

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

Where orphans, destitute children feel at home

NUR UDDIN ALAMGIR

SOS Children's Village Chittagong, a welfare organisation for the children, has been playing a vital role in raising orphans as well as the destitute children of broken families since its journey in the port city in 1989.

The organisation is taking care of 121 orphan and destitute children, some of them are now at university level, amid family environment with educational, health and other social facilities.

It has 12 families each headed by a SOS (service of the society) mother. SOS mothers are usually a widow, a divorcee or an unmarried woman.

The families are housed at three "Paras" (colony) -- Awlia Para, Dwip Para and Pahar Para -- of the SOS village on over 1.95 acres of land in the Halishahar A-Block area in the port city.

Each house has everything a middle class family requires. There are separate living rooms for the members of different ages, full-fledged kitchen, veranda, washing corner, television and musical equipment.

Project Director Md Fazlul Kabir said they enroll the orphan children from the newborn to five years. They also take care of the children whose parents or mothers are unable to look after their children on their own.

"After getting the offer for enrolling the children, our team investigate into the requirements for enrolling them," he said, adding that some times they allow two wards of a family to ensure family bondage at the arranged family there.

"We appoint the SOS mothers after a two-year training, three months in Dhaka and one year and nine months at the village," he said.

The mothers take care of the children as aunt until promoted as mother and they remain under strict supervision of the authorities before joining as mother in the houses.

Maria Samiha Tania, a student of class-II, and her brother Abdul Omar Sani, a student of class-I, are living at the village together since they came here from the city's Port Colony area around four years ago.

They were at the project director's room while this correspondent visiting the village on Sunday. They were seen talking with the director without any hesitation.

When asked about their study and how do they feel at the village, they answered like any other children of the traditional families and expressed happiness with their everyday activities.

Tanjim Afrin Soma, who came at the age of three and a-half

years and now appearing in the HSC examinations from Chittagong Government Commerce College, was seen getting ready to have lunch with her brothers and sisters at the house - Lusat - under the Pahar Para at around 1:30pm.

Besides, the organisation has three other social projects, including SOS Hermann Hmeiner School (Preparatory Class-1 to V), SOS Hermann Gmeiner Social Centre at the village Compound, and SOS Youth Village and Vocational Training Centre at Halishahar L-Block.

Youth Educator Md Zahiruddin said 243 students, including 70 children, of the village are studying at the school under the supervision of 10 trained teachers and other teachers for fine arts, music and physical education.

After completion of the pri-

mary level, the students get admitted to different high schools in the port city, then colleges and universities.

The authorities shift the male students at age 14 to the Youth Village and Vocational Training Centre where they get facilities like the children village, Zahir said.

They can stay at the centre until they become self-dependent and get facilities to receive training on two vocational trades -- Carpentry and Light Engine Mechanics. The authorities also allow 30 students from outside the SOS village from the destitute class of the society for the vocational training at the centre.

The social centre project includes a basic clinic, daycare centre for the children of poor and employed mothers, family strengthening programme and skill training centre, he added.

A total of 60 girls and boys, who were grown up under the organisation, have passed out of the village till date.

The organisation arranged marriage for 22 female and four male students of the village who are now leading their families on their own.

Of the passed-out students, four are diploma engineers, four are aide nurse and others are working at garments and poultry industries.

Kabir said the organisation has also branches in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna and Bogra. All the branches of the world are run with the financial assistance of six million donors around the world.

Only a UK expatriate donates for the Chittagong centre, he said. Any one's help for the orphaned and abandoned children are welcome, he added.

SOS Children's Village International is the member of SOS Kinderdorf International (SOS-KDI) working in 132 countries across the globe.

Prof Hermann Gmeiner, founder of the SOS-KDI, visited Bangladesh in 1972 immediately after the War of Liberation with Helmut Kutin, present president of the organisation with the proposal of establishing the Children's Village in Bangladesh.

SOS-KDI started functioning in Bangladesh under an agreement with the Labour and Social Welfare Ministry on May 17, 1972.



Indifference of the authorities concerned to a pothole that developed few days ago at the busy Kadamtali intersection poses threat to commuters and pedestrians. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

Passengers hostage to city bus services

DWAIPAYAN BARUA

Introduction of ticket system for the bus services in the port city has become virtually ineffective due to non-compliance with the traffic rules by a section of owners and drivers, causing untold sufferings to the commuters.

The traffic department of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) imposed a rule on the city buses to ply through counter-based service on April 14 in a bid to ease the passengers' hassles and streamline the service.

The system was launched to force the buses to carry passengers according to the seat capacity and to stop dropping and taking passengers from unscheduled stoppages.

Besides commuters are to wait for long time at the make-shift ticket counters after purchasing tickets everyday as the buses come after long intervals.

Female commuters are the worst sufferers failing to get into the buses after scuffling amid the huge rush due to inadequate buses.

CMP (traffic) and joint forces in a joint survey said around 50 per cent of 840 city service buses are not plying in 11 routes in the port city despite taking route permits from Bangladesh Road

Transport Authority (BRTA).

Deputy Commissioner (traffic) Abu Sufian said around 420, out of 840 buses, ply in different routes while the remaining buses ply outside the city or some carry staffs of different factories in the CEPZ on contract.

After launching of the counter-service, BRTA provided route permits to 75 buses to ply in each route while around 90 buses to the busiest route No. 10.

But the survey shows around 60 buses ply in route No. 10 a day while the picture in other routes is frustrating.

Sources said a section of bus owners started keeping their buses off the city roads since launching of the counter service to spoil the system.

Toufique, a passenger, alleged that the bus owners were unhappy with the counter service as they can't carry the passengers beyond the capacity.

So they started non-cooperation from the very beginning and kept their transport off the roads, creating the crisis, he added.

President of Transport Owners' Forum Lokman Hakim said a section of owners keep their buses off the roads and ply on routes outside the cities.

Md Mamun, working in a shop,

said passengers are the ultimate sufferers, as they are to face hassles even after paying so much.

He said the fare was Tk 6 from his residence at Bahaddarhat Terminal to his workplace at Choumuhani -- a distance of 4.5 kilometre -- before introduction of the new system that is Tk 8.

"And now I am to pay Tk 10 for the same distance following the fuel price hike but still I am to make my journey standing most of the time," Mamun said. Sometimes he is to wait for more than half an hour for a space inside a bus, he added.

Authorities concerned at a meeting of Regional Transport Committee (RTC) at CMP Headquarters on July 20 decided to take stern action against the owners for keeping their buses off the city roads.

BRTA Assistant Director Sheikh Ataulah Chowdhury said they are making list of the culprit buses and issuing show cause notices in this regard since Tuesday.

The owners will be given 10-day time to show cause for keeping the transports off the road, Ataulah said, adding that route permits of the buses will be cancelled if they fail to reply timely and the permits will be given to new ones.



The children of SOS Children's Village pass their leisure time on the village premises.

theweekthatwas

Call to cancel age-based admission system

Leaders of Consumers' Association of Bangladesh (CAB) on Thursday urged the government to cancel the existing admission system in the colleges on the basis of age of the students.

They said many meritorious students having required result in the

SSC examinations will be deprived of getting admission to their desired educational institutions due to the system.

They were addressing a discussion at the association office at Changaon.

CAB city unit President Afsar Khan presided over the discussion while Member Secretary Debashis Rakkhit, regional committee President SM Naser Hossain, General Secretary Kazi Iqbal Bahar Sabery, Abu Taher and Umme Kulsum Arju participated in the discussion.

The speakers said the 10 per cent

quota in the port city colleges for the students from outside the city is nominal.

They said a number of students may lose their valuable academic session due to the admission system.

'Extend time for birth registration'

Speakers urged the government to extend the time limit for birth registration free of cost until December.

They also called upon the govern-

ment and non government organisations to work together to ensure cent per cent birth registration as it is very important for every citizen.

They made the call at a workshop on birth registration organised by Adolescent Development Forum, a non-government organisation, at Zila Parishad auditorium on Thursday.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Education and Development) Md Zakir Hossain was the chief guest at the workshop with women's rights activist Jesmin Sultana Paru in the chair.

Md Shahidul Alam, Dr Mohammad Ali, Umme Mahmuda Khanam and Nur Jahan Sjamim spoke at the workshop.

Journalist Mintu Chowdhury presented the keynote paper.

Speaker said though birth registration is very important for all the children and adolescent, majority of the work could not be done due to lack of proper publicity and awareness among mass people.

CCC healthcare centre opens

Abulia Nagar Sastha Kendra, established under the Second Urban Primary Healthcare Project of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), opened in the port city on Friday.

CCC Acting Mayor M Manjur Alam inaugurated the health centre at a ceremony with the CCC Health and Sewerage Standing Committee Chairman Mohammad Hossain in the chair.

Manjur in his speech sought cooperation from all to build the Chittagong as an internationally standard city.

He said the CCC is emphasising on conservancy, lighting and development activities to ensure the civic services.

Councillor Javed Nazrul Islam, CCC Chief Executive Officer AKM Khairul Alam, Secretary Mohammad Shamsuddoha, Acting Chief Health Officer Dr Mohammad Ali and the land donor Mohammad Rafiqul Islam also spoke at the ceremony.

Rich people urged to help meritorious students

Speakers urged the well-off people of the society to play role in helping meritorious students to develop as worthy citizens by proper patronisation.

They were speaking at the prize giving ceremony of 'Baishakhi Medhabriti 2007' at the Muslim Institute hall on Thursday.

Noted Economist and former President of Bangladesh Economic Society Prof Dr Mainul Islam was the chief guest at the ceremony with Delwar Hossain in the chair.

Well Group Chairman Abdus Salam, Awami League leader Dr Md Afsarul Amin, Bangladesh Red Crescent Chittagong chapter secretary SM Saiful Alam and female ward commissioner of Chittagong City Corporation Advocate Rehana Kabir Ranu were present at the function.

Speakers urged the students to carry on their studies with a view to building up themselves as the future leaders. Later, a reception was accorded to the

successful students of this years SSC examinations.

Ctg Club launches tree plantation programme

Chittagong Club Limited launched a

weeklong tree plantation programme on Saturday.

Club Chairman Kashem Chowdhury inaugurated the programme planting a tree beside the swimming pool as the chief guest.

The Club Vice President and Landscape, Garden and Environment Department Member In-charge Dr Omar Faruk Yusuf, Club Committee Member Aftab Rahim Chowdhury, Dr

Masud Ahmed, Mohammad Shahjahan, Shariqul Islam, Shoyeba Yusuf, local daily Purbokone Publisher and Managing Editor Jasim Uddin Chowdhury spoke at the ceremony.

Later, the chief guest handed over certificates among the participants of the 'Urban Garden Show' held on the club premises from June 19 to June 21.



Activists of different cultural and professional organisations form a human chain in front of the Central Shaheed Minar in the port city on Monday protesting the assault on a freedom fighter in the capital.



Participants perform at the inaugural ceremony of a beauty contest titled 'Mr and Miss Chittagong' organised by Portrait, a cultural organisation, at Agrabad Hotel in the port city on Sunday.