

# An initiative with great vision

Flood affected farmers, school students earn by producing cocoon, silk yarn under Brac programme

RAFIQUE SARKER *back from Lalmonirhat*

A small initiative by Brac has opened up good prospects for flood affected people and school students to earn extra income with little effort by learning a viable profession.

It has taken up an innovative income-generating programme to rehabilitate flood affected poor students and marginal farmers in Lalmonirhat district.

Besides distribution of relief among flood affected poor people in five upazilas of the district, Brac has given logistic support to 1132 males and females for training and making silk yarn on handloom and also for cocoon cultivation on homesteads.

It has so far distributed 500 handlooms free of cost among 500 Brac school students, most of them

They were given a 10-day training on making silk Yarn on handlooms.

Talking to The Daily Star, Brac's Regional Sector Specialist (Sericulture) Bishwannath said, "We have given our students handlooms and silk cocoon free of cost. They will make yarn from cocoon and sell it to us."

Morzina, a student at a Brac

school at Saptana, said she is earning Tk 150 a week now.

"This is supplementing my family income to a great extent," she added.

Besides, Brac has also disbursed loans among 425 marginal farmers for cultivation of cocoon and bush plants. It has so far disbursed collateral-free loans amounting to Tk 56,60,000 among them after the flood.

Abdur Rahman of Khunigach in Lalmonirhat Sader upzila said he could earn at least Tk 12,000 by cultivating cocoon on the homestead. "This will be my extra income for the family".

Makbul Hossen of Kulaghat in Lalmonirhat Sadar upzila said cocoon cultivation is very easy and it needs little attention and labour.

Brac's Lalmonirhat Regional Manager said, "The farmers will sell their cocoons to Brac at market price and thus recover their flood loss."

He said the farmers have also been given training on cultivation of bush plants.

Soil and climate in Lalmonirhat and its adjoining districts are congenial for silk worm cultivation. Farmers can earn good profit from its cultivation, he added.



PHOTO: STAR  
School girls and flood affected women making silk yarn on handloom at a centre run by Brac.

## A laudable voluntary health service

500 cataract operations done for free at a Rangpur hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

The Community Care and Research Centre (CECRC), Rangpur performed free cataract operation on about 500 eye patients in seven days till yesterday.

Intraocular Lens are being implanted in the patients' eyes through SICS (Suture less Technique) method and other medicines supplied for free.

The programme started on September 4 and will conclude

tomorrow. More 200 operations will be done by this time.

The patients are from different areas of Rangpur, Gibandha, Nilphamari, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat districts, enlisted earlier.

The CECRC and Mechi Eye Care Centre (MECC) of Nepal are jointly implementing the programme with financial assistance from the Eye care Worldwide of the Netherlands.

Dr Khairel Islam and Dr Rejaun Nabi of CECRC and Dr Sanjay Kumar Singh of MECC are have been performing the operations.

Staff of MECC and CECRC are assisting them.

Dr. Khairel Islam, Executive Director of CECRC told The Daily Star, "Free cataract surgeries were done at many places in the country earlier. But this is the largest number of patients being operated upon under one programme.

CECRC Chairman Md. Ferdous Alam Mukul said most of the patients selected for surgery are living below poverty level.

According to CECRC, there are about 15 lakh cataract patients in the country who depend on others due to blurred vision. They can not earn their livelihood.

The number is increasing. There should be a national programme and doctors should come forward to volunteer their service to contain the increasing trend, he said.

Doctors performing cataract operation at CECRC.

PHOTO: STAR

## A different scene

New Barisal Sadar Hospital unutilised over corruption stand-off

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The new building of Barisal Sadar Hospital, built at a cost of Tk 7 crore, is utilised because it can not be handed over to the hospital authorities by the ministry of health due to alleged corruption in its construction.

The hospital authorities are refusing to accept the new complex, built on the old hospital compound, alleging that it was not constructed as per the project plan. Allegations have it that there were gross anomalies and corruption in the construction, deviating from the approved project plan.

The plan included some special arrangements and facilities for female patients, particularly expected mothers, but nothing has been done in this regard, sources said.

A meeting to decide its handing over and a possible date for inauguration ended inconclusively on August 16 because of allegations by the hospital authorities that the facilities were not created.

Construction of the new building was planned in view of the rush of patients to hospitals in the divisional headquarter.

The Construction Management and Maintenance Unit (CMMU) of Health and Family Welfare Ministry started the construction about three years back.

The project plan provided for special type of bathrooms, floors and other facilities in the female ward, but those were not done. Water supply facilities and sanitation system built are also not as per the plan, the sources said.

But mysteriously, some units were shifted to the new complex before completion of construction and without authorities' permission. Pressure was given on the hospital

authorities to shift the female surgery and gynecology wards to the new complex.

In such a situation, Barisal City Corporation (BCC) Mayor Majibur Rahman Sarwar MP, who is the district minister-in-charge, called a meeting of the District Health Committee and formed a body headed by the Director of Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (BSBMCH) to decide a date for handing over of the new hospital building.

At the August 16 meeting, CMMU representative Wahidur Rahman proposed immediate takeover of the new building by the hospital authorities and pressed for fixing an inauguration date. But the other members of the committee demanded the copy of the project plan, alleging that constructions deviated from it.

The meeting ended inconclusively as other members also wanted to see the project plan.

Public Works Department Executive Engineer Humaun Kabir Chowdhury and Power Development Board engineer Emdadul Huq, both members of the committee, were also present at the meeting. But later they declined to make any comment.

When contacted, Dr Mizanur Rahman, Resident Medical Officer of Sadar Hospital, acknowledged irregularities in the construction but declined to give details.

Meanwhile, the Director General of Health Department during a visit to the new complex also expressed his dissatisfaction about the quality of work, the sources said.

The city dwellers feel that the new complex should be inaugurated soon as the BSBMCH can not cope with the rush of patients.

## SNAPS

**Diarrhoea kills 3, attacks 1000 in Nilphamari**

**Monga creeping as VGF rice distribution yet to begin**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

At least three people died from diarrhoea and about 1000 were attacked in three days as the disease spread in different areas of the district.

The three dead are Tomi, 15, daughter of Syed Mamud of Chapra Sharansari village in Sadar upazila; Moslem, 24, son of Tara Miah of Khord Bolagari village in Syedpur upazila and Shahana Begum, 49, of the same village.

There has been rush of diarrhoea patients in several government hospitals in the district.

Sources said the disease is spreading as people are taking unwholesome food and inedible things as the poor have no work.

They said monga situation virtually started in the district since the beginning of the current month. Usually September-November is crucial for the poor in northern districts because of lack of employ-

ment, which begins with start of Aman harvest. Diarrhoea and other diseases increase in the months.

Transplantation of Aman has been completed in most areas of district and so there is no work.

The government has sanctioned 1,4,400 VGF (vulnerable group feeding) cards in the district to distribute 10 kg rice against each card.

These VGF cards have been distributed in 60 unions and four municipalities in the district. But distribution of rice is yet to start though distribution of the cards were completed nine days ago, the sources and many of the recipients said.

Officials said the lists of VGF cards are now being checked and verified by army and distribution will start after its completion.

The said the rice has been allotted and distribution will start soon.

**Gangraped schoolgirl fighting for life**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A gangraped schoolgirl is fighting for life at Manikganj Sadar Hospital.

The girl, a student of class V/11 at Jamiria High School, was abducted allegedly by neighbours Mohid Biswas, Amir Mollah, Ekhlas and Sattar when she went out of house on nature's call at Darirajnagar village in Sirgair upazila on Tuesday night.

They took her to a grocer shop owned by one Mohid's and gangraped her. The criminals tied her mouth and hands with cloth and left in a nearby field. She was rescued next morning in an unconscious state and taken to Shingra hospital. She was later shifted to Manikganj Sadar Hospital.

The victim's uncle Khorshed Alam filed a case with Singair thanan yesterday under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act accusing Mohid Biswas, Amir Mollah, Ekhlas and Sattar.

**'Ruling party ruining Liberation War spirit**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Krishok Shramik Janata League General Secretary advocate Fazlur Rahman Khan has said 'Razakars and fundamentalists who are in power now are destroying the spirit of the Liberation War'.

He is addressing in a rally on the Shahid Minar premises in the town on Thursday.

He said the ruling parties are sheltering terrorists, criminals and patronising corruption.

Fazlur Rahman also criticised Netrakona Awami League leaders, saying for their alleged in-fighting.

Netrakona district Awami League is now divided into three groups, he claimed. "Awami League candidate will lose the Netrakona-2 by-election if it participates in the polls because of the in-fighting, he said.

Neither AL nor BNP can do any good to the people because they do not practise democracy in their parties. Both shelter terrorists and criminals, he claimed.

He called upon the people to rally round his party, saying this is the only alternative.

Presided over by Abdul Hannan, convenor of Netrakona Krishok Shramik Janata League, the meeting was addressed by, among others, Habibur Rahaman (Bir Protik), Abu Jaber Sabet and Abdul Kalam Azad.

## Army pullout from CHT opposed by settlers

Speakers recall memory of Pakuakhali tragedy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Speakers at a discussants meeting opposed withdrawal of army from Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) fearing insecurity for Bangalee settlers.

If army is withdrawn, Bangalee settlers might have to take up arms to protect themselves from alleged attacks by a section of tribesmen engaged in various crimes including toll collection, they said at a discussion meeting reminiscing the Pakuakhali tragedy in which 34 Bangalee woodcutters were killed by the then Shahibabu in 1996.

"There will be no alternative to taking up arms to save settlers from tribesmen's oppressive activities if army is pulled out and government will be responsible for any situation arising thereof", said Jamat-e-Islam district Ameer ASM Shahidullah said at the meeting held

on Thursday.

It was jointly organised by Parbatya Gono Parishad (PGP), an organisation of Bangalee settlers and Jamaat-e-Islam.

He demanded redeployment of army in areas from where they were withdrawn, considering the prevailing situation.

The Shantibabu was disarmed and its members were granted general amnesty after signing of the landmark CHT peace agreement on December 2, 1997.

On September 9, 1996, some Shantibabu members in a letter called the woodcutters to join a discussion in Pakuakhali jungle in Baghaichhari upazila. As they went there, armed Shantibabu men cordoned and slaughtered them.

On the following morning, army and police recovered some 28 bodies, most of those with throats slit or severed, floating on the

Maine river.

The massacre stirred all quarters and the then government formed a committee to probe the incident. But its report has not yet been made public.

The speakers demanded immediate publication of the probe report, rehabilitation of the affected families, compensation for them and trial of all killings in the CHT over the years.

Presided over by Rangamati

Poura Jamaat Ameer Nurul Amin

Paturay, the meeting was addressed by, among others, PGP

leader Jalal Uddin Choudhury Alomgir, district Jamaat Assistant Secretary Abu Bakar Mulla, its leader Harunur Rashid, Islami Chhatra Shibir leader Abdulla Mamun, Advocate Mokhber Ahmed, Jahngir Alam and Jamshed.

## AL demands fresh polls

Rigging alleged, journo beaten: BNP's Humayun declared elected in Kalapara

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

BNP-backed candidate Humayun Sikder has been declared officially elected chairman of Kalapara municipality.

Humayun got 6,708 votes against 3133 polled by his nearest rival Didar Uddin Ahmed Masum of Awami League. The election was held on Thursday.

The elected commissioners in women's reserved seats are Najneen Fatima Beauty (1118 votes), Bilki Jahan (1835 votes) and Hasanuzzaman (Ward No-9, uncontested).

Our Barisal Correspondent adds: Awami League backed candidate Didar Uddin Ahmed Masum rejected the polls result, alleging massive rigging and violence by ruling party men.

At about noon on the polling day, Masum lodged a written complaint to Kapalara Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abdul Barik alleging massive rigging and violence by ruling party men. In the letter he said he boycotted the polls and demanded re-

election.

Later at a press conference in Kalapara he alleged that ruling party men ousted his agents from polling centres, captured many and did and massive rigging.

Even journalists were not allowed to enter polling centres, he alleged. Local Awami League lawmaker Mahbub Rahman Talukder was also present at the press conference.

According to reports reaching Barisal, Nikhil Chatterjee, Patuakhali correspondent of Bangla national daily Sangbad, was beaten near the upazila livestock office at about 9:30 am allegedly by ruling party activists when he was collecting election news.

Kalapara Reporters Club condemned the attack on Nikhil.

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