



PHOTO: STAR

Children taken out of bidi factories and enrolled at schools form human chain and bring out procession at Daulatpur with appeal for continuation of their studies.

# We want to continue schooling

## Children rescued from tobacco factories demand at Daulatpur

AMANUR AMAN, Kushitia

It was a unique event when over 1000 children, rescued from hazardous tobacco factory jobs and enrolled in schools, brought out a procession and stood hand in hand with banners and fastoons, appealing for continuation of their free education and saving thousands more like them.

They also held a rally at Daulatpur, the largest tobacco and Bidi producing area in the country, where they appealed to the government and others concerned to free children from risky work and ensure their rights.

Banners and fastoons reading slogans like "We want education", "No more child labour" drew attention and sympathy of all quarters including big stake holders in the tobacco industry.

Alongside, a workshop on saving children from tobacco

industry, organised by a local NGO-- SETUY-- and Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra evoked good response from some of the Bidi factory owners.

"I have greatly reduced child labourers in my factory and will replace the few still there", said Nasiruddin Biswas, owner of Nasir Bidi Factory while talking to this correspondent yesterday.

Sunil Kumar, owner of Sonali Bidi Factory, said "I will gradually eliminate child labour from my factory. It can not be done abruptly".

At the workshop, speakers including 'card holders' (those who supply child labour for bidi processing) from different tobacco factories promised they will no more use children to produce and process Bidi and tobacco.

The workshop titled 'To Eliminate Child Labour: Role of Cardholders in Bidi Factory' was

organised by BTUK.

The SETU and BTUK are working to eliminate child labour from tobacco factories with assistance from ILO (International Labour Organisation) and the United States Department of Labour (USDOL).

The ILO programme in Bangladesh under an IPEC (International Programme to Eliminate Child Labour) project is part of its activities in Third World countries to get children out of five 'most risky jobs' in tobacco industry, match factor, tannery, construction work and working as domestic help.

According to survey made by SETU and BTUK, at least 5,000 children were working in eight big tobacco factories in Kushitia in 2001.

The ILO programme implemented by SETU and BTUK was launched in December 2001.

Meantime, SETU took out 1459 children from Bidi factories and 896 of them have been enrolled at schools after orientation at pre-school centers run by it. It runs 28 pre-school centers in the district.

The rest aged between 13-17 were provided with income generating activities including tailoring, paper bag making, nursery raising, electrical work and other technical jobs after short training.

The SETU also signed an agreement with the owner of Mansur Bidi Factory, a big tobacco factory, on May 9 last year that he will not employ children anymore.

The NGO also have taken initiatives to bring poor parents of the children under income generating programmes so that they are not forced to send their children to tobacco factories.

It has also formed 53 'mother groups' with the children's mothers to create awareness among them not to send their children to tobacco factories.

"About Tk 29 lakh has been disbursed among 497 poor parents and we have attained success in bringing their children out of tobacco factories," SETU Executive Director MA Kader told this correspondent.

Now 3000 children are still working at eight tobacco factories.

But the 30-month ILO project, extended for six months earlier, concludes in March this year.

People of all classes this correspondent talked to have expressed their deep concern and said children will go back to Bidi factories once the project is closed.

The project should continue for at least three more years to produce a sustainable result, they said.

BTUK coordinator Ahsanul Haq Nabab said, awareness has been created among the children and their parents. If the project is stopped, many of them will go back to their old hazardous jobs, he said.

Chairman of Hogolbaria Union Parishad, Belal Hossain, expressed his deep concern that the ILO project would be closed.

"The ILO opened great opportunities for children in the area. They will go back to Bidi factories if the programme is closed", he said.

Abdul Khaleq, 16, son Noor Hossain of Hosanbad village, who worked at a Bidi factory earlier, is now an electrician.

"I earn Tk 70 a day now, which is more than three times the amount I used to earn at Bidi factory", he told this correspondent.

"Many like me have benefited by the ILO project", he said.

# Meant to be cheap

FROM PAGE 1

patients, which are sold back to the same pharmacies that had earlier sold them. A number of brokers are allegedly engaged in the process.

Plainclothesmen recently arrested one of the brokers, Mobarak Hossain, from his house close to the hospital. He had allegedly stockpiled 29 categories of medicines worth about Tk 50,000. Detective Branch (DB) police quizzed him to learn that for the last 25 years he was buying at very low prices medicines mostly required for surgical interventions from various departments at the hospital.

He admitted that more than 10 brokers are engaged in such illegal purchase of medicines.

Roni Begum, 25, from Mahakhali Sattala slum was admitted to maternity ward -2 at the hospital recently. Half an hour into her admission, the attending doctors asked her husband Arif, a rickshawpuller, to bring a number of drugs and medical accessories for caesarean section.

Doctors who had examined her prior to her admission to the DMCH had said she would have a normal delivery.

Arif failed to pay for the cost of the drugs and accessories and took his wife back home about two hours later. She gave birth to a baby within half an hour of returning home.

"We are very poor and we come to the hospital (DMCH) for less expensive delivery. But I have seen many other attendants of patients being asked to buy costly drugs," Arif said.

Rahela Akter, 22, had come to the hospital from Singair, Manikganj. The attending doctors gave her husband a list of drugs and medical accessories

worth about Tk 9,000. But earlier she was told that she would have a normal delivery.

Rahel's attendants expressed their inability to pay for a caesarean section and doctors later asked them to buy drugs worth about Tk 1,900.

A broker at the hospital offered loan to Rahela's husband Fazal Huq, a rickshawpuller. "I was asked to give a guarantee to pay him back to get the loan at a very high interest. Initially, I borrowed Tk 4,000 and then more," Fazlul said.

Kalpana Begum, 20, from Shamirakha also narrated similar experience. "We had no idea delivery at the public hospital will cost us so much. We also borrowed money at a very high rate of interest," said Md Monir, Kalpana's husband.

A common sight at the maternity section is worried attendants of patients rushing to the nearest pharmacies to buy medicines and other things the doctors say are urgently needed.

"The attendants hardly know that about half of the items are later pilfered," one source said.

A number of pharmacies located at nearby Chankhar Pool area offer drugs and medical accessories even on credit to poor patients at much higher rates.

On caesarean section, doctors said however they opt for such costly surgeries only when normal delivery involves risks.

They also denied allegations of pilferage of drugs and other things. "It is not true that a section of doctors and nurses here are linked to pilfering drugs from patients," said a senior doctor.

"We have a poor fund to help extremely poor patients in cases of surgery," she said.

## RIFT IN KISHOREGANJ BNP

### Ex-lawmaker assaulted, police deployed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Additional police have been deployed at Kishoreganj town to stave off possible clash as tension mounted following a brawl between rival factions of ruling BNP at the party office.

Former lawmaker Maj (Rtd) Akhtarujjaman Ranjan was assaulted in the incident on Thursday that resulted from "serious disagreement" over formation of the party district committee. The tension spilled over to BNP factions in upazilas also, party sources said.

They said Akhtarujjaman, also former convener of Kishoreganj district BNP, reached the party office in the town from Kotiadi at about noon on Thursday to attend a scheduled party meeting to form a district committee.

They said Akhtarujjaman, Minister-in-Charge for Kishoreganj Mirza Abbas, Education Minister Dr Osman Faruque and lawmaker from Kishoreganj-6 constituency Majibur Rahman Manju was asked by BNP 1st Joint Secretary Tareq Rahman to form a district body.

But Akhtarujjaman was opposed by Kishoreganj Poura BNP General Secretary Ismail Hossen Madhu. This ensued a brawl and at one stage Akhtarujjaman was assaulted by followers of Ismail Hossen.

This correspondent tried several times to contact Akhtarujjaman but he was not available over phone.

## SNAPS

### Workshop on children, women issues ends

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

A five-day workshop on Reporting Training Workshop on Children and Women Issues ended here on Friday. Organised by the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) for local journalists, the workshop was held at Netrakona Press Club. PIB Director General (DG) Razwan Siddiquee, Programme Director Siddika Sultana, Senior Instructor M Aliur Rahman and Programme Co-ordinator Abdul Mannan were present as resource persons. Netrakona Deputy Commissioner (DC) Hossain Jamil opened the workshop. On conclusion of the workshop, Birishri Upajatiya Cultural Academy Director Mosharaf Karim distributed certificates among the participants.

### Cake festival held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A daylong 'pitha' (cake) festival concluded here on Sunday. Held at Brahmanbaria Pali Biddut Samity office, the festival was organised by the members of the samity. Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner (DC) Md Jahirul Haque was the chief guest. Among others, Biddut Samity General Manager (GM) Engineer Md Sirajul Haque, Engineer Md Muzammel Haque and Rural Electrification Board Executive Engineer Md Didarul Alam addressed.

## 2 more killed

FROM PAGE 12

crimes, Yusuf was later taken to Rab office in Tikatuli.

Rab sources said Yusuf fell ill during interrogation and was rushed to the DMCH, where doctors declared him dead on arrival at 6:00pm.

Hospital sources said he was beaten to death.

### Chuadanga

Nyamat Ali alias Nyiat, an operative of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddha), was killed in crossfire with police in Alamdanga upazila in Chuadanga early yesterday.

Police said they arrested Nyamat from a Dhaka bound passenger bus on Friday evening. He used a different name on the passenger register of the coach, police said.

Under interrogation by police he admitted involvement with the underground party and confessed to possessing firearms hidden somewhere at Bhogalbadi village in Alamdanga upazila.

Police said they took Nyamat to the village to retrieve the firearms. When they reached Bhogalbadi field at about 2.45am, PBCP cadres fired on them. Police returned fire resulting in a half-hour gunfight.

Police said Nyamat while trying to escape from the police van got caught in crossfire and died on the spot. Police recovered one shutter gun and five bullets from the scene.

Nyamat stood accused in several cases filed with Alamdanga and Sadar Police Stations.

BSS adds Niamat died in crossfire when a shootout broke out between PBCP cadres and a joint team of Rab and police.

# 'Conflict' with MPs main obstacle to rural uplift

## Union Parishad leaders tell press conference

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

"Conflict" between lawmakers and local government leaders is a major obstacle to rural development, said Union Parishad leaders here yesterday.

Parliament members usually "dictate" local government institutions keeping UP leaders "handcapped", they alleged at a press conference at a local hotel.

Added to this problem, there is bureaucratic tangles and delayed government decisions on projects, they said.

It was addressed by, among others, Satkhira unit General Secretary of National Union Parishad Forum (NUPF) Jaglul Haidar. He is Chairman of Shyamnagar UP.

Often, much needed projects can not be taken up due to interference by Upazil Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) and non-participation of UP chairmen at District Development Coordination Committee (DDCC) meetings, they said.

Rural development projects are

placed at Upazila Development Coordination Committee (UDCC) for primary selection. Selected projects are then sent to parliament member who is advisor to the UDCC.

They scrutinise the projects on the basis of "their own choice" and then send those to DDCC where the minister-in-charge for the district or the MP as its chairmen approve the those finally.

"As a result many important projects are excluded, knowingly or unknowingly", Jaglul Haidar said.

There are evidences that many priority projects could not be implemented timely as the minister concerned remained out of the country or could not attend the DDCC meeting for lack of time, he said.

UP Chairman Abdur Rouf, also President of Satkhira NUPF, said the responsibility of leasing rural markets and waterbodies has also been transferred to UNOs.

"This has curbed the powers of people's representatives and created fund crisis for Ups", he said.

Local bodies should be empow-

ered to lease markets and waterbodies to institutionalise democracy and ensure good governance, he said.

UPs are supposed to get one percent of the total land registration fees but that is never given, he said.

"It is really unfortunate that people's representatives have to request their employees for fund".

Habibur Rahman, Chairman of Fingri UP, said the honorarium of a UP chairman and a member is only Tk 500 and Tk 300 respectively, which is very "disgraceful". He demanded enhance of the honorarium to Tk 5000 and Tk 3000.

The UP leaders also urged for a separate budget for local government institutions to strengthen their activities.

UP leaders have virtually nothing to do except issuing nationality certificates and birth certificates. Strengthening local governments is vital for local development and good governance.

A large number of UP leaders including women attended the press conference.

# 9 Nilphamari villages say no to early marriage

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The curse of early marriage was removed from nine villages in Dimla upazila.

The laudable job was made possible after 10 years of sincere efforts by the Union Federation (UF), an independent beneficiary group of the Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS).

This was learnt from a meeting organised to exchange opinion with local journalists titled Role of Journalists in Developing Rural Mass at the RDRS auditorium here recently.

Funded by the European Union (EU), the UF launched a massive campaign against dowry, early marriage, illegal divorce, child labour, AIDS and other social issues. The campaign was launched through different motivational activities under the Federation Capacity Building and Social Mobilisation Project.

A case was filed against an Imam, a Muslim priest, who illegally solemnised the marriage ceremonies of a few teenage couples, according to Abu Obaid, President of the UF, West Chhatnai village in Dimla upazila.



PHOTO: STAR

RDRS officials exchange views with journalists on how to remove social ills.

4x2

6x2

9x3