

## Rahul Gandhi visits Brac projects

SHAMIM ASHRAF, back from Gazipur

Abject poverty had forced Fatema Begum of Kapasia to stop her study after she passed SSC examinations in 1993 but could not take away the thirst for knowledge from her.

The 30-year-old woman, who has become solvent after starting selling medicines for common seasonal diseases, resumed her study last year and is going to sit for the HSC exams next year.

I send my two sons to school and bear all the expenses of my family, Fatema said, sitting beside the display of her medicines at Torgao UP complex in Kapasia, Gazipur, when Indian parliament member and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi visited the area yesterday to see Brac's microfinance activities.

Like Fatema, Amina, Nargis, Farzana, Monwara and Hamida, who are among 30 members of Brac's microfinance programme in Lahuripara, also turned up there to tell their success stories to Rahul, who is now on a five-day visit to Bangladesh.

Rahul, son of Congress President Sonia Gandhi and former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, listened to the stories of how these women lifted themselves out of poverty after receiving small loans and training on farming, fishing and cattle rearing.

The 38-year-old Congress leader also visited Brac's pre-primary and primary schools, human rights and legal education class, ante-natal care facilities, community library, adolescent centre and teacher training programme in Gazipur amid tight security.

But the members of police, Rapid Action Battalion, Special Security Force and Indian security team could not stop him from interacting with common people who gathered at different places to see him.

After visiting Lahuripara, Rahul went to Torgao East village where 26 students of Brac's pre-primary school recited rhymes, danced and rendered patriotic songs. These students get free education materials and they do not have to pay any tuition fees.

He stood up when the students of Raonite primary school sang the national anthem.

"So, when are you coming to India for a visit?" he asked the kids.

"When we grow a little more," they replied.

Dr Mahbub Hossain, executive director of Brac, accompanied Rahul Gandhi and his team members, including Rajiv Gandhi Foundation Secretary Gyanendra Badgaiyan and trustee Suman Dubey, during their visit.

Rahul also had a meeting with Brac Chairperson Fazle Hasan Abed at the Brac Centre in the evening.

He will visit Grameen Bank projects at Shingair in Manikganj today and the bank's head office at Mirpur in Dhaka tomorrow.

Rahul will leave Dhaka on Tuesday morning.



Indian parliament member and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi talks with the students of a primary school of Brac at Kapasia in Gazipur yesterday.

## BIBIYANA POWER PLANT Power Cell completes evaluation of Powertek's technical bid

UNB, Dhaka

The Power Cell completed the evaluation of technical bid for 450 MW Bibiyana power plant, which was submitted by the lone bidder Powertek Berhad of Malaysia.

According to official sources, the Power Cell would submit the evaluation report within two or three days to the power ministry for approval.

When contacted, Director General of Power Cell Abdul Jalil said they have almost completed the evaluation of technical bid of the Powertek.

"We're likely to submit our evaluation report on Monday or Tuesday," he told UNB.

"If the power ministry approves the technical offer, we'll then open the financial offer of the bidder to start the final evaluation," he added.

Power Cell, a reform implement-

ing wing of the power ministry, had invited the international tender and Powertek along with German company Siemens and Korean company Kepco under a joint venture submitted only a single bid for the project on July 24.

As this was a single bid, Power Cell took only a week to complete its assessment, said another official of the Power Cell.

But doubts arise whether the power ministry will finally approve the bid to go ahead as it received only a single bid for the Bibiyana power project.

Power ministry officials said that the receipt of a single bid has put the project into uncertainty about its implementation within the stipulated timeframe.

The government had envisioned to implement the top priority project by 2011 as the country has been

experiencing nagging power crisis.

Earlier, three companies qualified for the project in the pre-qualification (PQ) round to submit their final bids.

But, among the three pre-qualified bidders, only the Powertek Berhad of Malaysia submitted its bid while two others -- the USA-based AES Corporation and Chevron Corporation -- refrained from doing so.

Normally, when the government receives single bid for any project, it goes for re-tendering to ensure competitiveness in the cost and price offer, which is a very time consuming and lengthy process.

As per terms and condition of the Bibiyana project, the private sponsor will install the project on build-own-operate (BOO) basis and the government will purchase electricity from it for a 22-year period.

## Proposed Saarc convention for 'unified agri system' protested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

UBINIG and Odhikar yesterday protested a proposed convention to form unified agriculture system (UAS) for Saarc countries which is at the final stage of being signed by the heads of state and government during the ongoing 15th Saarc summit, apprehending that UAS would destroy indigenous varieties of paddies in our country and create dependency on commercial seeds of multinational companies.

Demanding food sovereignty and checking trafficking of women and children in South Asia, UBINIG and Odhikar, two rights organisations, held a press conference at the Dhaka

Reporters' Unity auditorium in the city to put pressure on the heads of the states in the two-day Saarc summit in Colombo.

Speakers said South Asia, including Bangladesh, is being trapped by multinational seed companies of the western countries as the companies have been introducing their costly hybrid seeds destroying eco-friendly indigenous varieties of paddies in South Asia.

Invasion of the multinational

seed companies is causing natural disasters due to excessive use of underground water, insecticides and chemical fertilisers, they said, adding that indigenous seeds need less application of these elements and keep environment in sound condition.

UAS would facilitate multinational seed companies to make farmers totally dependent on their seeds making South Asia, including Bangladesh, a market of their agro-product, speakers added.

Speakers also raised questions that whether the organisation is really working for the interest of 150 crore people of this region or for the interest of western countries which recently started sending their representatives to Saarc summits in the name of observers.

UBINIG Executive Director Farida Akhter presented a keynote paper at the press conference where Adilur Rahman Khan, Forhad Majhar, Rokeya Begum and Dr MN Sobhan took part.

## Citizens' body to observe Aug 15 as Nat'l Mourning Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To mark the August 15 as National Mourning Day, a citizens' committee has been formed in the city yesterday.

The 251-member committee was formed to mark the day in the most befitting manner with the Prof Kabir Chowdhury as convener and Nasiruddin Yusuf, Dr Harun or Rashid and Dr Kamrul Hasan Khan as joint conveners, while Golam Kuddus was made member secretary.

The committee has chalked out various programmes, including placing wreathes at the portrait of Bangabandhu at Dhanmondi at 8:00am on that day and a memorial meeting at Shaukat Osman auditorium at the Public Library at 5:00pm on August 16.

Members of the committee include Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Kalim Sharaifi, artist Imdad Hossain, Quyyum Chowdhury, Syed Shamsul Haque, Ramendu Majumder, Asaduzzaman Noor, artist Hashem Khan, Rafiqun Nabi, poet Mahadev Saha, Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, Prof AAMS Arefin Siddiqui, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul and barrister Shafik Ahmed, among others.

Meanwhile, Gono Forum leaders at its presidium meeting demanded to mark the August 15 as National Mourning Day.

The two-day meeting ended on Friday in the city with its President Dr Kamal Hossain in the chair.

On August 15 in 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated along with most of his family members following a coup by a group of disgruntled army officials.

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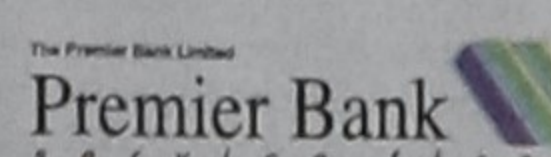
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