

'Politicians' apathy negates UN charter on women's rights'

4,444 incidents of repression in last nine months in country

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Woman's rights remained a far away dream in rural Bangladesh due to lack of commitment by political leaders both in ruling and opposition parties.

There has not been any significant progress in ensuring woman's rights enshrined in documents adopted at the International Human Rights Convention and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) because political leaders are oblivious of it, speakers said at functions at Satkhita and Gaibandha yesterday.

A mechanism should be evolved to ensure accountability of our politicians regarding women's rights, they said.

Separate programmes were organised in the districts in observance of the World Rural Women's Day yesterday.

This year's theme of the day was 'Accountability of Politicians in Ensuring Rights of Rural Women.'

The proposal to observe World Rural Women Day was approved in the fourth UN World Women Conference, held in Beijing in 1995. Nearly 100 countries have been observing the day since 1997.

Our Satkhira Correspondent reports: Speakers at a workshop here yesterday called for ensuring accountability of political leaders both in the ruling and opposition parties to implement the declarations adopted at the International Human Rights Convention and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) regarding woman's rights in rural areas in Bangladesh.

The workshop on women's rights as enshrined in the UN conventions was organised jointly by the Satkhira district World Rural Woman's Day Observation Committee, and two NGOs--AktionAID Bangladesh and SODESH.

It was held at the Officers Club in the town with Mariam Mannan in the chair. Salma Begum, wife of Satkhira Deputy commissioner, was the chief guest while former lawmaker Snigdha Haque and Mrs Kaniz Fatema were special guests.

It was addressed by, among others, The Daily Star Correspondent Prof Abu Ahmed, lawyers Rifat Amin, Ferdousi Ara Lucy, Farida Akhtar Banu and Safia Karim, Jelena Chowdhury, Monzur Hossain, Pradip Mondal and Madhab Chandra Dutta.

As repression on women starts within the family, it should be resisted there by changing attitude of family members, they said.

They urged all irrespective of male and female members of a family to come forward to resist violence against women at homes.

Women are treated unequally in all walks of life-- access to health, training for jobs and education. Moreover, there are some invisible barriers due to social taboos, they said.

Women still continued to be the poorest of the poor. Their job opportunities are limited and they are also paid less than man for the same kind of work.

They urged women to unite to realise their rights

Our Gaibandha Correspondent reports: The declarations adopted at the UN conventions are still in papers in Bangladesh due to lack of commitment by political leaders. This was stated at a press conference organised in observance of the World Rural Women's Day yesterday.

Political leaders should be made aware that primarily it is their responsibility to ensure woman's rights in their respective areas, they said.

The World Rural Women Day Celebration Committee in Gaibandha organised a press conference, held at Gaibandha press.

Speakers at the press conference also highlighted the nature and incidence of violence against women in rural Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is in the third position as regards women repression in the world, they said quoting from the UN Human Development.

Quoting a report by the Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, it was stated at the press conference that 20,134 incidents of repression on woman took place in Bangladesh from 1997 to 2003.

Against this, 4,444 such incidents took place only in the last nine months, which exceeded all previous records, they said.

The speakers also quoted a report by the Bangladesh National Lawyer's Association to say that 5,207 incidents of women repression took place all over the country in 2003. In 2004, a total of 335 women were killed and 412 were injured due to repression.

Besides, 908 women were raped, 37 killed for dowry, 34 sustained acid burn and 92 committed suicide following continued repression.

According to Education Watch, an NGO, literacy rate among men and women in Bangladesh is 47.6 and 35.6 per cent respectively.

The press conference was addressed by, among others, Monwara Talukder, president of the observance committee and Ataur Rahman, its secretary.

They also highlighted different forms of repression on women, their social deprivation and response from local political leadership.

Rural women in Bangladesh play a significant role in maintaining the family and generating income but they are neglected, they said.

A significant portion of the national economy is dependent on women's labour but there is no comprehensive policy for their development, they said.



A partial view of the workshop on 'Political Commitment and Rights of Rural Women', held in Satkhira town yesterday.

Diarrhoea kills 4, attacks 500 in Tangail

A CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Four people died and 500 others have been attacked with diarrhoea in Ghatail and Madhupur upazilas in last three days.

The dead are Zohura Begum, 40, and Ambia Khatun, 42, of Karimpur village in Ghatail upazila and Salima, 6, of Khamarpara village and Rabeya Khatun, 54, of Jujna village under Musuddi union in Madhupur upazila.

Tangail District Health Control Room sources confirmed death of three people only. They said 200 diarrhoea patients were treated at different hospitals and 117 medical teams are working across the district.

However, unofficial sources said around 500 patients went to government hospitals and field level treatment centres.

Anti-piracy drive in Meghna estuary: 56 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Police from Bhola and Laxmipur districts and Coast Guards in joint operations on Monday and Tuesday arrested 56 suspected pirates from three shoal areas bordering the two districts.

About law enforcers took part in the operations.

Laxmipur Additional Police Superintendent Abdul Wahid, Bhola Sadar Circle Assistant Police Superintendent Assaduzzaman, Lieutenant Raisuddin and Lieutenant Namely of Coast Guard led the operations. The joint forces raided Gajariar Char, Teliar Char and Char Jahiruddin. The arrested people were taken to Ramgoti police station in Laxmipur district.

After interrogation 17 of them were sent to jail and the rest were released.

Another source claimed that many of the pirates got tip-offs from police and fled the areas before the raids by joint forces.

When contacted, Lieutenant Shahidul Islam, Zonal Commander of Coast Guard, said the operation will continue till security is restored in Meghna estuary and coastal areas.



Divers in search of bodies in the ill-fated bus that broke the railing of a bridge and plunged into Gangnai river at Kichak in Shibganj upazila in Bogra yesterday. (Story on page 1).

Majhipara Hindus fear fresh attack, 5 still being treated

Five held, police camp set up far away from spot

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

About 200 Hindu families at Majhipara village in Kandi union in Pirgachha upazila are passing days amid uncertainty, fearing a fresh attack.

Some miscreants attacked and torched some houses of Hindu families in the village on the night of Saturday last, injuring at least 10 people including some women. Two houses were burnt and a temple was vandalised.

Of the injured, Birbal, Bijbala, Shudhu, Taru, Minoti Bala are undergoing treatment at Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

The hoodlums are still threatening their families, the victims alleged yesterday.

A temporary police camp has been set up near the village.

Additional Superintendent of Police Iqbal Hossen visited the and ordered setting up of the police camp.

Piragachha police said, they have arrested five persons in connection with the attack. They are Shafiqul, Naya Miaha, Golam Rabbani, Ishrafil, and Khoha Mia.

But Prema Dash, a resident at Majhipara, complained that police could not arrest the main accused yet.

Elderly Haripado Sarker, a leader of the Hindu community in the village, alleged that the temporary police camp, set up on the premises of a Union Council office half a kilometre from the village, will be of no use to the villagers in case of need.

President of Rangpur Puja Udjapon Committee Banomali Paul and its vice-president advocate Babu Sona after visiting the village expressed their anger and anxiety over the incident.

They alleged that the security measures taken at Majhipara village by the administration is inadequate.

They demanded punishment to the persons responsible for the arson.

Rangpur Police Superintendent

Mahbub Mohshin told The Daily Star that the security measure is enough to control any situation at the village.

"They (police) would arrest all culprits involved in the incident."

Chairman of Kandi Union Parishad Nazrul Islam Khan told this correspondent that the local government body has sanctioned five bundles of CI sheets (corrugated tin sheets) and one Tk 1,000 for the affected families.

Nazrul Islam Khan said some miscreants attacked and torched houses of Hindu families at Majhipara, injuring 10 people and burning two houses. They also vandalized a temple.

The villagers complained that the miscreants tried to attack the Durga Puja Mandap earlier but law enforcers foiled their attempt. They again attacked at the villagers on the night of Saturday last.

The cause of the attack is yet to be ascertained, police said.

Reopen KNM, decision to shut it was unwise

Speakers at roundtable in Khulna suggest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Speakers at a roundtable discussion here yesterday urged the government to take steps to reopen Khulna Newsprint Mill (KNM), which will cost only Tk 30 crore.

The mill can produce 60 tonnes of newsprint a day if this small amount is invested initially, they said and called for a united movement by people in the region to save assets of Khulna from being looted.

The roundtable, held at the Dainik Purbanchal Dialogue Centre at Iqbalnagar, was presided over by Alhaj Liaquat Ali, Editor of the daily.

It was participated by leaders of all political parties including lawmakers from BNP, Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami, local heads of NGOs and some socio-cultural organisations, prominent labour leaders, secretary

general of Greater Khulna Development Action Coordination Committee and senior journalists.

Nizamur Rahman Lal, president of now defunct Khulna Newsprint Mill Employees Union, presented the keynote paper at the discussion.

Appreciating holding of a discussion on a sensitive but very important issue, the speakers regretted that KNM was closed on November 30, 2002, throwing over 3,000 workers and employees out of jobs and their families to abject poverty.

Biggest in Asia, Khulna Newsprint Mill always played an important role in economic development of southwestern region of the country and earned an enviable reputation in world market for its high quality product, they said.

The present government's decision to close the newsprint mill was

undoubtedly a blunder. Still it can resume production on commercial basis and reinstate the retrenched workers and employees, the speakers observed.

Once re-started, it can produce newsprint which can compete in world market and earn huge amounts of foreign exchange for the country. Newspapers in the country will also be able to buy newsprint at cheaper prices.

They claimed that KNM can run profitably. It can earn at least Tk 10 crore revenue by producing 48,000 tonnes of newsprint annually, they claimed.

Besides, the 25 MW power plant of the mill can earn revenue after meeting its electricity requirement if it is put into operation again, they said.



Barisal unit of Gas, Oil and National Resources Protection Committee brought out a procession in the city yesterday protesting the enhanced launch fares.

REB office ransacked in Kalapara

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Protesting frequent power outage, several hundred angry people attacked the Rural Electrification Board (REB) office at Kalapara upazila town Friday night after Tarabee prayers.

They ransacked at least 50 electric meters and damaged other equipment at the office. On information, police rushed there and dispersed the unruly people.

On the other hand, ten ice factories have been closed down and production of another 100 factories in Patuakhali district is being greatly affected due to frequent load shedding.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, Uttam Babu, owner of an ice factory at Mohipur, said, "We are facing 8 to 10 hours' load shedding a day and we produce only 5000 to 6000 cans of ice in a month against the demand for 18000 to 20,000.

When contacted, REB general manager Shibul Lal said only 4-5 MW power is supplied against a demand for 15 MW in seven upazilas in Patuakhali and Barguna.