

# Immediate interventions needed to stop unsafe abortion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 19-year-old girl was brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with high fever and profuse bleeding. She came from a remote village of Shariatpur and was 16 weeks pregnant. To terminate the unwanted foetus, she inserted a sharp object into her uterus, putting her life at risk, as she had no other options -- it was a question of 'honour' for her after all.

Every year, around 2400 women die from clandestine unsafe abortion, and thousands of women suffer disastrous consequences, including sepsis and sterility. Still, the cases of menstrual regulations (MR) done across the country are not properly reported, let alone abortion.

According to official statistics, 8000 doctors and 6500 Family Welfare Visitors (FWVs) trained on MR are posted in government clinics at national, district, thana and union levels at present, but accurate estimates of the annual number of procedures are not available due to weak reporting system and the tendency of MR performers to under-report the performance.

In Bangladesh, women take informal means of abortion, including inserting twigs, sharp

objects into uterus, ingestion of herbs, washing powder, chemicals/ herbs, vigorous massaging and pressure on the abdomen.

Though the existing law prohibits termination of pregnancy, except to save the life of the mother, hundreds of clinics only in the capital are performing abortions, ignoring the government regulation.

Analyses of available data from ICDDR,B show that the total abortion rate is minimised by high quality family planning programmes of the government, but unsafe abortion remains a leading cause of maternal mortality in the country.

In 1978, one year before the legalisation of MR, deaths from abortion accounted for an estimated 26 percent of all pregnancy-related deaths in Bangladesh. To reduce the mortality rate, the government trained health workers to perform menstrual regulation (MR) up to ten weeks' gestation.

Stigma associated with MR came as the first reason for tarnishing the image of the successful programme aimed at reducing the maternal mortality rate, specialists said.

Besides, the rigidity of the system like obtaining permission from guardian or husband and

availability of alternative sources such as homeopathy and Kabiraji makes women go for life-threatening options.

While legalising the MR, the government clearly defined that MR services will be provided by medical college hospitals, maternal and child welfare centre (MCWC), district hospital at the district level, the Thana Health complex at the Thana level and the Family Welfare Centres (FWC) at the Union level.

However, a study conducted by Bangladesh Association for Prevention of Septic Abortion (BAPSA) in 80 upazilas in 2003-04 showed that 69 percent of abortion cases are performed by traditional birth attendants such as Aya, Kabiraj, Ojha and sweeper.

While visiting several clinics in the city's Azimpur, Chankharpool and Mohammadpur areas, this correspondent found evidence of illegal abortion.

A doctor even claimed her success in aborting foetuses of seven or eight months' gestation, while her assistant said it is also possible in the 10th month. There are also brokers who lure women to these clinics.

According to official statistics, 15,000 MRs are performed a year, but the actual figure is not less than

30,000, an official at the Maternal and Child Health Training Institute said, preferring anonymity.

"More often than not, these cases remain unrecorded. And there are also back street abortions."

It has been observed that due to lack of monitoring at Upazila level, trained Female Welfare Visitors (FWVs) often take patients to their homes and perform the MR in unhygienic condition. Sometimes, the lure of a fast buck drives nurses, Aya and other hospital staffs to perform the MR.

A patient with 'incomplete abortion' at Dhaka Medical College Hospital said she inserted a root of a plant into her uterus as per the advice of a Kabiraj. The foetus of six months' gestation came out of the womb within 24 hours, but the placenta remained inside. She is now fighting for life as she suffers from perforated uterus.

Dr Kazi Golam Rasul, general manager, programme resource development, Marie Stopes, said, "Though women in urban areas have access to proper healthcare services, there are a lot of illegal practitioners in this sector. Medicines causing abortion are also available in pharmacies, but such drugs cannot terminate pregnancy. Rather, they are harmful to maternal health."

According to a recent study of ICDDR,B, conducted by Dr Elizabeth Oliverus and Dr Heidi Johnson, "The MR programme in Bangladesh is lauded around the world for its decentralisation and stand as an example of smooth collaboration of GO-NGO, but still Bangladesh has miles to go."

Dr Elizabeth Oliverus and Dr Heidi Johnson told The Daily Star, "The continuing presence of unsafe abortion in Bangladesh suggests that MR services are not accessible to all women. While factors limiting access to services have not been well studied, the data suggest that almost 10 percent of women seeking MR come to health facility too long after their last menstrual period to be eligible for MR".

Another reason to restrictive accessibility, according to them, is that unofficial fees are often charged for MR services.

The number of MR and abortion in some areas is increasing, but unsafe abortion remains a major cause of maternal mortality. The country needs a strong intra-ministerial monitoring system that would make people aware of the harmful effects of unsafe abortion, experts said.

Unsafe abortion could also lead to breast cancer or permanent sterility, they said, adding that since abortion is not legal, the government has no programme to make the people aware of the fatal consequences of unsafe abortion.

To achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing 75 percent of maternal mortality, interventions to stop unsafe abortion should be taken right now, they suggested.

Former adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal, Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, South East University Vice-chancellor Dr M Shamsheer Ali, educationist Yasmeen Murshed, lawyer Azmalul Hossain, Independent University Vice-chancellor Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury and Managing Director of Holiday Publications Limited Tawhid Samad also spoke at the seminar.

Holiday Editor Syed Kamaluddin moderated the seminar.

Citing the example of Chittagong port, they said the scenario has changed dramatically in the port with the change of the system.

MONEY LAUNDERING

## 8 arrested in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) have arrested eight people raiding different parts of the city on charges of money laundering and doing business with fake banknotes and drugs.

Rab arrested Sarwar Hossain from his office S Alam Travels and Tours at Dilkusha on Thursday and recovered huge foreign currencies from his possession.

Rab claimed that Sarwar, a member of an organised gang of moneylaunderers, has confessed to his involvement in smuggling foreign currencies to abroad for long.

One Amir Hossain was arrested from in front of Asian Hospital at Badda on Thursday with 16 fake notes of Tk 500 denomination including Tk6600 in cash.

A Rab press release claimed that an organised gang has been doing business of fake banknotes in the area.

Rab also arrested six members of a drug-syndicate with a private car from Madhubaghin Ramna.

The arrestees are Zabeed Ali, Saiful Islam Mithu, Nurul Islam, Rezaul Karim, Shahjalal and Bashir Ahmed.

## Miscreants hurl bombs at cops

UNB, Dhaka

A junior police officer was injured as miscreants had hurled bombs at a police patrol team yesterday that had challenged them in Mirpur.

Police said a patrol team of Shah Ali Police Station challenged three suspected youths carrying a shopping bag when they were passing through Akbaria Mosque area in Mirpur-2 at about 8:15 pm.

Being challenged, the miscreants hurled bombs at the police in a bid to flee the scene. Assistant Sub-Inspector Ataur sustained shrapnel injuries.

Pedestrians and police chased and caught red handed two miscreants--Abdul Jalil, 18, and Tusar, 17. The third one, however, managed to escape. Police recovered three live handmade bombs from their possessions.

## Gopal's memoirs bear vital issues of DU

DU CORRESPONDENT

Gopal Chandra Das, a valiant freedom fighter, a collector and photographer of Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducus) collection centre, has written a book documenting his experiences on the university campus during the last five decades.

The publication ceremony of the book, 'Monidipto Campus', which is the first volume of 19-volume history, was held with the presence of renowned DU teachers at Ducsu building yesterday.

Gopal said this volume contains writings on a number of renowned and respected teachers of DU and different elements on the campus that have been lost or unknown to students of the university but bear historic importance.

On the occasion, DU Vice-chancellor (VC) Prof SMA Faiz, former VC Maniruzzaman Miah, Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Prof Aminul Islam, Prof Rangalal Sen, Prof Niaz Zaman, Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Pro-VC Prof AFM Yusuf Haider, Treasurer Prof Syed Abul Kalam Azad and others were present.

Prof Aminul said like Modhu Dey and Hakim, who served the university until their death, Gopal is also going to be an institution with his lifelong contribution to the university.

Gopal, who began his life as a canteen boy at historic Modhu's Canteen in 1960s, has defied all the obstacles and won in the battle of life, Prof Chowdhury said.

He said, "With the power of his mind to fight against all obstacles, once canteen boy has become collector and photographer of Ducsu collection centre and created example by being a history writer."

"The example Gopal has created is simply pursuable."

Prof Maniruzzaman said in spite of not having institutional education, what Gopal had done would have not been impossible if he had not have a refined mind and developed cultural thoughts.

As a collector of Ducsu, Gopal has been collecting documents of various issues and preserving them that will be valuable in the coming days, Prof Siddique said.

He hails from Sonagaji of Noakhali district. He was appointed at Ducsu as a bearer in 1970 and actively took part in the liberation war in 1971.

After formation of Ducsu collection centre, Gopal, familiar to all at the university, has been appointed as its collector and photographer.

# World's second tallest man in city with message of love and peace

PORIMOL PALMA

Two Nepalese youths, one being the second tallest person in the world and the other a cyclist with a limped-leg, who were once victims of social stigma for their distinct biological features, are now in Dhaka as part of a world tour with the message of love and peace.

Seven feet three inches tall Rajan Adhikari, 28, the tallest person in Nepal, and Chitra Poudel, 24, who travelled 1800 kilometres by bicycle in Nepal, came to Dhaka on a four-day visit last Thursday after their visits to India and Pakistan.

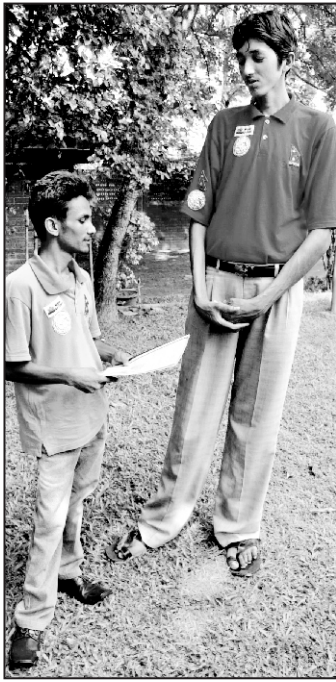
Talking to The Daily Star at the Nepalese Embassy in the city, the world-travellers, born at the same village of Bayarban in Morang city, yesterday revealed their next tour plan to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore.

"This is the plan we want to complete in the first phase, but gradually we shall travel the whole world for spreading the message of peace and love in a world suffering from violence, intolerance and hatred," said Chitra.

Rajan Adhikary, the tallest person after the Chinese-born Bao Xishun (7 feet 9 inches) in the Guinness Book, started growing tall surprisingly at the age of ten.

"Many called me 'bamboo' and looked at me differently. I felt uneasy, but nothing was to do with the God-gifted height," Rajan said. His growth stopped at 25 following a hormonal surgery in India.

"Travelling by bus is not a problem for me, but I have to sit at the back seat," said Rajan, who trav-



Rajan Adhikari, right, and Chitra Poudel, left.

elled to Dhaka following visits to Nepal, India and Pakistan by bus and train.

Proud father of two kids, Rajan now works as a brand ambassador for Om Distillery (Pvt) Limited in Kathmandu, and along with Chitra, run 'Rajan Adhikari Foundation' that takes care of people with abnormal characteristics in Nepal.

Winner of National Award of Nepal for being the tallest person in Nepal, Rajan, the only son of his parents completed his secondary education in 2001 and started working at Om Distillery for earn-

ing, as his parents died.

"I have to make everything I use with special order," he said, adding his shoe size is 17 centimetres. "I sometimes used to be very embarrassed when people looked at me differently and make comments, but now I got used to it."

"I rather now think it is a special gift of God that I can use for spreading the message of love and peace," said Rajan, who is very fond of volleyball.

Asked how they got the idea of travelling around the world, Chitra said, "We are from the same village in Nepal and two of us have a nationwide identity his for being the tallest and mine for being a cyclist with a limped leg. So, we thought we can utilise it."

It is the polio that made his leg limped, but this disability could not stop him from his eagerness for knowledge. He studied up to XII class and always reads the books of wisdom that inspired him to be a cyclist.

"With my relentless practice I can now cross miles after miles that inspired me to travel the world for love and peace," Chitra said.

Chitra said awareness about HIV/AIDS, narcotic drugs, child labour and disability will be highlighted in their visits.

The two youths, who are scheduled to meet the officials of the ministries of foreign affairs and tourism today, will handover two crests inked "World Peace And Love". They planned to do the same in every country.

The Nepalese government, Nepalese Airlines and some private companies are sponsoring their tour, Chitra said.

# Update vested property law

## Speakers urge caretaker govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday called on the caretaker government to update the vested property law, saying that the law is inconsistent with human rights principles and the spirit of the constitution and the War of Liberation.

Although this law has caused suffering to the minority community for the last four decades, all the governments have upheld it, they said.

They also called for forging a unity to fight injustice done to the minority community by influential people who took away land and properties of Hindu families by taking advantage of the vested property law.

The seminar titled 'Deprivation of affected million families: Living with vested property in Bangladesh' was sponsored by Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Nijera Kori and Samata.

Prof Abul Barkat, who conducted a research on the effect of vested property law, presented the findings at the seminar.

He said some 12 lakh Hindu households, out of 27 lakh, has so far been affected by the vested property law. They have lost 22 lakh acres of land whose current market price is Tk2,52,000 crore.

Prof Barkat also said those who looted land and property of Hindu families were influential and well-off people.

According to a study, during the BNP government in 1995, 72 percent of plunderers belonged to BNP while 11 percent belonged to Awami league (AL), he said. During the AL government in 1997, 44 percent of plunderers belonged to AL while 32 percent belonged to BNP, he added.

The study also shows that during the BNP-led four-party alliance government in 2006, 45 percent of plunderers were aligned with BNP,

31 percent with AL, 8 percent with Jamaat-e-Islami and 6 percent with Jatitya Party, Prof Barkat said.

Justice Mohammad Golam Robbani suggests forming a separate tribunal to resolve the issue of vested property law.

Advocate Rana Das Gupta said the caretaker government has also issued a new circular regarding the vested property law, which will add to suffering to the minorities.

He urged the government to stop all activities in this regard until the law is updated.

Former adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal, eminent journalist Kamal Lohani, Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, Advocate Tobarak Hossain, Editor of The New Age Nurul Kabir, Advocate Syeda Ritwana Hasan of BELA and Shamsul Huda of ALRD also spoke. Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori, chaired the seminar.



Anti-Corruption Commission Chairman Lt Gen (Retd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury speaks at a discussion on 'Corruption in Bangladesh' in the city yesterday. On his left is former adviser to the caretaker government Syed Manzur Elahi.

# Panic should not be created in name of war on corruption

## Civil society members tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing all-out support to the ongoing war against corruption, civil society members yesterday demanded exemplary punishment to corrupt people, but said panic should not be created in the name of combating corruption.

Taking part in a seminar on 'Corruption in Bangladesh' at Radius Centre in Gulshan, they suggested bringing reforms to the existing laws, judicial system and the system followed by the state machineries.

The seminar was organised by the Weekly Holiday.

Chairman of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Lt Gen (Retd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury urged all to join the ongoing war against corruption, observing that corruption became a life-threatening disease in the country. It is high time to prevent corruption, he added.

New Age Editor Nurul Kabir said the ACC has so far caught mainly politicians, while the civil and military bureaucrats, believed to be corrupt, are yet to be touched.

He also criticised the extra-judicial killings.

"The ACC enjoys public support but its success is still zero," said health expert Zafarullah Chowdhury.

A mandatory provision may be made for disclosure of wealth statements for any person at the time of his/her joining any service, he suggested.

"We are confused about the ACC's mandate, as we observe different agencies including ACC, taskforces and coordination committee are working against corruption and one is making lists, one is publishing it and another is investigating," said New Age Publisher Shahidullah Khan Badal.

A number of businessmen, including Managing Director of Square Group Anjan Chowdhury, Fida-E Dastagir, Salahuddin Imam, Waliur Rahman, Aziz Khan of Summit Group and BGMEA President Anwar Pervez, said the ACC should not publish any list of

corrupt suspects without being confirmed of the allegations against them.

Former adviser to caretaker government Syed Manzur Elahi said as the leaders of the nation are totally failed, the nation now hopes that proper leadership will be elected in the next general elections and they will be able to ensure an environment free from corruption.

Although it is difficult to prove graft charges, exemplary punishment should be ensured for corrupts as a short-term programme, he added.

Attorney General Fida M Kamal suggested that the ACC should target the institutional corruptions under its short-term programmes against corruption.

Former adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal, Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, South East University Vice-chancellor Dr M Shamsheer Ali, educationist Yasmeen Murshed, lawyer Azmalul Hossain, Independent University Vice-chancellor Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury and Managing Director of Holiday Publications Limited Tawhid Samad also spoke at the seminar.

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Citing the example of Chittagong port, they said the scenario has changed dramatically in the port with the change of the system.

## Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at a few places over Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Dhaka, Khulna, Barisal and Chittagong divisions in next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Mild heat wave, which is sweeping over Khulna division and the regions of Rajshahi and Ishwardi, may continue, Met Office said.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

Highest temperature 37.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sathkira and lowest 20.4 degree Celsius at Rangpur.

**The sun sets in the capital at 6:40pm today and rises at 5:11am tomorrow.**

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

City/Town	Temperature in celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	35.7	25.5	75	65
Chittagong	31.5	26.8	77	82
Rajshahi	36.8	24.8	77	70
Khulna	36.5	28.2	77	63
Barisal	34.5	27.8	76	70
Sylhet	32.2	20.8	78	69
Cox's Bazar	33.0	26.8	75	81

## Obituary



press release.

He is survived by his wife, one son and four daughters.

Relatives, friends and admirers are requested to attend a doa mahfil at his residence at GP-Ga 16 Mahakhal in the city after Asr prayers on May 28.

## Death anniversary

Today is the third death anniversary of Sukumar Chandra Sen, a senior officer of Sonali Bank, says a press release.

He died due to cerebral haemorrhage at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on this day in 2004.

On the occasion, religious programmes will be held at his residence at Ghurka, Sirajganj. Relatives, friends, colleagues and admirers are requested to pray for salvation of the departed soul.

## Qulkhwani



release.

Friends, relatives and admirers are requested to attend the qulkhwani and pray for salvation of the departed soul.

Aminul Huq Tipu, younger brother of former secretary and ambassador Manzur Murshed, passed away due to a cardiac arrest on May 24 at the age of 62.



Dhaka University Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz, extreme left, and other senior teachers hold copies of a book titled 'Monidipto Campus' by Gopal Chandra Das, third from left, at the publication ceremony of the book at Ducsu building yesterday. From right are Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury, former VC Maniruzzaman Miah, Pro-VC Prof AFM Yusuf Haider and Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique.

PHOTO: STAR