



Bashundhara City shopping mall stands with charred floors. A devastating blaze reduced its six upper floors to a skeleton on Friday. (Story on Page 1)

## Work unitedly to ensure victory in by-elections

*Khaleda asks party men*

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia asked party leaders and activists last night to work unitedly to ensure victory of their candidates in the upcoming parliamentary by-elections.

She made the directive while exchanging opinions at her Gulshan office with leaders of BNP and its front organisations of Gabtoli upazila unit of Bogra district on preparation for the elections.

Bogra Zia also urged them to work for the party-nominated candidate, "maintaining party

discipline", according to the meeting sources.

BNP has nominated barrister Moudud Ahmed for Bogra-7 (Gabtoli-Shajapur) and former speaker barrister Jamiruddin Sircar for Bogra-6 (Bogra Sadar) constituencies for by-elections to the two parliament seats vacated by Khaleda.

The by-elections for a total of seven vacated seats will be held on April 2.

BNP Secretary General Khondoker Delwar Hossain and Standing Committee Member Dr RA Ganj were present in the meeting.

## Recognise contribution of indigenous women

*Speakers tell seminar*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday said indigenous women and female tea workers of the country remain largely neglected and their contributions to their community has never been recognised.

They pointed out that Adivasi women are often the main workforce and earning source of their community, but they can rarely play a decision-making role in the society or the family.

Research and Development Collective (RDC) in association with Oxfam GB organised the seminar on "Minority women of Bangladesh: Adivasi and tea workers" at the WVA auditorium in the city as part of marking the International Women's Day.

RDC General Secretary Prof Mesbah Kamal said, "Adivasi and working women at tea gardens remain at the lower end of the marginalised segment. They remain in a cycle of discrimination firstly as a woman, then for belonging to the indigenous as well as minority community and also as a labourer."

Tondra Chakma, programme manager of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said, "There is a common misconception in Bangladesh that indigenous women enjoy more freedom than the women in the mainstream. But in reality, it is otherwise."

There is no representation of women in the hill district local government council and among the

300 mouzas existing in the three hill districts, there are only a few female headmen, she explained.

Excepting Mandi (Garo) community in Tangail and Mymensingh and partially Marmma community of Bandarban, women in other indigenous community do not have rights to inheritance. Although they are the main workforce, their earnings go to their husbands which is a barrier to their empowerment.

Rambhajan Koiri, general secretary of Bangladesh Tea Workers' Union, said, "Female tea workers are the first in the region to work outside their homes, yet they remain largely dejected," he said.

Koiri mentioned that every day the women workers in the tea estate must collect around 20 kgs of leaves for a meagre salary of Tk 32. They work around 10 hours. Most of the time they do not get any maternity leaves.

There are high rates of sexual harassment in the tea estate. However, even a single case of harassment did not receive any legal attention, he added.

Shamsunnahar Gafur, former director of Jahangir-nagar University Language Institute, Sanjida Akter, lecturer of Gender Studies department at Dhaka University, Ayub Ali, executive director of Society for Research and Development Steps, Bibhush Chakravarty, programme coordinator of Oxfam GB, Shaoli Jharna, project officer of Oxfam GB and Jannat-e-Ferdousi, director of RDC, also spoke.

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