

Directorate to provide legal aid for poor soon

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to set up a directorate soon to provide legal assistance for the poor people who truly deserve the aid.

With the name of 'Directorate of Legal Aid', it will work under the law ministry as a regulatory body to provide legal assistance for the poor across the country.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed revealed this to reporters after a panel discussion on legal framework to combat violence against women and girls titled 'Women and girls 1st! Combating violence, ensuring rights' organised by Dutch embassy at a city hotel yesterday.

"All the measures to set up a directorate of legal aid under the law ministry have already been taken. The directorate will provide legal assistance to the people who don't get their legal rights due to economic hardship," he said.

Elaborating the matter, the minister said the directorate will have all the necessary things that a directorate should be and will have their committees in every courts of the country under the district judge.

"Legal assistance that were given earlier was an unwritten arrangement and now it will be given under this directorate so that there will be a day-to-day monitoring on the matter," he added. It has been done to give an institutional shape, he added.

"This has been done in order to get a feedback about how many people are being given assistance, who are getting assistance and which sort of assistance is being given," he said, adding that several NGOs are helping them in establishing the directorate.

Speaking on the occasion as the chief guest, Shafique said most of the women, especially the rural ones, are not aware of their legal rights and even many of them do not want to seek legal aid whatever the magnitude of the torture they face.

"The reason is basically economic," he said, adding that violence against women will not stop until the society achieves progress in education and have a sound economic development.

The minister further said that there are many laws in the country, but the question is how effectively the laws are being

implemented.

He said an initiative to provide marriage registration for Hindu women is underway as the women of the community often fail to enforce their marriage rights legally due to absence of the registration system.

The Netherlands Ambassador Bea ten Tusscher said violence against women is a universal phenomenon and it transcends all boundaries and comes at exorbitant human and economic costs.

"It lowers economic productivity, drains resources from public services and employers and reduces human capital formation," she said, adding that violence against women is widespread in Bangladesh, though many efforts are being undertaken to address the problem.

Bea urged the government to endorse the draft 'Domestic Violence Bill and Guidelines for Sexual Harassment' as an important step forward in the fight to end violence against women.

Barrister Sara Hossain presented a keynote paper at the discussion moderated by Maheen Sultan of Brac University.



Barrister Sara Hossain speaks at a discussion on 'Women and girls 1st! Combating violence, ensuring rights' organised by Dutch embassy at a city hotel yesterday.

Ex-BNP lawmaker Prof Shahid gets ad-interim bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted ad-interim bail to former BNP lawmaker Prof Shahidul Islam in a case filed against him for amassing wealth worth Tk 1.30 crore illegally and concealing wealth information of Tk 56.49 lakh to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Judge ANM Bashir Ullah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order after Prof Shahid along with lawyers appeared before the court and sought bail in the case.

Moving the bail petition, Advocate Sanaullah Miah told the court that their client had earlier appeared before the High Court (HC) and sought anticipatory bail on January 27. But it, without granting bail, directed the accused to surrender to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court within eight weeks.

Prof Shahid's wife Lelina Shahid, now on a HC bail, was also present in the court yesterday.

Strengthen monitoring to prevent blaze in high-rises

Speakers say at discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday called on the authorities concerned to strengthen monitoring and holding regular fire drill in all high-rise buildings to prevent frequent fire-related accidents across the country.

They urged the authorities to start strict monitoring in these buildings whether they have proper firefighting equipment to tackle the accidents and take stern action against those who are violating building code.

The speakers also underscored the need for following the existing building code to avoid such accident.

Paribesh Bachao Andolon (Paba) and WBB Trust jointly organised the discussion titled 'Fire accidents in high-rise buildings and our responsibilities' at the National Press Club in the city.

Speaking as the chief guest, Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology

(Buet) Dr AMM Shafiullah said alongside modernising fire brigade, the government should concentrate on keeping fire hydrants for water reservation beside city roads so that fire men have an access to water to put out any devastating fire promptly," he added.

He underscored the importance of taking some necessary steps to prevent fire, including domestic ways, proper training for firefighters, creating awareness among common people, regular fire drill and conducting a survey of buildings at risk or under threat.

"Concerned authorities should have documentation of the flaws of fire accidents since they can learn from the incidents and take proper steps to prevent the fire in due time," he suggested.

M Abdus Salam, deputy director (admin and finance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said every high-rise building should have special firefighting system with mod-

ern equipment, including sprinkler, fire lift and underground and overhead water preservation system to prevent fire.

Prof Shahida Rahman, head of Architecture department at Buet, said: "Modern equipment for fighting fire would be of no use unless we could ensure its practical utilisation and create awareness among the decision-makers."

With Paba Chairman Abu Naser Khan, the programme was also addressed by Prof Shamsul Wares of Asia Pacific University, Monir Hossain, assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, and Syed Mahbulul Alam Tuhin, programme manager of WBB Trust.

Other suggestions include giving approval for construction of a high-rise building on the basis of a comprehensive policy, adequate free space beside the building site, conducting fire drill in education institutions and ensuring quality of construction materials.



Saarc Secretary General Dr Sheel Kant Sharma calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the city yesterday.

Tk 25 lakh Indian goods seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rab members arrested director and travelling ticket examiner (TTE) of the Dhaka-bound Uttara Express train after they had seized huge amounts of smuggled Indian goods worth Tk 25 lakh from the train yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team raided the train when it was standing on Joypurhat Railway Station, says a Rab release.

They seized goods include 135 bottles of Phensidyl, 7307 crockery, 15 sarees, 776 stimulant tablets, including Viagra, 50 drug injections, 2000 injections for domestic animals and 626 sacks of fertiliser (potash and TSP).

The arrestees were identified as Director M Jubayedur Rahman, 38, of Govindapur in Dinajpur, and TTE M Ziaur Rahman, 29, of Phulbari in Gaibandha.

Both of them were employed by Bengal Ship Builders of Gaibandha which runs the train, said the Rab men.

Graft main obstacle to ensuring equal rights of women

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Corruption is one of the main obstacles to ensuring equal rights of women across the world, speakers at an International Women's Day programme said yesterday.

They also called on the youths to work together to fight corruption.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) organised the celebrations at Rabindra Sarobar at Dhanmondi.

Countries with high rates of corruption have been reported to be discriminating more against women, said Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB.

"It is not possible to achieve equal rights of women without addressing the issue of corruption, as it creates barriers to women's empowerment," he added.

Former advisers to the caretaker government Rokia Afzal Rahman and Advocate Sultana Kamal, General Secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad Ayesha Khanam, writer Selina Hossain, artist Kanak Chanpa Chakma and freedom fighter Shirin Banu Mital joined the programme to express solidarity with the fight against corruption.

A cultural function was also held where singers Bipul Bhattacharya, Chandana Majumder and Sumi, youth activists of TIB Youth Engagement Support (YES), Panchamshur, a cultural platform of acid survivors, Awaraz Foundation, a cultural group of garment workers, and Adivasi Forum rendered songs and recited poems.

Students of different educational institutions attended the programme.

British countess in city on blindness prevention tour

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Britain's Countess of Wessex Sophie Rhys-Jones, patron of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, the global initiative for the elimination of avoidable blindness, is now visiting Dhaka to see the progress of eye care projects for some of the hardest to access communities.

During her stay till Wednesday, she will also meet the Health Minister Prof AFM Ruhul Haque and the leading representatives from international eye care agencies operating in the country, says a press release of the British High Commission.

Sophie Rhys-Jones is visiting Bangladesh as a guest of the Sightsavers International and Standard Chartered Bank.

Standard Chartered Bank, through its community investment programme 'Seeing Is Believing', has pledged to continue its existing partnership with Sightsavers International to strengthen eye care facilities in the country.

An estimated 750,000 people are blind in the country and 80 percent of all blindness is due to cataract, which can be treated easily and cost-effectively.

Students of DU political science dept call off strike

DU CORRESPONDENT

The agitating BSS honours final examinees of the political science department of Dhaka University yesterday called off their agitation programmes after they were assured that the results would be published by Sunday.

They had been demonstrating on the campus since Saturday demanding immediate publication of the result of their honours final examinations, as more than six months had elapsed since they sat for the exams.

An agitating student told The Daily Star that Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Harun-or-Rashid assured them of publishing the result by Sunday morning.



Winners of Star Campus-Drishya Debate Competition pose for photograph with the guests at the prize giving ceremony at Mastermind School in Chittagong yesterday.

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