

Where child marriage still happens

WASIM BIN HABIB, *Back from Brahmanbaria*

Libas is doing entire household works being a housewife of a village youth when she was supposed to go to school or play with her friends.

When Libas was supposed to grow up with the love and affection of her parents, she herself is taking the care of her two and a half-year-old child.

Libas, who is now living at her husband's house in a remote village named Burishar under Nasirnagar upazila in the district, got married with Shahjahan four years ago when she was in class five.

Like other girls who long for playing or going to school with her peers, this 15-year-old girl has to kill her all desires as she is now pregnant for the second time.

When asked, her mother-in-law Jamela Akhter said she got her son married with a little girl just out of fun.

Besides, Libas's family was also eager to marry their child off, Jamela added.

Manju Mia, a vendor, also married off her 10-year-old daughter with a 16-year-old boy just 15 days back paying Tk 15,000 in dowry.

Her daughter Hazera Begum does not understand the exact meaning of marriage.

When this correspondent met Hazera, her face was gloomy and she could not give any answer while asked whether her marriage was held with her consent.

When asked, her father said he also married at the age of 15 when his wife was only nine years old.

"More over, I am not physically

well. So I married my daughters off apprehending that what would happen to her if I die," he added.

Manju said three of his daughters Monwara, Firoza and Zarina were married off at the age between 10 to 12.

He does not know that early

marriage is a punishable crime.

This is a common picture of other villages in Nasirnagar upazila which is the part of a project titled 'Communication activities for children and women development'.

Bangladesh Sangbad

Sangstha (BSS) is executing the third phase of the project with the financial assistance of UNICEF.

Sujit Kumar Chatterjee, a Hindu cleric, said Nasirnagar is a poverty-stricken upazila and most of the people here are living below the poverty line. Most of them are fishermen.

Whenever a girl attains the age of 12 to 13, her parents become worried about her marriage, he added.

The maternal and infant mortality rate is very high due to early marriage, Sujit said, adding that hundreds of mothers and children have been suffering from various diseases including malnutrition.

Sabbir Ahmed Osmani, executive director of Advancement for Sober Unity (ASU), thinks poverty and illiteracy are mainly responsible for early marriage.

He also said dowry is a common phenomenon here and no marriage takes place without giving or taking dowry.

Though many government and non-government organisations are working here to create awareness and eradicate poverty, their initiatives are yet to touch them, he added.

Abdul Hannan, upazila general secretary of Bangladesh Manobadhikar Bastobayon Sangstha, said the literacy rate here is only 23 percent.

The amount of dowry increases with the increase of bride's age, he said, adding that illiteracy and poverty are forcing them to early marriage.

Around three lakh people are living in 131 villages of the upazila and there is hardly any family where there was no early marriage, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

15-year-old Libas with her two-and-half-year-old son Salauddin on her lap.

BLAST AT FAN FACTORY

One worker succumbs to injuries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A worker of an electric fan factory who was injured in an explosion of chemical materials inside the factory died at a city clinic yesterday morning.

Sagar, 21, was among the eight injured workers who were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital after a drum full of chemical substances exploded at Nipa Metal Engineering at Jatrabari at around 10:00pm on Tuesday.

Later, Sagar was shifted to a local clinic where he died at around 7:00am.

His body was sent to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue.

Man burnt alive in Cakariya

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

One person was burnt alive while his house was gutted in a fire at Badarkhali union under Cakariya upazila of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The victim was identified as Ali Ahamed, 50, son of Nurul Hoque.

Witnesses said Ali got trapped inside the house when it caught fire and was burnt alive.

Police recovered the charred body of Ali and sent it to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

An unnatural death (UD) case was filed with Badarkhali Police Station in this connection.

Bailey bridge collapse in Sirajganj: One missing

UNB, Sirajganj

A bailey bridge on Tarash-Bhuiyagati road at Deobhog in Tarash upazila collapsed, leaving a man missing and two others injured on Tuesday.

Police said the bridge caved in as a stone-laden Tarash-bound truck coming from Sylhet was crossing the bridge at about 10:00am.

A passerby, who was standing on the bridge at that time, remained missing until writing of this report at 11.30am yesterday. It is feared that he might have been buried under the debris.

The truck driver and the helper injured in the mishap were admitted to Sadar hospital.

Local people blamed the Roads and Highways department for the mishap as they failed to repair the bridge that remained vulnerable since long. They said no repair work was done at the bridge since its construction in 1988.

Traffic movement on Tarash-Bhuiyagati road remained suspended following the incident, causing untold suffering to the commuters.

Properties worth Tk 42 lakh gutted in Ctg

CU CORRESPONDENT

Seven houses, two shops, textile raw materials and equipments worth over Tk 42 lakh were gutted in four separate fire incidents in the city and two upazilas of the district on Tuesday night and yesterday.

Textile raw materials and equipments worth over Tk 30 lakh were gutted in a devastating fire at a godown of Pahartali Textile and Hosiery Mill at Khulhi area on Tuesday night.

The fire broke out at around 10.30pm and spread fast engulfing the whole godown.

The fire reduced to ashes forty bales of thread, 50 pounds of other raw materials and four valuable equipments, fire brigade sources said.

Four fire fighting units rushed to the spot and extinguished the fire originating from electric short circuit, after a two-hour effort.

In another incident, a residen-

tial house and valuables worth around Tk 1 lakh were gutted at Bangladesh Railway Staffs Colony in the city.

After originating from electric short circuit, the fire broke out at around 11.00am yesterday.

Four firefighting units extinguished the fire at around 12.00noon.

Sourav Barua, 19, and Munna Barua, 20, were injured in the fire.

Six shanties and properties worth around Tk 9 lakh were gutted in a fire at West Deyapara under Patiya upazila early yesterday.

The fire broke out at around 12.30am and firefighters extinguished it at around 3.00am.

Meanwhile, a fire gutted a grocery and a stationery shops at Bhatari Bazar under Sitakunda upazila.

The fire broke out at around 1.00am and gutted the shops before being extinguished by firefighters after two hours.

248 overloaded vehicles barred from plying over Jamuna Bridge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge Authorities imposed strict restriction on plying of overloaded vehicles over Jamuna Bridge from January 21, says a press release.

It also said 248 vehicles were found to be overloaded and barred from plying over the bridge in the last three days.

It sought cooperation of all transport owners and workers in this regard and warned that stern legal steps would be taken against the overloaded vehicles that would try to pass over the bridge.

Fake cigarette factory sealed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Army personnel yesterday sealed a fake cigarette factory and held 14 people, including the factory manager Abu Hena from Sopura Industrial area in the city.

They however failed to nab the factory owner Aslam Parvez Shafik, who allegedly used to manufacture fake Navy cigarette at the factory.

They seized some 50 barrels of fake Mobil from the area.

Another army team held Suranjit Sengupta, general secretary of Mohonpur unit Hindu Buddha Christian Oikya Parishad, from near Rajshahi court.

Army men also held upazila Jatuiyatmadi Chhatra Dal Secretary Sultan Mahmud and two others who used to assist local traffic police in taking extortion from transport workers in Tanore upazila.

Police seized a private car carrying 400 bottles of smuggled Indian phensidyl and said no one claimed the ownership of the car at Hadi's crossing in the city.

City Bank donation to SEID Trust

The City Bank Foundation will provide Tk 25 lakh to SEID Trust for the underprivileged and intellectually challenged children in five years, says a press release.

The bank will donate Tk five lakh each year for education, treatment and other expenses of the children as part of its corporate social responsibility.

As part of the donation, DH Choudhury, managing director (CC) of City Bank Limited, handed over a cheque to Dilara Satter Mitu, director of SEID Trust, at a simple ceremony at the bank yesterday.

Ahsanul Bari, member secretary of the City Bank Foundation, and other high officials were also present on the occasion.



PHOTO: STAR

An NDI delegation led by its Asia Programme Director Peter Manikas calls on BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at the party office in the city yesterday.

Drive against illegal rickshaws starts in Ctg today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

With a view to streamlining traffic movement, Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) has fixed twelve specific routes for city service buses in the port city.

As part of its continued efforts, the CMP is also starting a drive against illegal rickshaws from today, said CMP DC (traffic) Abu Sufian.

A Road Transport Committee meeting on Tuesday fixed the routes for around 600 city service buses now plying in the city on rotation basis determined by the associations of transport owners and workers.

The CMP traffic department is also starting a drive against illegal rickshaws in the city from today.

At present there are around two lakh rickshaws with only 35 thousand plying in the city streets with legal documents.

Meanwhile, the CMP has removed all illegal bus stands of inter-district buses from the city centers.

Conspiracy still on Says Menon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said people achieved moral victory by foiling the scheduled one-sided election of January 22.

The conspirators of BNP-Jamaat alliance foiled many fruitful victories of the mass movements in the past and also in recent days and the conspiracy still goes on.

Menon was addressing a meeting of 11-party alliance held on the occasion of Shahid Matiur and Mass Uprising Day at the Workers Party office in Barisal city yesterday.

Paying tribute to the memories of martyrs Asad and Matiur, Menon said their sacrifices created the background of our liberation war of 1971 and all walks of the nation showed their strength of unity at that time.

He further said there is no alternative of immediate free and fair election and restoration of democracy in the country.

Santi Das presided over the meeting while Talukdar Muhammad

Yunus, Abdus Sattar, Rafiqul Islam Sujon and others spoke on the occasion.

UN calls for end to impunity in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

UN human rights chief Louise Arbour called yesterday for the prosecution of members of Nepal's security forces and rebel Maoists who committed grave human rights abuses during a decade of civil war.

"There should be prosecutions of those most responsible for these levels of gross violations of human rights, disappearances, killings, and torture," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights told journalists in Kathmandu.

At least 13,000 people were killed in Nepal's civil war, with both the security forces and rebel Maoists accused of abuses.

Assam closes at sundown as attacks grow

REUTERS, Guwahati

Authorities in India's restive state of Assam ordered shops and businesses to close before sundown yesterday as security forces struggled to contain guerrilla attacks blamed for more than 80 deaths this month.

In a further blow to the authorities' prestige, three businessmen were killed by security forces after being mistaken for rebels of the separatist United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa).

Separately, seven people were wounded in a suspected rebel bomb attack on a tea stall.

Many streets in Guwahati, Assam's biggest city, were deserted after nearly daily grenade attacks and bomb blasts in the state over the past week.

The violence comes despite a military offensive against the separatists following the massacre of 72 migrant workers this month.

The indefinite closure of shops and businesses at sundown across the state was aimed at halting civilian casualties, but did little to inspire confidence.

"There is no guarantee of safety of lives in Assam and only God knows how long this is going to continue," said Chandrima Phukan, a mother of a five-year-old son. Like many people, she now longer shops late or takes her

children outside to parks.

India's northeast, joined to the rest of the country by a thin strip of land, is home to dozens of tribes and ethnic groups, and several major separatist rebellions.

The Ulfa rebel group, formed in 1979, is fighting for independence for Assam's 26 million people. The rebels accuse New Delhi of plundering the state's mineral resources and neglecting its inhabitants.

Most Assamese are Hindu but speak the Assamese language. The Ulfa has tried to bolster its sagging popularity by targeting migrants from other parts of India, whom they accuse of diluting their culture, analysts say.

Violence has risen in the oil- and tea-rich state after peace talks between the representatives of the Ulfa and New Delhi failed last year.

Some 20,000 people have been killed since the start of the insurgency in 1979.

OFFENSIVE FAILS?

Thousands of soldiers have fanned out into the jungles of Assam to hunt the rebels while others are deployed on streets throughout the state in a major show of force.

But the offensive appeared only to cause a violent backlash.

"There is total chaos in the state," said Noni Gopal Mahanta, a security analyst at the Peace and

Conflict Studies Centre at Guwahati University.

"The (state) government lacks a clear policy to contain violence and the rebels are taking advantage of it."

He said security forces were finding it difficult to identify militants among the state's civilians and many officials were worried a hardened crackdown would lead to accusations of human rights violations.

Police said security forces shot dead the three businessmen after mistaking them for rebels as they tried to enter an oil installation in Geleki in Sivsagar district, about 325 km (200 miles) east of Guwahati.

The men supplied construction material to the oil site.

Separately, a bomb exploded at a roadside tea stall in Tinsukia town, about 600 km (370 miles) east of Guwahati, wounding seven people.

"Contrary to the government's assertion that it would provide security to us, it has now asked us to close down and go home in the evening," Rajesh Jain, a computer dealer in Guwahati, said.

"Which means that it has failed to provide security to its people and bowed down before the militants."

NDI TEAM MEETS BNP LEADERS

'Hold election as early as possible'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Democratic Institute (NDI) yesterday said it wants to see quick restoration of democracy in the country through a free and fair election as soon as possible.

It also stressed the need for consensus among political parties to this end.

During a meeting with BNP leaders, an NDI delegation led by its Asia Programme Director Peter Manikas also showed their interest in providing assistance for the training for polling officers and agents and transparent ballot box.

Both the US-based election watchdog and the BNP leaders also called for an error-free electoral roll.

During the hour-long meeting, the BNP leaders said they want the election to be held in the shortest possible time.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan, Vice-chairman MK Anwar, and advisers to the party chairperson Reaz Rahman and Mofazzal Karim were present at the meeting held at the party's central office at Naya Palatan in the city.

After the meeting, NDI Resident Director Owen Lippert told reporters that NDI and others would encourage quick election in order to keep democracy on track.

About the meeting, Reaz Rahman said the NDI delegation wanted to know about the latest political situation and how long it will take to restore democracy in the country.

About NDI's election-related proposals, he said, "We welcome them as we also want a correct voter list, but only the caretaker government could take proper steps in this regard."

Replying to a question, Nazrul Islam Khan said, "There is no bar to holding elections with the current voter list after inclusion of the names of those who were dropped from the list."

About an NDI report showing over 1.2 crore fake voters, Reaz Rahman said they never spoke of fake voters; they only said there are additional names in the voter list due to errors and duplication.

"However, we also want a error-free electoral roll," he added.

The NDI delegation members included Senior Programme Manager Deborah Healy and Asia Senior Programme Manager Terry Hoverter.

Obituary



says a press release.

Her husband is Prof Md Helal Uddin, former head of the Department of Physics of Tejgaon College.

She left behind her husband, two sons, two daughters and a host of admirers.

Shraddha



Company, will be held at Dhakeshwari temple in the city today, says a press release.

He was also a life member of Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee.

Family members of the deceased requested all to pray for salvation of the departed soul.

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Dry weather will continue over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country during late night till early morning, Met Office said predicting nearly unchanged night temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 28.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and lowest 5.9 degree Celsius at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:40pm today and rises at 6:42am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature	Humidity in percentage	in celsius
	Max	Min	Morning Evening
Dhaka	25.7	13.4	82 61
Chittagong	27.6	11.5	72 71
Rajshahi	24.5	11.5	84 67
Khulna	24.5	11.8	91 70
Barisal	26.2	10.5	93 70
Sylhet	28.0	12.3	60 49
Cox's Bazar	27.0	12.5	65 58



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DHAKA TODAY

Talk

Asiatic Society of Bangladesh organises a talk on Literature of Bengali Renaissance and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Venue: seminar room of the Society. Time: 3:30pm.

Lecture

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies organises a lecture on 'ICRC in the contemporary world'. Venue: Institute's auditorium. Time: 10:30am.

Discussion

Karmojibi Nari will hold an open discussion 'Agenda of the workers in the next election'. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 10:00am.

Launching

The launching of Human Development in South Asia Report 2005 by Mahbubul Ul Haq Human Development Centre will be held. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 3:00pm.