

Dream burnt in acid

FROM PAGE 1
angry with me for some reason, but I don't understand why," said a baffled Nila while groaning with agonising pain in her bed.

This teenage schoolgirl from Baro Bashoria village in Sirajganj had a passion for performing arts and cherished a dream of becoming established in the field some day. This talented performer used to win awards from her school every year for her outstanding performance in acting, singing, poem recitation and dance.

"The man to whom we handed over our beloved daughter with the hope that he would nurture her dream, has shattered it instead," Nila's mother said with a blank look.

"Akbar seemed to be a polite man when we arranged our daughter's marriage with him. Who could've guessed that a man like him could do something like this?" the mother said while talking to this correspondent at the ASF hospital.

"On February 19, my husband got very upset at me as I wanted to go to my parents'. I tried to settle the matter, but he didn't calm down. After we had the dinner, he left for the market, but I didn't know why. He didn't even come to bed later," recalled Nila.

"I woke up around midnight and found my husband sitting on a chair with his eyes bloodshot out of anger. I asked him what had happened, but no response. He just walked up to me with a glassful of liquid and poured it down over my head," Nila said reminiscing the dreadful night.

"I suddenly felt an excruciating burning sensation over my entire face and my arms, realising that it was acid. My husband rushed out of the house right after that," she added.

"I received the first treatment 20 hours later after my father brought me to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), Nila said.

She was later transferred to the ASF hospital. Doctors at ASF hospital said her face and eyes have been damaged badly and 20 percent of her body is burned in the acid attack. They fear she might even go blind.

"Nila came to our hospital in a critical condition with deep burns that involved her vital organs. Though we work with acid victims, we've seen only a few patients with such major burns," said Dr Sanjoy Biswas of ASF.

A large number of women and children fall victim to acid violence every year. According to an ASF report, on an average, 221 women and children fall victim to acid violence every year and the main causes of the violence are dowry, refusal of love proposal and land disputes.

According to the report, the number of persons attacked with acid came down to 187 in 2007 from 234 in 2000 and 349 in 2001. In 2006, the total number of acid victims was 221, the report stated.

The acid violence incidents saw a sharp rise in the 90s and started to decline in the decade that followed -- thanks to the awareness campaigns, legal and rehabilitation assistance programmes taken up by different government and non-government organisations (NGOs).

The situation improved in 2002 when the government passed two acts for curbing and preventing the acid violence and started to work together with the NGOs.

The DMCH burn unit still treats 2 to 3 percent acid victims out of around 1,400 burn patients every year.

The number of acid violence has been declining gradually due to the

enactment of the new laws and the campaigns of the government and the NGOs, said Dr Shamanta Lal Sen of Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit at DMCH.

However, more concerted efforts are necessary to stop the acid violence once and for all, he added.

Ronald W Hiles, a plastic and reconstructive Surgery consultant who has been visiting the country for the last 25 years and conducting plastic surgery free of charge, said, "Since 2002, the acid violence has reduced by 60 percent."

Campaign against acid violence achieved significant success as it was handled from different angles and the government, the NGOs and the media -- all worked together to resist the violence, said Ronald noting that the violence is still taking place in the country.

"I think people who are throwing acid don't know what they are doing. They are doing it either from jealousy or from envy or greed. In developed countries, such types of violence is unusual and whenever I come across these acid victims, I become upset because it's not an accident, it's man-made and it shouldn't happen," Ronald added.

Referring to Nila's sufferings, Ronald said in an emotion-choked voice, "She had all her life before her, but that has changed now. One more acid violence is one too many and we want no more of it."

OC Wares Mia told The Daily Star last night that the arrestees said they are disciples of Nura Pagla Peer of Rajbari and they have been looking for Imam Mehedi.

"As they were secretly meeting at midnight, we suspect they have links to hidden Islamic organisation."

ADP performance
Nine of the projects to be implemented solely with local resources include Emergency Rehabilitation and Expansion of Urban Areas Power Distribution System Under Chittagong Zone, and Rehabilitation of Destroyed Distribution System Under Rural Electrification Programme for Sidrahit areas.

The other locally funded projects are Procurement of Modern Equipment for Fire Service and Civil Defence, Environment Disasters and Resources Monitoring System, Construction and Development of Airport Road to Mirpur Cantonment Road, Construction of water supply and sewerage system in 18 district towns, and

Protection of Betil and Enayetur Bazar areas from Erosion by Jamuna River, Union Parishad Development, and Rural Roads and Bazaar Infrastructure Development.

Recalling a conversation between Prof Anisuzzaman and the then prime minister Tajuddin Ahmed, the former chief justice said, "Tajuddin said they could hold trial for the killings of intellectuals, but not for war crimes as Russia was not keen. USA was against it and putting pressure on India to forget it."

"The essence of trial doesn't stem from hatred for anyone. We want to try the criminals because trial is a kind of burial. If you don't bury the dead, it will start spreading infection. If we fail to hold trial for crimes, it will multiply. Crime will foster crime," Habibur said.

Stressing the need for documenting war crimes and genocide in 1971, he said sharing experience

of those documenting such crimes in Germany, India and Cambodia can be of great help.

While talking to the journalists later, he said the caretaker government has to initiate the trial for war crimes 'which will not be a farce but a true trial.'

Terming the 1971 genocide the supreme example of barbarism, Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) AK Khondoker, the deputy chief of Liberation War forces, said trial of the accused was important to establish truth and justice and let everybody know that none can get away after committing such crimes.

"Trial for crimes is not a matter of taking revenge, it is an imperative for establishing truth and justice in the society," he said.

People hope that trial for war crimes will be initiated at the earliest through International Crimes (Tribunal) Act 1973. It might take several years, but the process can begin now, he added.

Farina So, team leader of Documentation Centre of Cambodia, and Ashis Nandy, senior fellow of Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, India, addressed the session.

Earlier, Mofidul Hoque, a trustee of Liberation War Museum, delivered the welcome speech.

Shahadat used the old ball to good effect and the reverse swing earned him the wickets of McKenzie (226), Hashim Amla (38) and Ashwell Prince (2).

Rafique's moment came after tea when he had Mark Boucher caught at cover and then forced Robin Peterson to edge one to the waiting hands of Zunaed Siddiqui at first slip. The moment after Zunaed took the catch, the whole Bangladesh team rushed to congratulate the born fighter. It was also nice to see umpire Aleem Dar presenting the ball to Rafique when South Africa declared their first innings immediately after the fall of Peterson.

But the celebration turned sour after a familiar top-order collapse. This time however it was a fine exhibition of fast bowling from Steyn that effectively killed Bangladesh's hopes of any turnaround.

Steyn in an interview with The Daily Star Sport said that he did not like to hit a batsman and he was the ugliest side of the game.

But the South African succumbed to his fast bowler instincts, in an inspired spell of pace bowling. Using whatever help the surface provided, Steyn troubled both Zunaed and Tamim with short deliveries into their ribcage to soften them up before scalping them.

And Ashrafail was subject to a peach of a delivery first up, one that left him no time to get his hands out of the way as it kissed his gloves on way to Mark Boucher.

For a change, the post-lunch session belonged to Bangladesh first Test bowling hero Shahadat Hossain initiated a sudden collapse by taking three wickets as the visitors lost four wickets within ten runs before Jacques Kallis and Mark Boucher steadied the ship again to put up their

8 militants

FROM PAGE 1
Mia told journalists that the arrestees introduced themselves as followers of Imam Mehedi and claimed they have been trying to gather fellow followers to seek Imam Mehedi.

The eight are Obaidur Rahman Mollah and Alam Mia from Danga upazila, Saiful Islam from Goalanda upazila, Ruhul Amin Mollah and Farid Sheikh from Sadar upazila in Faridpur, Ruhul Amin from Sadar upazila in Rajbari, Humayun Kabir from Hizla upazila in Barisal and Anwar Hossain from Goalia upazila in Rajshahi.

According to addresses provided by them, messages have been sent to the police stations concerned. Nagarkanda police would take further steps following feedback from those.

The law enforcers had information that an Islamist group was operative at Shankar Pasha of Dangi union, it would meet regularly at a rented house in the dead of night.

Following up the leads, a team raided the house at around 3:00am Friday and rounded up the eight who were at that time holding a meeting.

Alam Mia, one of the arrestees, rented the house four months ago. Locals said hardly anyone would be seen in or around the house at daytime, while a good number of bearded people wearing panjabi and cap would gather there at night and hold meeting.

On export transactions, the state-owned banks take Tk 250 to Tk 500 for LC advising and amendment advice, private banks Tk 500 to Tk 2,000, and foreign banks take Tk 500 to Tk 1,000 in addition to the commercial cost of such services.

Moreover, the banks take charges for export related transactions including LC advice, confirmation, foreign bank guarantee, document collection and mailing.

Abdus Salam Murshedi, a director of BGMFA, admitted that service charges on bank transactions are quite high in Bangladesh comparing to neighbouring countries.

Murshedi, also a director of a private commercial bank, said different banks take dissimilar charges and there is no banking

policy in the process.

"The banks should reduce the charges and there should be a policy which will determine how much a bank can take in service charge for a certain job," he observed.

Golam Mustafa, managing director of the South East Sweater, cited an example of import transaction saying: "We need to give almost 3 percent of a Tk 1 crore import deal to the banks in service and other charges."

"Banks in our country make profits even from the services which are free in other countries," he added.

He suggested a rationalised system of the banks' service charges.

Chairman of the Association of Bankers Bangladesh (ABB) K Mahmud Satter said the central bank has identified some service and fees taken by the banks as unnecessary.

"We are working on it and sitting with Bangladesh Bank next week so that we can make the charges rational," said Satter, also managing director of the City Bank Limited.

He favoured higher service charges in private banking compared to the state-owned banks and argued that the private banks' services are better than the government ones.

"It's not a logical idea in free market economy that all banks irrespective of their quality of services will take the same fees," he said.

Khandaker Ibrahim Khaled, former deputy governor of BB, said foreign and some private banks are taking higher service charges and different fees.

Khaled, who served in different private banks, said the central bank can persuade the private and foreign banks to stop taking extra charges on services even after taking normal commissions.

Opening the CID's first criminal intelligence analysis unit, he said they would provide two weeks' advanced training for the unit's officers.

Besides, he said, he would lobby hard and try to raise money in order for a Bangladesh police officer to work at the Interpol headquarters in Lyon, France.

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year to protest low pay, longer work hours and other kinds of abuses.

The Bangladesh authorities there, in coordination with the Malaysian authorities, found other jobs for them. In the meantime, they were put in the camp. But, many workers refused to go to new work for fear of further abuses.

Kamruzzaman of Faridpur, who went to Malaysia through recruiting agency Matco Enterprise in January last year, told The Daily Star that they underwent untold miseries in that country. He said they were provided with inadequate food.

"The health of most of us is very bad," he said adding that they flew to Malaysia for a bright future by selling land and other property, taking on loans at high interest rate, only to come back empty-handed.

"Would the government help us recover whatever we had before we went to Malaysia?" he said wistfully.

Earlier, the Malaysian government assured the 800 workers that they will be given full salaries if their allegations were proved to be true.

"The money will be remitted to the workers even if they are deported," Ismail Abdul Rahim, director general at Malaysia's Labour Department, told daily New Straits Times on October 18 last year.

Nothing, however, could yet be known about the Labour Department's investigation.

Electoral alliance
and democratic political parties urging them to take a stance against war criminals.

Former army chief Maj Gen (ret'd) AKM Shafiqullah said no government in the past could hold trial of the war criminals. But the present caretaker government should not hesitate to initiate the process of trying war criminals.

He said it must be made sure that war criminals are barred from participating in the next general election.

Col (ret'd) Abu Osman Chowdhury said Jamaat leaders and their allies termed the liberation war a civil war which is a violation of the constitution. But the caretaker government is yet to take any action against them.

Sector Commander Maj Gen (ret'd) CR Dutta, and Maj Gen (ret'd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury, among others, were present.

Lankan forces
The ministry says 94 soldiers and police have also been killed in 2008.

Casualty figures provided by both sides differ vastly and cannot be independently verified since the government bars journalists and human rights workers from frontline and rebel-held areas.

High bank charges

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instructions, inward bill purchased and collection and bank guarantee.

In case of import related transactions, the state-owned banks take 0.25 percent of the value of the Letter of Credit (LC) or minimum Tk 250 to Tk 500.

The private banks charge for such transaction Tk 500 to Tk 3,000 as minimum charge or 0.30 percent to 0.60 percent of the amount. Foreign commercial banks take commercial cost in addition to the service charges for LC opening.

Besides, the banks take charges on LC amendment, acceptance, confirmation, cancellation, foreign correspondent charges, handling charges, shipment documents charges and charges for credit report collection.

The BB has asked the banks to stop taking handling charges from importers when the traders give charges for opening LC. The banks take highest Tk 25,000 as handling charges in import transaction.

The state-owned commercial banks do not take charges on LC opening where hundred percent margin is received, but private and foreign commercial banks take different ranges of charges despite such receipt of money against LC.

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45 killed in Guatemalan bus accident

AFP, Guatemala City
At least 45 people were killed late Friday when a passenger bus heading from Guatemala to El Salvador overturned and fell into a ravine in nighttime conditions, officials and media reports said.

At least 15 other people were initially reported injured. But according to unconfirmed reports two of them had already died in local hospitals, and the exact number of survivors remains unknown.

Guatemalan Vice President Rafael Espada rushed to a hospital in the outskirts of the capital to give moral support to some of the victims and their families.

"We are confronting a tragedy," Espada told reporters gathered at the hospital. "People come here from the site of the accident with multiple bone fractures. The medical personnel are trying to make miracles, but they need all of our moral and administrative support."

The reports quoted witnesses as saying speeding and malfunctioning brakes were the probable causes of the accident.

Interpol boss
to track its own citizen's movements as well as help his organisation to keep track of people on its global watch list who may enter Bangladesh, he added.

Bangladesh is a poor country lacking resources and it does not have widespread use of identity papers. So it cannot be given the same level of technical assistance that Interpol provides for other countries, observed Noble.

He said the countries should prevent criminals from entering their territories to reduce the problems related to extradition.

Head of the world's largest international police organisation said currently details about 12,000 terrorists are held on their databases.

Asked if the government has asked them to help recover the assets siphoned out of the country, he said they would soon open an anti-corruption unit to focus on assets recovery.

Pressed further, he said Interpol has the ability to assist in asset recovery, but for that to happen Dhaka must come up with details about suspected individuals.

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PPP still undecided

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party to highlight alleged weak points of Fahim. "There is a campaign going on within the party to malign Fahim and some senior leaders are also involved in it," he added.

He said the "Zardari friends" were telling others that Fahim was close to some people in the establishment and he had been engaged in negotiations with them over the past six years. The PPP leader, who did not want to be named, said he had been told by one of the campaigners that President Musharraf had asked Zardari to appoint Fahim as prime minister and the PPP co-chairman did not want to see a Musharraf's man as prime minister.

On Friday, Fahim met US Ambassador Anne W Patterson at the residence of PPP Senator Enver Baig and some party leaders alleged that the meeting had taken place without the knowledge of Zardari.

However, Baig told Dawn that the meeting had been held at the request of the US ambassador and Zardari was fully aware of it. He said as the PPP was a government-in-waiting, the US and other countries wanted to know about its future policies.

PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar, however, denied that there was any rift or division in the party over the issue of premiership and said that an announcement in this respect would be made in a couple of days to end such speculations.

He said all members of the PPP's central executive committee and parliamentary group had been alerted for a possible meeting in the next few days to designate their parliamentary leader.

National Party chief Abdul Hayee Baloch and former minister Jahangir Khan Tareen separately called on Mr Zardari on Friday and

discussed possibilities of cooperation in the future set-up.

Tareen had refused PML-Q's ticket and contested the elections from the PML-F platform.

Akram Durrani and Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal held talks with a PPP team led by Raza Rabbani at the Parliament House. The meeting was the follow-up of talks held on Thursday between top leadership of the two parties.

EU Ambassadors Johannes De Kok and Ambassador of Japan Siji Kojima also called on Zardari.

Meanwhile a Pakistani court yesterday acquitted the brother of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a murder case after the families of the dead suddenly withdrew their accusations, lawyers said.

The surprising turnaround came after the former premier's party ended up second