNPP meeting for long.

An MP, on condition of anonymity, said if allowed he would question the necessity of a jumbo cabinet and head-heavy government and suggest downsizing the cabinet immediately since people are asking questions about its utility.

Another MP said although the MPs work as a bridge between the government and party, no initiative has yet been taken to close down the huge gap between the two over the last two years.

He said he would speak on how the ministers have ignoring party affairs and party men since the BNP-led coalition came to office.

Sources said several MPs would raise the issue of corruption particularly by some ministers and state ministers and demand immediate removal of those engaged in corruption.

However, they said it would not be possible for any lawmaker to say anything about Hawa Bhaban, known as BNP's alternative power centre, and the persons of the Bhaban, who have been causing serious damage to party's image.

"This is highly sensitive... it is impossible to speak about the Hawa Bhaban before the prime minister," said an MP.

The legislators are likely to suggest removal of some ministers and state ministers, citing that they failed to deliver in the past two years.

Sources said the MPs do not want to speak out for fear of breaking parliamentary party discipline. But resentment is growing among them because they have no scope to express their views in any forum of the party.

## IGP sorry

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prayed for absolving him from the charge.

Former attorney general Mahmudul Islam, appearing as amicus curiae to assist the court, submitted that the earlier remarks of the IGP against a sitting High Court judge tantamount to contempt of court. But he could be exonerated from the charge following the fresh apology that he would never repeat it again.

Additional Attorney General Abdur Rezzak Khan, who appeared for the state, echoed the former attorney general and submitted that the IGP as the chief executive of the police should not behave in a manner that might tarnish the image of the force.

The Division Bench of Justice M A Matin and Justice Syed Refat Ahmed after hearing the case fixed January 27 for order.

Earlier, the High Court had issued contempt rule upon IGP Shahudul Huq for his remarks while replying to certain queries in connection with a contempt case against five police sergeants in August last year.

In June last year, the sergeants did not show due respect to a sitting judge at Farmgate in the city while he was on his way to court in a flag car.

In his written reply to High Court queries, the IGP said that by issuing the contempt rule against the traffic policemen, the judge had become liable to be prosecuted under the criminal law on charges of wrongful confinement, abetment, prejudicial act, obstructing public servant in discharging public function and threatening a public servant.

He also had questioned the court's mode of communication with the police headquarter.

The High Court in its suo moto contempt rule wanted to know from the IGP whether or not traffic police personnel were given training to salute a judge when he or she passes in a flag car. It also wanted to know whether or not a traffic policeman should give priority to a judge's car over those of subordinate officials.

Barrister Mainul Hossain appeared for the IGP.

## Outcasts

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Burakus. "They used to work on dead animals, tanning leather for the Imperial Court during the 17th century and as a result were not considered human," said Tagawa Masato, a member of the Buraku Liberation Movement.

Since then, he said, their situation remains pitiful. "Burakus suffer more frequent unemployment and lower salaries," Masato said, appealing for help from abroad in combating discrimination faced in Japan.

Another speaker, from Ecuador, a Quechua, said the indigenous community had faced discrimination for 500 years. "We're denied the right to education, to work, to dignity -- even to live," said Blanca Chansanco, former president of the confederation of indigenous peoples in Ecuador.

The group heard only once solution -- repeated over and over -- to end their suffering. "Let us join forces," said Nigeria's Dike.

## Khawja Habib

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Engineer Kazi Mahbubuddin. Khawja Habib, earlier sentenced to 27-year imprisonment in an arms case, was granted bail two months ago after 17 weeks of the conviction.

Engineer Kazi Mahbubuddin, sentenced to life imprisonment for killing his wife Nilubar Rashid, was released on bail on November 19 after two months of his conviction.

The Appellate Division asked both the convicts to surrender before the lower court in two weeks.

The order came upon two separate petitions filed by the government, seeking stay of the High Court orders granting them bail.

The Appellate Division also asked the government to come up with regular leave petition for hearing of the cases.

Additional Attorney General Abdur Rezzak Khan appeared for the state.

## Asad, Motiur

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Azhar Ali said his son Motiur, a meritorious student of class X, and Asad showed the path of freedom to the masses by sacrificing their lives. He said Motiur's contributions for his country's liberty were not properly included in its history.

The present situation of the country doesn't reflect their dreams, Azhar observed. He also vented his grievance at the government for not offering any facility to the families of the martyrs.

Nuruzzaman said the mass upheaval in 1969 would not have reached its goal without Asad's sacrifice. Asad's death intensified the movement, he said, adding the then autocratic government killed Asad, a student leader, in a planned way to stop the mass upsurge, but failed.

"Today, politics in this country is being treated as a business. But the politics in which Asad was involved was for freedom of the poor and the needy," he said, adding unfortunately that freedom has not been attained yet.

## 19 charged in Alam murder

#### COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka Court yesterday framed charges against 19 people for killing the leading Zura industrialist Mohammad Alam and his three maids two years back.

Judge Shahed Noor Uddin of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 fixed January 25 for trial of the sensational murder case.

The accused in custody that also includes Alam's sons-in-law Motiur Rahman (Matin) and Mohammad Ali Babul Hasan (Babu Jamie) pleaded not guilty and appealed for justice before the court after the charges were brought against them.

Of the 13 other accused, Mohammad Kabir, Sohag Bepari, Mohammad Sohel, Yusuf Miah, Abdul Latif Khan, Jahannah Begum, Farida, Haji Mohamad Rafiuddin Khan, Sheikh Akhter, Barkat Ali alias Bachchu, Abdur Rahman, Asma Rahman and Rehana Parvin are now in custody while Babul, Al Amin, Dulal and Alauddin are absconding.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressed charges against the accused on August 9 last year, drafting in 122 people as prosecution witnesses. The investigation officer seized 187 items of evidences (alamats) during the investigation.

Alam, 64, and his three maids -- Rahima, Sakina and Kamala -- were murdered at his New Jurain residence in Shyampur on the night of January 2, 2002. His son-in-law Matin filed a murder case with Shyampur Police Station the following day.

But the case took a new turn when the CID submitted a final report on July 18 last year after probe that suggested the maids were murdered to steal all valuables from Alam's residence.

The CID then filed a burglary and murder case accusing Matin, Babu Jamie and 24 others the same day.

The arrestees on charge of the murder were also shown arrested in the burglary and murder case on July 20 last year.

## AL won't harbour

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region. Besides, the prime minister and her son have made a blueprint to silence the voice of opposition leaders of the country, Hasina said.

The Awami League chief said the killing of journalist was meant to terrorise others and stop them from writing against growing lawlessness. "While in power we never gagged the press to stop writing against criminal activities," she said emphatically.

"I ordered the arrest of Ershad Shikder despite the fact that he was wanted to join Awami League," Hasina said. During the AL rule

### Sramik Dal leader shot dead

#### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants gunned down a Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal leader at Dayaganj in Sutrapur area of the capital on Monday night.

The victim, Md Shahidul Alam Swapan, 37, was president of Sadarghat unit of Sramik Dal, the ruling BNP's labour wing.

Two persons riding a motorcycle shot Shahidul inside a taxicab at around 11:00pm as he was returning from Gulistan area along with an activist named Tipu Sultan, driver of the cab Liton said.

He was rushed to General Hospital and then shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), where doctors declared him dead.

## NSI, DGFI quiz

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confined him in a room. "We went there with a search warrant," Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Police (Dhanmondi) Morshedul Hasan said, turning down repeated requests to provide further details.

The DGFI and the NSI interrogated Neyamat separately for five hours. He was then taken to Dhanmondi Police Station.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of the police station, Zafarullah, called Neyamat's relatives and asked them to go to the police station to get him released.

"Police did not find anything. I don't know whether other agencies found anything objectionable," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dhaka South) Khan Sayeed Hasan.

After his release, Neyamat told The Daily Star he did not know the reason for the move. He however refused to say what police enquired of him.

Neyamat has been running a madrassat named Darul Uloom Sahbaniat at his house for over one year.

criminals of the southwestern region could not raise their heads, she added.

"We made our political stand against this inefficient government absolutely clear through our 15-point programme recently announced at the Paltan grand rally," she said.

Hasina said murders in the region have been on the rise after Information Minister Tariqul Islam, who was charged with complicity in Jessore Udichi carnage, has been given the responsibility to look into the law and order of the region.

The Awami League chief gave assurance that she and her party will do everything possible for the education of Manik Saha's daughters.

"Manik was a brave journalist and I knew him personally," Hasina said in a choking voice while paying homage to him at the press club.

The meeting was addressed, among others, by Dainik Purbanchal editor Alhaj Llaquat Ali, President of Khulna Union of Journalists Wadudul Rahman Panna, President of Metropolitan Union of Journalists Sheikh Belaluddin Ahmed and former president of Khulna Press Club Shahabuddin Ahmed.

The speakers thanked Sheikh Hasina for her quick response to the call of journalists and for expressing solidarity with them against murders of journalists including the killing of Manik Saha.

Hasina also joined the journalists observing a token hunger strike to express her solidarity with their seven-day programme that ends today.

## JS sessions

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party ruling alliance in a landmark decision unveiled a plan to raise the JS seats to 450, including 50 reserved for women, to keep pace with the rising population.

"If the decision (to increase decision) is implemented, the lawmakers will get more time to do more development works at their constituencies," the law minister observed.

It will be placed as a bill during this session, which resumes today in the evening after a two-day recess. At the beginning of the session at 6:00, lawmakers will hold a discussion on the president's speech at the inaugural sitting of the new year session Sunday.

Meanwhile, the main opposition Awami League, which has been abstaining from the House since June last year, rejected yesterday's decision terminating it a conspiracy to destroy the parliamentary democracy.

"The government is doing this to make parliament ineffective further," Abdul Hamid, deputy leader of the opposition told the BBC.

## Rokan tells journalists

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"Lay siege to the magistrates who are influenced by the ministers and MPs and then issue warrants to arrest journalists in criminal defamation cases... we will stand by you," Barrister Mahmud told the biennial general meeting of Crime Reporters' Association of Bangladesh (Crab) at the auditorium of Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU).

He said in such cases, the ministers and MPs do not go to the civil courts, rather to magistrate courts. "The home ministry or the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) asks magistrates to issue warrants and they follow it."

"Neither in the USA nor in Europe the defamation charges are dealt by the criminal courts, rather by the civil courts. This is a matter of the criminal courts only in Bangladesh and some countries in the region. This has been a big professional hazard for journalists," he said.

Mahmud said such cases are designed to harass the journalists.

To avoid such harassment over the warrants, the leading lawyer demanded scrapping of certain provisions empowering magistrates to issue arrest warrant against the journalists in criminal defamation cases. He requested Attorney General AF Hassan Arif to pursue for the required amendment to the laws.

## Jewellery traders

### call indefinite strike in Kushtia

#### OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushiya

The jewellery shop owners association of Kushtia enforced an indefinite strike in protest at the arrest of three jewellery traders allegedly for assaulting a magistrate yesterday.

According to the district administration, a team of Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI) led by Magistrate Nabirul Islam went to a jewellery market in the Babur Ali Gate area to check weighing-machine and verify licenses.

The team observed the traders are cheating people by buying gold using the unit of 'tola' but selling the same measuring in gramme.

At one stage, the jewellery owners led by Kamal Ahamed, general secretary of the association, assaulted the team members and forced them to leave the market.

Later, police arrested Rokumuzzaman, Tara and Nitaya Saha following filing of two separate cases.

## Five killed in Feni road mishap

#### UNB, Feni

Five people were killed and four injured in a road accident on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway in Sadar upazila Monday night.

Police said the accident occurred in front of Sultana Filling Station at Muhurigan when a Dhaka-bound fertilizer-laden truck veered off the road into a ditch about 11:30pm.

Police said all the dead and injured are day-labourers. They were returning home in Rangpur by the truck.

The attorney general, who also addressed the conference, said that certain provisions in the penal code on defamation charges were both used and misused in the country. "I hope we will be able to reach a consensus whether the criminal liability will remain in the present form."

Referring to recent press reports on balls of some convicts who were awarded life imprisonment, Hassan Arif informed the meet that the balls had been cancelled. He also praised the role of the journalists in this regard. "I hope this will also create a kind of awareness in the court precinct," he said.

Referring to the killings of journalist Manik Saha and Shamsur Rahman and the torture of Tipu Sultan, he said all these show how hazardous the profession has become. Hassan Arif also labelled the police as tormentors of the journalists.

Alongside police, Mahmud said there were two more threats for journalists -- terrorists and the government. "Right to information is our constitutional right. The government has a big role in protecting the right and ensuring the security of newsmen."

"When a journalist goes out of home, the family members remain anxious whether he will return unharmed or whether he will return at all. I think no family will send their children to become a journalist if the present situation continues," he added.

Crab President Shankar Kumar Dey presided over the meeting. It was also addressed by DRU President Alamgir Hossain and Crab General Secretary Harunur Rashid Swapan.

## Road blockade

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The JSS brought out a rally headed by Pranati Bikash Chakma in front of its office.

Bandarban correspondent said without any violence the road blockade ended there. The PCJSS brought out a rally headed by Joli Mong.

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