

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

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 Cakriya

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

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

The victim was identified as Ali Ahmed, 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.

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 Manobadhinikar 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-a-half-year-old son Salauddin on her lap.



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.

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 Paltan in the city.

After the meeting, NDI reported that the delegation 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."

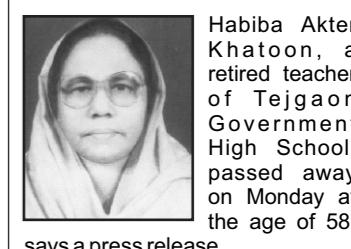
Replying to a question, Nazrul Islam Khan said, "There is no bar to holding elections with the current voter list after inclusion of the names of those who were dropped from the list."

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



Habiba Akter Khatoon, a retired teacher of Tejgaon Government High School, passed away on Monday at the age of 58, 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



Shraddha of Aminy Majumder (Bappu), a director of Jamuna Bank, and New Generation Construction 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.

DHAKA TODAY

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
Karmajibi 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.

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 resident

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 cigarettes 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 Okya Parishad, from near Rajshahi court.

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

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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 5 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.

Special Education for Intellectually Disabled (SEID) Trust is a voluntary organisation working for the intellectually challenged children through therapeutic and educational interventions.

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 Assam (ULF).

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

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

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

