

## VIOLENCE AGAINST DOMESTIC HELPS

## Most accused go unpunished as victims fail to pursue cases

AMENA KHATUN

A little mistake made Farida's life a misery. Now people don't want to employ her as a domestic help since she got badly disfigured after her employer poured hot oil on her face about a year ago.

The eight-year-old girl worked as a domestic help at the house of Bithi Khandaker at Munshiganj. Bithi got enraged and poured hot oil on Farida because she mistakenly fried three dry chillies instead of two as asked for by Bithi.

Although a case was lodged against Bithi with the local police in this connection, she finally managed to go unpunished by settling the issue out of court. She paid Tk 5000 as compensation to the victim's family members.

Like Farida, most victims of torture do not receive justice as their families cannot afford to carry on legal battle due to poverty.

On the other hand, the accused manage to settle such matters out of court as

they generally belong to well-off section.

According to a survey of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), a total of 542 cases of violence against domestic workers were filed during the period from 2003 to 2006 and 70 percent of them were settled through negotiations.

Sultan Uddin Ahmed, assistant executive director of BILS, said most of the cases were settled by payment of compensation ranging from Tk10,000 and 15,000.

"If the government appoints a person in the local administration to pursue such cases, the offenders would not be able to go unpunished, which will help curb violence against domestic workers," he said.

The public prosecutors should also come forward to pursue such cases, he added.

"At the same time, the media and the non-government organisations should follow up such incidents to draw the attention of the government so that they take stern action against the culprits," he

suggested.

According to another study of the organisation based on reports published in different dailies from 2001 to 2008, a total of 640 domestic helps fell victim to domestic violence and 305 of them died.

Also, 235 domestic workers were injured, 77 were raped and 23 went missing during the period, the study said.

Farida Yasmin, deputy director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust (BLAST), said most victims fail to pursue their cases due to poverty while most accused take this opportunity to go unpunished.

"As the accused are influential people in most cases, the victims want to settle the issue in exchange for an amount of money," she observed.

Interestingly, the victims' families find it difficult to receive the compensation as the mediators take away the money in most cases, she added.

She also said the government should provide legal aid to the victims so that they can pursue their cases.



PHOTO: STAR

Noted columnist Syed Abul Maksud speaks at a seminar on 'Right to Information Act and Freedom of Press' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left are former adviser ASM Shahjahan and Prof Sheikh Hafizur Rahman Karzon. Campaign on Citizen's Right to Information organised the seminar to mark the World Press Freedom Day.

## Steps taken to offset job cuts of migrant workers: Mosharraf

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Labour and Expatriates' Welfare Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain yesterday said there are prospects of returning migrants from some major labour-receiving countries and called for vigilance and preparations to face any possible effects of global financial crisis.

"We, therefore, need to be vigilant and prepared to face any possible adverse effects of the crisis," he said, citing that the number of people migrating abroad for jobs declined by 26.2 percent in July-February of 2008-09 compared to the same period of 2007-08.

In Bangladesh, exports and remittances are the backbone of the economy, but since early this year, it has experienced a significant slowdown in certain export products, the minister said while speaking as the chief guest at a high-level forum titled 'Social dialogue and decent work: Our challenges'.

He noted that the government has taken and expanded a number of social safety-net programmes, including distribution of food grains and creating jobs through road maintenance programme and 100-day employment programme that promote decent work.

The forum was organised by International Labour Organisation (ILO) in collaboration with the Labour and Employment Ministry, Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) and National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education (NCCWE) to mark ILO's 90th anniversary and 36 years in Bangladesh.

Mentioning that major economies are facing severe economic crisis with its adverse social impacts in the form of huge job losses and erosion of incomes of the people at the bottom, the minister said, "We have to find a win-win situation for workers, employers and the country."

Congratulating ILO for its completion of 90 years, Mosharraf said, "We remain committed to working with the ILO, our constituents and social partners to achieve decent work goals."

ILO Country Director for Bangladesh Panudha Boonpala said the world has witnessed a backdrop of rising unemployment, deteriorating conditions of work and the undermining of respect for rights at work, along with inequality, poverty and insecurity.

Stating that a global job summit will be organised as part of the International Labour Conference on June 15-16, she said it would bring together heads of the governments, ministers, and policymakers to discuss actions for economic stimulus packages, job creation and social protection.

Congratulating the new government for putting employment and protection of the rights and welfare of the people, including those of the employers and workers, at the centre of the policy, Boonpala said, "Bangladesh has ratified 33 ILO conventions and is one of the Asian countries which is actively implementing the 'Decent Work Country Programme'."

In the keynote presentation, Bangladesh Economic Association President Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad said the inevitable implosion of neo-liberalism because of the greed and irresponsibility inherent in the process is leading to the ongoing global financial meltdown, which is bad news for all, particularly for the poor.

Economic growth is not enough, the governments and the international organisations have to work to make sure that equitable benefits go to everybody, he said.

UN Resident Coordinator Renata Lok Dessalieu, BEF President Kamran T Rahman and NCCWE Chairman Abdul Matin Master also spoke.

## One shot dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered a bullet-hit body of an unidentified man in the city's Malibagh area yesterday afternoon.

Officer-in-charge (OC) Sayed Selim Sajjat of Motijheel Police Station told The Daily Star that on information police recovered the body and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Morgue for autopsy.

Quoting locals Sajjat said they (locals) heard several gunshots when it was raining and following the rain they found the body left lying in front of a garage there.

DMC Morgue sources said the body bore mark of three bullet injuries in its head and back.



## Doa mahfil on Hasna Haque today

METRO DESK

A doa mahfil and celebration of life of Mrs Hasna Haque, wife of late Col MM Haque, will be held at the Old DOHS, Banani Community Centre at 7:00pm today, Monday, May 4, 2009, says a press release from her family.

She passed away after a short illness on April 29 at the age of 81.

Hasna Haque was the daughter of late Khan Bahadur Dewan Abdur Rahim Chowdhury and Zubeda Khatun Chowdhury of Sylhet.

All relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to attend the doa and pray for salvation of her departed soul.



PHOTO: STAR

Recipients of 'UNESCO-Bangladesh Journalism Awards 2009' pose for photograph with Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad and High Commissioner of Canada Robert McDougall at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. The High Commission of Canada and UNESCO jointly organised the award giving ceremony. The winners are Syed Ashafqul Haque, Jufikar Ali Manik and Mahbuba Zannat of The Daily Star, Sharmin Rinni of Bangla Vision and Shykh Siraj of Channel I. The organisers also gave four honorary awards to Irene Neazi Manna of the Daily Shamokal, Sharifuzzaman Pintu of The Daily Prothom Alo, Sultana Rahman of Ntv and Keramat Ullah Biplab of Channel-1. (Story on Page 16)

## DEATH AT WORKPLACE

## 'Strengthen inspection for due compensation'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday urged the government to strengthen labour inspection system by recruiting more inspectors.

They said existing 18 inspectors and seven labour courts cannot deal with the deaths at workplaces properly.

The seminar titled 'The right of workers to a safe workplace: The way forward' was organised by Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) at Osmani Memorial auditorium in the city to mark the May Day.

Speaking at the seminar, Ataharul Islam, secretary to labour and employment ministry, said the government has already taken initiatives to amend Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 for protecting the rights of workers.

The amount of compensation resulting from workplace death should be over Tk 6 lakh instead of existing Tk 1 lakh, he suggested.

OSHE Chairperson Saki Rezwana said it is the government's responsibility to ensure the rights of underprivileged groups including workers as per their election manifesto.

She stressed the need for immediate formulation of a

policy to ensure occupational safety and health at workplace.

The speakers urged the government to keep a provision in labour act so that the deceased's families or injured workers get a handsome financial support or compensation.

## MUKTIJODDHA SANGSAD

## 'Announce polls schedule'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

District commanders of Kendrio Command Council of Muktiyoddha Sangsad yesterday demanded announcement of schedule for election of the body by next one month.

They made the demand at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity yesterday. Badruddoza Badar, Gopalganj district unit commander, read out a written statement at the press conference.

He said around two months have elapsed since the formation of a convening committee of the body to hold the election, but we are not seeing any sign of holding elections.

He also said the tenure of the committee is three years, but some members of the committee are telling that it may take two more years to hold a election.

He demanded to announce the date of election to remove confusion among the freedom fighters.

## WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY OBSERVED

## Threats on journos on rise

## Says report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though there were no reports of killings of journalists, series of threats, coercion, intimidation and aggression on them in the last year have become all too common, revealed a report at a programme in the city yesterday.

The report titled 'Security of journalists and restrictions on collecting information in journalism 2008' was launched at the National Press Club in observance of World Press Freedom Day.

It mentioned that environment for journalists of the news media remains risky and hostile.

Media research organisation Mass-line Media Centre (MMC) and international human rights organisation ARTICLE 19 jointly published the report at the programme 'Article 19 Book Launch and Grassroots Women Journalists Awards 2009'.

Presenting the key findings of the report, MMC Executive Director Kamrul Hasan Monju said, "People do not realise that journalists across the country are involved in bringing to light the truth risking their lives."

The study based on interviews of journalists in six divisions and newspaper reports showed that 166 journalists were abused, 26 faced lawsuits and 21 were injured while they were on duty, another 82 faced security threats, 40 were subjected to physical aggression, 32 faced death threats and 11 journalists were sent to prison during the period from January to December 2008.

The journalists fell prey to people with political muscle or back-up, power brokers, law enforcers, religious groups and

extremists, terrorists, teachers and even national-level sports person, it said.

Head of News of ATN Bangla Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul said, "The mental torture the journalists had to face during the state of emergency was beyond description. While the report conveys some rather unsettling and nearly accurate results, it is only a part of the whole picture."

A book titled 'Proshnottore Tathya Adhikar Ain', an east to read commentary on the recently passed Right to Information (RTI) Act 2009, published by ARTICLE 19 was also launched at the function.

State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam as the chief guest inaugurated the book featuring the RTI act in the simplified question and answer format for the convenience of general readers.

"The right to information is everybody's right. But a lot of people do not even know that there is such a law," the state minister said, adding, "The book is an informative publication which will give the general people a clearer and broader idea on their right to information."

"The RTI act like other laws is written in very formal way using a glossary of legal terms that the general people may not comprehend. This book will remove that problem to some extent," said Prof Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University.

To mark the day, Article 19, the global campaign for free expression, a total of 12 promising female journalists from grassroots level were awarded a special fellowship for outstanding performance in journalism.

Presiding over the programme, noted human rights activist Dr Hameeda Hossain said, "Journalism is undoubtedly a

very risky and perilous profession, especially for women. Things are even worse for the female journalists working in the remote areas as they enjoy little exposure or support in exchange for putting their lives at risk every day."

She handed out the fellowship certificates and crests to the awardees.

"They deserve a lot of support simply for picking such a dangerous profession and this fellowship is certainly a positive step in that regard," she added.

Dr Akram Hossain MP and Country Director of ARTICLE 19 Bangladesh champed Tahmina Rahman also spoke at the programme.

Meanwhile, the speakers at separate discussions said free flow of information is the precondition for development. Access to information facilitates the movement of rural people to realise their rights.

They also said free flow of information also promotes empowerment and compels policy-makers to be accountable to general people.

The speakers said this while addressing separate discussions at five districts organised by Campaign for Good Governance to mark the World Press Freedom Day yesterday, says a press release.

Colourful processions, human chains and cultural programmes were also held in the districts -- Sathkira, Pabna, Bogra, Jhenaidah and Comilla.

Speakers also said freedom of press is yet to be established in many countries like Bangladesh.

Terming such repression violations of human rights, they said these activities create a bar to free flow of information and institutionalise democracy as well as establish good governance.

Choose from a range of contemporary Titan watches and win fabulous adventure holidays. Six lucky couples can win trips to Malaysia or Thailand and go scuba diving, paragliding or bungee jumping. So go ahead, buy a Titan, and gear up for the holiday of a lifetime.

© Present in 26 countries © 100 million watches sold worldwide © The World's Fifth Largest Watch Manufacturer-Marketer

Available at: Dhaka: WORLD OF TITAN: Bashundhara City - 9111440 Ext:101010 • Time Zone: Banani: Iqbal Centre - 9894524 • Dhanmondi: Rifles Square - 9674610, Rapa Plaza - 9144881 • Gulshan: The Westin - 01714 038923 • Mirpur: Mukta Bangla Shopping Complex - 8051816 • New Market: 9662875 • Shantinagar: Concord Twin Tower - 9360664 • Shuvastu Nazim Valley - 01190962599 • Tejgaon: I/A 199 - 8816004-9, Ext-133 • Uttara: North Tower - 8959831 • Barisal: Hemayet Uddin Rd. - 01816-830667 • Chittagong: Ameen Centre - 01819321090, New Market - 031-630590 • Comilla: Eastern Yakub Plaza - 01717-090393 • Jessore: M.K.Rd. - 01711233488 • Khulna: Clay Rd. Bara Bazar - 041-731532 • Narayanganj: Club Market - 7633063 • Rajshahi: Shahab Bazar, Anam Plaza - 0721-810890 • Rangpur: Jahaz Company Shopping Complex - 01190962599 • Sylhet: Al Hamra Shopping Complex - 0821-722457

Imported and Marketed by: Kallio Group of Companies, 199, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Tel: 8816004-9, Fax: 8802-8826268, email: kallio@kalliofgroup.com