

Silent revolution in a remote village

Poor girls educated with modern outlook at a Nilphamari children's home campaign against illiteracy, dowry, early marriage

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

It is a children's home for the poor in a remote village. But it is indeed a centre for developing a generation of educated girls with a modern outlook, a movement to free the society from illiteracy, early marriage and dowry.

All the 34 inmates of 'Chadmoni Children's Home' at Chaoradangi village in Jaldhaka upazila are good students at different schools.

They also learn sewing and handicrafts-making, take part in cultural programmes at the Home and run an adult literacy centre there. There is also a library facility.

The founders of this exceptional institution are a childless couple Pizirul Alam, 61, retired AGM of Uttara Bank and Motahara Alam, a former teacher of Fulkoli Nursery School in Dhaka.

A man of progressive ideas, Alam set up the Home at his village in 1999, spending all the money he got after retirement.

He moved village to village, talked to schools teachers and parents and procured poor girls from distressed families. He bears all their expenditures.

To create awareness among women in surrounding villages, the inmates visit houses in groups and campaign against dowry, early marriage, acid violence, smoking and also tobacco cultivation.

Early marriage and dowry has decreased to a great extent in the villages following their campaign, elderly Yakub Ali of Chaoradangi told this correspondent during a recent visit.

The atmosphere at the Home surprised some high officials and the local lawmaker who visited it.

"Such an institution in a remote village is a great surprise", said Jamaat-e-Islami law-

maker from Jaldhaka Mizanur Rahman Choudhury.

"The girls are so well mannered, well-dressed and well groomed up", he said. "This is an example in the country".

Inmate Feroza Begum, 15, from Kaligang village told this correspondent that two years ago, when she was 13, her day labourer father settled her marriage with a rickshawpuller. A student of class eight then, he was unwilling but her opinion got little importance to her parents.

"I knew about Chadmoni. One day I came here and told 'Amma' everything. The inmates call Motahara Alam Amma (mother).

On hearing everything, Pizirul rushed to Feroza's father Sheikh Farid and persuade him not to arrange her (Feroza) marriage. At last he was convinced. Since then, Feroza is staying at Chadmoni. Now she is a student of class ten at Kaligang High School. She secured the third position in the last school final examination.

Another inmate, Monteza Begum, 14, is the 'first girl' in class nine at Kaligang High School. She said her father Mojibar Rahman arranged marriage of her 14-year-old elder sister.

"I became afraid as my turn would come next".

Pizirul heard about the girl from a teacher of that school. He contacted her parents, told them that an educated girl is as asset, not a liability, and brought Monteza to the Home.

The day at Chadmoni begins early in the morning with Fajr prayer and recitation from holy Quran, followed by assembly, drill and oath-taking.

The girls then study till 9.30 am with a 15-minute break for breakfast. They then go to their respective schools.

"There are arrangements for indoor games

like carom. We also play local outdoor games", said Tahmina Akhter an inmate.

Toma, Luna and Sapna Akhtar said they also practise songs, drama and recitation.

Motahara Alam, also a member of Chadmoni Managing Committee, said Spandhan Sanskritic Gosthi, a cultural organisation of Jaldhaka, voluntarily provides training to interested inmates on cultural activities. Two of the inmates got prizes this year for cultural performance, she said.

During the visit, this correspondent saw a group of women and girls taking sewing training in a room, named 'Ambia Khatoon Free Sewing Training Centre at the Home.

Ambia Khatoon is the aunt of Pizirul Alam. "Training of the third batch is going on", said Pizirul. Women from nearby areas can also take training with our girls free of cost", he said.

After training here, some of the women have become self-reliant by running tailoring shops.

Forty male adults attend the literacy centre at night at the Home, run by the girls.

There are about 350 books at the library.

"I do not want any donation in money. I want books for my library", Pizirul said.

The monthly expenditure is around Tk 15,000, which he manages from his small businesses started with a part of his retirement benefits. He takes donations only from close relatives and friends.

Asked why he does not seek help from government or any organisation, he said, "I will seek help when needed".

A 11-member committee including four women with Pizirul Alam as its Chairman runs the Home. The rest three women members are Masuda Begum Daizi, now working at BIDS

(Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies), high school Shamsun Nahar and housewife Fazilatunnesa.

Lipi Akhtar Ria, 18, passed the SSC examination from Chaoradangi High School this year. She is unhappy because she will have to leave the Home shortly.

"No girl can stay if she reaches 18", Pizirul said.

"We may amend the provision, considering the reality. Now we think that if a girl returns to parents before becoming self-reliant, she will be a burden to them and our goal will not be achieved. Besides many girls have none to return to".

Pizirul has a plan to set up a cottage industry and a garments factory to provide jobs to girls after education.

Every year, a fair called Chadmoni Fair is arranged on its premises. Handicrafts including Nakshi Katha, home made toys and various food items are displayed.

Pizirul said the Nilphamari Deputy Commissioner visited the Home some months ago and promised to give one computer for the girls.

Chaoradangi village is under Balapara union. Chairman of the Union Parishad, Reazul Islam, said Chadmoni is playing an important role for education of extremely poor girls and checking early marriage and dowry.

Former headmaster of Chaoradangi High School Abdul Khaleq said girls of 'Chadmoni' are very modest and they are doing brilliant results.

Golam Mostafa, a teacher of Jaldhaka College and Editor of local weekly Jalkatha said, "Our society will change within a short time if we have Chadmonis".



Pizirul Alam with the girls he is grooming up (left) and sewing training going on at the Chadmoni Children's Home



PHOTO: STAR

IFS Kurigram: 7 MT rice still 'missing', 'fake' bills

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Chilmari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Parimol Majumder has said seven metric tons of rice allegedly misappropriated from the allocation under the Integrated Food Security Programme (IFS) in Raniganj union in Kurigram could not be recovered till yesterday.

A total of 37.7 mt of rice was allocated for the work there, sources in Raniganj told this correspondent earlier.

The misappropriation was detected by a LGED team from Dhaka during its spot visit to Raniganj on July 4.

Parimol said after detection of the anomaly, the team asked him and Kurigram LGED Executive Engineer Salaududdin Ahmed to recover the misappropriated rice.

The sources said that during the spot visit, the team had found that out of 37.7 metric tons, only five metric tons of rice were being distributed. Seeing this, the team stopped the distribution and asked the User Committee Chairman, Sudhir, to produce the rest quantity and then resume distribution.

But within 36 hours, the rest quantity could not be produced.

The team then asked the UNO and the LGED Executive Engineer to

recover the rice.

Being pressed by them, the User Committee Chairman brought 25 metric tons in the last fifteen days and distributed it among the beneficiaries of the project.

The rest seven tonnes are yet to be recovered.

When asked, the UNO told this correspondent that action would be taken against the persons responsible for the anomaly in implementing the IFS programme in the upazila.

"Our first duty is to ensure the resources for the beneficiaries. So we put pressure on them to recover the resources. Then we will go for action against the corrupt persons", Parimol said.

Meanwhile, The Daily Star obtained documentary evidence on attempts to draw Tk 94,640 by producing "false bills" in the name of road reconstruction in Fulbari upazila in the Kurigram under the IFS programme.

The malpractice was mentioned in a letter to the Fulbari Upazila Nirbahi Officer by the Upazila Accounts Officer. A copy of the letter was made available to The Daily Star.

It was stated in the letter that a total of Tk 1,09,640 was drawn against three bills (bill no. 33 dated

14-03-2004 Tk 30,000, bill no. 87 dated 19-05-2004 Tk 20,000 and bill no. 188 dated 10-06-2004 Tk 59,640) for reconstruction of a road from Gangarhat Dakhil Madrasah to Balatari in Kashipur union.

Later, a "false" bill (bill No. 232 dated 10-06-2004), signed by the Upazila Engineer, was produced, claiming Tk 59,640 as the "last installment" of the payment, "which can not be paid in any way", the letter said.

The same letter stated that Tk 1,41,420 was drawn against four bills (bill No. 5 dated 29-02-2004 Tk 40,000; bill No. 136 dated 29-05-2004 Tk 35,000; bill no. 216 dated 10-06-2004 Tk 35,000 and bill No. 214 dated 10-06-2004 Tk 31,420) for reconstruction of a road from Kholhar market to Bhangamor Primary School in Bamoner Khamar village in Bhangamor union.

Later, a "false" bill (No. 254 dated 10-06-2004) was produced claiming Tk 35,000 as the third installment payment, "which can not be paid in anyway".

The latter said, "Efforts were made to misappropriate Tk 94,640 through the false bills".

It added, "Special request is being made to take legal action against the persons involved and to check such things".

Miscreants snatch ultra poor's money!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Sub Assistant Engineers of Kurigram Sadar Upazila LGED Ziur Rahman and Khalilur Rahman on Tuesday filed a case with Kurigram Sadar police station alleging that some miscreants snatched Tk 21,409 when money was being distributed among IFS project beneficiaries on Kathalbari Girls High School ground on Monday.

The money was being distributed among the beneficiaries who worked under IFS project in Kathalbari Ward No 1 and 2.

In the FIR, they said a group of miscreants led by Chananur Haq, Shimul, Azad, Ershadul, Quel, Suman and Juel came to the spot and demanded their money back from one Nazrul Islam, husband of 'user committee' chairman Diljan. Nazrul Islam was also present there.

After a heated exchange of words with Nazrul Islam, the miscreants snatched away the bag which contained the money (Tk 21,409).

Sources who were present at the spot during the snatching, talked to this correspondent seeking anonymity. They claimed that Nazrul Islam had taken money from them on condition that he would sell rice to them.

As he failed to give them the promised rice, they snatched the money, the sources claimed.

The Kurigram Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) visited the spot immediately after the incident.

When asked by this correspondent, the UNO however denied the claim that Nazrul Islam had taken money on condition of rice sale. It was an incident of snatching, he said.

LGED rejoinder

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has issued a rejoinder to a Daily Star report published on June 30 under the headline "Resources for Ultra Poor Eaten Up".

The report was on alleged misappropriation of food grains under a project in Kurigram.

The rejoinder said after publication of the report a LGED team from Dhaka "inquired into the matter physically, verifying the spots of occurrence and the people referred to (in the report) and found the news to be totally baseless and concocted."

"During interrogation Mr. Imrul Kayes, Director, RDRS; Mr. Zafar Ali, Chairman of Kathalbari Union, Kurigram Sadar Upazila; Rajina, Chairman of Kazipara Users Committee in Daldalia union under Ulipur upazila told that they were misquoted in the report."

"The team also met with the Deputy Commissioner, Kurigram who is also the chairman of district food security assistance committee and all the concerned Upazila Nirbahi Officers (Sadar, Rowmari, Rajshpur and Ulipur Upazila).

"The Deputy Commissioner and concerned Upazila Nirbahi Officers termed the allegation of misappropriation of two-third resources of the project as totally false, motivated and far from reality."

"After verifying the report, field situation and interviews of the persons concerned, it was observed that the report was misquoted and fabricated with malafide intention".

5 killed in B'baria road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Five persons were killed and three others injured in a road accident on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway at Bariura village in Sarail upazila yesterday.

The dead victims were Mahbubur Rahman, 30, Md Robin, 7, Md Amin Mia, 35, his wife Rehana Begum, 30, and Md Fazlul Haque, 40.

The accident occurred when a passenger-loaded tempo collided

head-on with a bus coming from the opposite direction at the spot. The tempo was heading towards Shahabazpur from Brahmanbaria, according to police, eye-witnesses and hospital sources.

As a result three persons died on the spot while two others died on the way to hospital. All of dead victims were tempo passengers.

The bodies were sent to Brahmanbari Sadar Hospital for autopsy.



Asir Uddin Ahmed

Anniversary of death

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Today is the 15th death anniversary of Asir Uddin Ahmed, the first Muslim headmaster of 116-year-old Nilphamari High English School (now Government Boys' High School).

Asir Uddin passed away on July 22 in 1989.

He served the school from early 50s till its nationalisation in late 60s when its name and fame rose to the peak all around. During his tenure he created many golden sons of the soil like Shaheed Captain R A M Khairul Bashar (popularly known as Captain Bashar), late Ambassador Humayun Kabir, world renowned statistician late Ahsan Ahmed, noted Telegraph and Telephone engineer A R Saber, cultural personality turned law-maker Asaduzzaman Noor, prominent Dhaka University teacher Ahaduzzaman Mohammad Ali, former bureaucrat Ashraf Ali, popular folk singer Rathindra Nath Roy and other distinguished persons.



PHOTO: STAR

The Fulchari UNO office building is now threatened with erosion by the Brahmaputra river. The UNO office has been shifted.

SNAPS

2 fake doctors sued by BMA

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The Satkhira unit of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) has filed a case with the Sadar thana against two fake doctors for cheating people by personifying themselves as highly qualified doctors. They are B Rahman of SkyLab Medical Centre and Clinic at Plashpole in the town and Chitta Ranjan Bachhar of Sardar Clinic at Banishpur in Shyamnagar upazila, police said yesterday. The case was filed by the general secretary of Satkhira BMA. The local MBA earlier conducted investigation against twelve fake doctors in the district and found that they were cheating people impersonating highly qualified doctors.

Garo leader held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Garo leader Proshanta Mankin was arrested by Mochpur police from Toli in Mochpur, Tangail on Monday. He was sent him to jail on Tuesday. His arrest has created commotion among the indigenous people. Garo leaders Albert Mankin, Ajay Mree and Roki Mrong that this correspondent that all the cases filed against him are false. A top aboriginal leader, Ajay Mree told this correspondent, anti eco-park movement will not be stopped even if all Garo leaders are arrested. "Each and every aboriginal has become a leader of the movement", he added. Police said the aboriginal leader is an accused of about 20 cases filed by the Forest Department.

Killers yet to be nabbed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Police failed to nab the killers of Rokeya of Shreerampur village in Barhatta upazila even after one month of the incident. Ill-fated Rokeya was killed by her husband, Abdul Latif on June 20 night. Police said, on the fateful night, Latif was gambling with Jalal, Dulal, Nawab Ali and Wafiz of the same village in his bed room. As Rokeya protest, her gambler husband became furious and strangled her. The next day, Latif and his gambler friend buried Rokeya without informing the matter to her near and dear ones staying at her father's house at the neighbouring Noapara village. Rokeya's brother Mostafa filed a murder case with Netrakona magistrate's court on July 13 accusing Abdul Latif and four others.

Free legal aid for the distressed

350 got free legal aid by SUS in Netrakona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

A local NGO, Sabolombi Unnayan Samity (SUS) has been rendering free legal aid to distressed people for sometime.

As many as 350 distressed people got free legal aid from here since its inception. This was disclosed recently by Director Golam Mostafa Razu.

The organisation's legal aid committee settled 45 cases during the last six months, said Legal Advisor advocate Marsha Ahmed. She said all the cases have been settled within the shortest possible time. Forty members of the committee are engaged in the noble mission, she added.



PHOTO: STAR

A partial view of the audience in a workshop on legal rights, organised by Sabolombi Unnayan Samity in Netrakona recently.

CPB human chain for relief

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) here formed a human chain on Tuesday protesting alleged negligence by local Water Development Board in repairing flood control embankments.

A half-kilometre human chain stretched from Tetultola to Dariyapur bridge in Gaibandha Sadar upazila.

They alleged that vast areas were

flooded in Kholahati, Ghagoo, Gideri, Kuptola, Kamajani as about 500 feet of the Ghagot flood control embankment was washed away at Kamorani because WDB did not renovate the vulnerable points.

They also demanded punishment against the persons responsible.

The CPB also demanded immediate medicate services, relief for the flood affected people till the next Boro crop and seeds for farmers after recession of flood water.

Bridge to be built on Karnaphuli linking road to Yangon

TO STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Commerce Minister Air Vice-Marshal (Retd) Altaf Hossain Chowdhury here on Tuesday a third bridge would be built on the Karnaphuli and it will be connected with the proposed road to Yangon, capital of Myanmar.

There should not be any confusion about the bridge after laying of its foundation by the Prime Minister, he said while addressing a view-exchange meeting with leaders Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI).

The government is sincere to set up the bridge to enhance legal trade and commerce and to reduce the present informal border trade with Myanmar, he said.

Altaf, a former home minister, said the government has taken steps to strengthen the law enforcing

agencies including police and coast guard to check undesired informal trade.

A amount of Tk 900 crore has been allocated in the annual budget for upgrading the forces with necessary equipment and transport. The budget provides Tk 300 for modernizing the coast guards to safeguard the territorial water.

Some 1800 vehicles would be procured for police, he added.

The meeting also discusses various issues raised by the business leaders.

Earlier, CCCI President Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury gave an address of welcome. Among others, CCCI Senior Vice-President Ershad Ullah, Sufi Mizanur Rahman of PHP Group, Ali Hossain, M Sallimullah, Iqbal Dada, Dr. Parvez Sajjad Akter also spoke.

Crimes up in Keshabpur

A CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Rising incidents of crimes in different villages in Keshabpur upazila has raised a great concern among the villagers.

On July 16, armed robberies were committed in the houses of Abdus Samad, Abdul Jalil and Abdus Satter at Dormutia village.

On the same night, robbers raided the houses of Ansar Sarder, Shahidul Islam, Abdul Bashar, Alhaj Abdul Gani at Jahanpur village and that of Babulal Das at Chhalitbaria village.

The dacoits decamped with cash money, gold ornaments and other valuables worth about Tk 2 lakh.

A 40-year-old insane woman was raped on Armathra road at Verchi Palpara point on the same night.

On the previous night, miscreants damaged about 4,000 saplings planted by the Forest Department.

Five persons were arrested relating to the incident.

Armed robberies were committed in the houses of Tarapada Das of Magurdanga village, Tabibur Rahman and Gafur Gazi of Kariakhal village.