

ASF saviour of acid victims

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

It was 1998. Acid violence was widespread in the country, but none was there to help rehabilitate the victims, to provide legal aid or even arrange proper treatment for them.

Majeda was only 14 years old at that time and seven months pregnant, with new dreams and hopes flowing through her mind. But an acid attack shattered all her dreams.

"A relative of my neighbour wanted to have an affair with me. As I refused him, he got infuriated and threw acid on me. My face, head and upper portion of the body got burnt severely," recalls Majeda.

She was rushed to nearby hospitals but they could not provide any treatment for her. Then she was taken to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) where she found her 'lifesaver'.

He was John Robert Morrison, executive chairperson of Acid Survivors Trust International, UK, who was visiting Bangladesh at that time. When he saw Majeda who lost her eyesight and was

groaning in pain with a baby in her womb, tear rolled down his face and he became desperate to do something for this innocent woman.

"How come a mother won't



Majeda

be able to see the face of her dear child who is coming soon," Dr Samantal Sen of DMCH quoted Morrison as saying.

Dr Sen along with Morrison took the initiative first to do

something for the victims of acid violence. Rights activists Kazi Fazlur Rahman, Sigma Huda and Salma Khatun also joined their hands to combat acid violence.

Recalling the past, Majeda said that she was blind when she gave birth to her son and she always prayed to Allah so that she could see her baby only once.

"One day John came to me and asked whether I would go to London for treatment. I said I can go anywhere in the world just to see my boy once," she said.

Majeda was then brought to London and she underwent a successful eye operation in Bristol Hospital. She finally saw her dearest child, Emon, then a five-month-old boy.

"When I got back my eyesight, the doctors carried my boy to me," she continued at an emotion-choked voice. Emon is now 10 and studying in class three.

Talking to this correspondent, Morrison said he came to Bangladesh in 1997 with his wife Terri Kelly who was appointed a senior education adviser of the Department for International Development at the British High Commission in Dhaka.

Shortly after his arriving in Dhaka, a film was made about acid violence and shown in several western countries and offers of help came to the British High Commission from various countries. Morrison then offered, as a volunteer, to coordinate these offers of help.

The first major piece of practical action was to send six survivors to Spain for plastic surgery. From these very early days, Dr AIM Salek and Dr Samantal Sen at DMCH and late Nasreen Huq of Naripokkho gave him practical, professional help and guidance.

"I was horrified at what I discovered. Acid violence is one of the most terrible forms of violence against women. Seeing Majeda at DMCH, I was so moved that I decided to work for her and my initial voluntary work soon turned into a full-time commitment through establishing ASF Bangladesh," said Morrison.

The ASF Bangladesh marked its 10th anniversary yesterday with the 1st International Conference of the Acid Survivors.



Most city roads experienced massive traffic jam yesterday. This picture was taken at Farmgate.

PHOTO: FOCUSBANGLA.COM



Acid Survivors Foundation takes out a procession in the city yesterday to mark the First International Conference of the Acid Survivors.

RATNAGARBHA MA 27 mothers awarded

Staff Correspondent

A total of 27 mothers were selected 'Ratnagarbha Ma' (mothers of talents) from across the country this year as Azad Products Ltd awarded the successful mothers.

Saleha Akther is one of the 27 awardees at a programme at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city marking the International Mother's Day on May 10.

In her reaction, Saleha said, "Braving the then social system and surroundings, I tried to ensure so that my children grew up as honest and ideal. I made the effort like every other mothers in the country."

"It was a great challenge for me to make my children good citizens facing crucial household matters, including nursing all members of the family and cooking," she added.

All of the five sons of Saleha now work at home and abroad with reputed national and international organisations, including law enforcement agency.

Her sons are Vice President of National Bank Ltd Mirza Zakir Sarwar Ahmad, NDC teacher Brig Gen Mirza Baker Sarwar Ahmad, engineer Manjur Srawar Ahmad, who is working as nuclear inspector in Canada, Unicef Dhaka Programme Officer Mirza Mashrur Ahmad and Rab Deputy Director Maj Mirza Ahmad Saifur Rahman.

Other awardees include late Nazina Begum, Asma Abbasi, Rokeya Khanam, Shamsun Nahar Lulia, Yuthika Chakma, Jahanara Begum, Zobeda Khatun, Mahmuda Khanam, Rowshan Ara Khondakar, Fatema Mahbub, Nasrin Begum, Putal Rani Das, Nurun Nahar, Yasmin Akter, Fazilatun Islam, Khadija Begum, Nurjahan Motalieb, Saleha Begum, Nurunahar Begum, Shafiqunnesa, Rowshan Ara Haque, Iffat Ara Islam, Dilara Shaheed, Rokeya Begum, Nurjahan Begum and Sufia Begum Basunia.

Govt conspiracy on to destroy BNP leadership: Delwar

Khoka absent at city unit's joint meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday alleged that like the immediate-past caretaker government, the ruling party is also hatching a conspiracy to destroy the leadership of the nationalist party.

"The present government continues the caretaker government's attitude towards BNP as the latter wanted to oust Khaleda Zia from the country, while this government wants to oust her from her house," he said at a joint meeting of the party's city unit leaders, pro-BNP ward councillors and leaders of the associate bodies.

Delwar, however, hoped that the rights of Khaleda Zia regarding the cantonment house would be upheld through the court.

The meeting at the party's central office at Naya Paltan discussed prepara-

tions for the planned human chain scheduled to be held from Gabtoli to Jatrabari tomorrow.

Activists and supporters from the Mirza Abbas-led faction were present at the meeting, but those who are known as supporters of Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, including many pro-BNP ward councillors, did not attend the meeting.

Asked about his absence at the meeting, Khoka told The Daily Star last evening that he could not attend the meeting due to some important official activities.

Party insiders, however, said Khoka and his supporters refrained themselves from attending the meeting due to the party's internal conflict between him and Abbas over taking control of the city unit.

Delwar, who are backing Abbas, urged all the leaders and workers to work together to make the party's agitation programme a success.

Party leaders Mirza Abbas, Nazrul Islam Khan, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, MA Mannan, Aman Ullah Aman, Rizvi Ahmed and Moazzem Hossain Alal were present at the meeting, among others.

Earlier on April 29, two rival leaders -- Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and former mayor Mirza Abbas -- attended a meeting together at the party office following Khaleda's instructions to work together ahead of the May 2 rally at Paltan Maidan.

Before the meeting, Khoka called Abbas over a telephone and requested him to attend the meeting at the party office to discuss preparations of the May Day rally.

But Khoka's absence at yesterday's meeting created fresh commotion within the party men as they feared the party would be affected seriously if the conflict between Khoka and Abbas is continued.

Big public hospitals to get autonomy: Health minister

UNB, Dhaka

The government has planned to grant autonomy to the big public hospitals with financial freedoms for ensuring better management and rendering quality services to the people.

Disclosing the plan yesterday, Health Minister Dr AFM Ruhul Haque also said that the government would soon appoint some 4,000 doctors through the Public Service Commission (PSC) by holding a special BCS examination in an effort to improve the quality of people's health services, which are said to be in a shambles in many cases.

"Realising the practical situation we have taken initiatives to fill up the critical vacant posts in this sector so that sustainable improvements in the health, nutrition and reproductive health, including family planning, particularly of vulnerable groups (women, children and elderly), are attained," he said.

The health minister was addressing the inaugural session of 'The Policy Dialogue on Annual Programme Review (APR-2009) of Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPP)' at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city.

He said before giving autonomy the government would review the performance of the hospitals already made autonomous in the country and the hospitals that are running under the autonomous system in other developing countries.

"Based on the experiences, we will formulate a standard and acceptable autonomy bill to make the hospitals autonomous," he said.

The health minister firmly believes that development partners would come forward to support the government in undertaking the reform agenda in the lifesaving health sector.

Saying that the mega-scheme in the health sector, HNPP, has been revised up to June 2011 through the Development Credit Agreement (DCA) was signed for June 2010, the minister requested the development partners to come up with consensus to contribute financial and technical support to the HNPP life.

Health Secretary Shaikh Altaf Ali presided over the inaugural session where Swedish Ambassador Britt F Hagstrom, on behalf of the development partners, and Independent Review Team leader Jarl Chabot spoke.

Accepting the government's proposal in principle for extending the HNPP until 2011, Britt F Hagstrom hoped that the extension would increase efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery, support systems, stewardship and reforms.

"The development partners will be looking for clear signals that the government is prioritising action in these key areas. We believe that such progress will help to give a fresh start to further health-sector support from July 2011," she said.

Health Ministry officials attending the function told UNB that the policy dialogue of APR-2009 was held aiming to strengthen implementation of the existing HNPP programme and laying foundation for designing the next HNP sector programme under which Tk 37,384 crore would be spent within the extended timeframe till 2011.



A big pothole on this road at Katusur at Mohammadpur in the city causes suffering to pedestrians and passengers, but the authorities remain indifferent.

PHOTO: FOCUSBANGLA.COM



Industries Minister Dilip Barua inaugurates a two-day National Child Festival by releasing balloons on the Public Library premises in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Let children know real history of liberation war: Dilip

DU Correspondent

Industries Minister Dilip Barua at a programme yesterday said children should be grown up with the spirit of the country's liberation war and history of its traditional cultures alongside academic studies.

"Let children know the real history of Bangladesh, its liberation war and cultures," he said, adding: "Otherwise, children's education would be one-sided. Besides academic studies, building character is also important."

Dilip said this while addressing the inaugural session of a two-day national child programme titled 'Padakkhep Jatiya Shishu Utsab 2009' organised by Padakkhep, a cultural organisation, at Shawkat Osman Memorial Auditorium at the Central Public Library in the city.

"When we would think about children, we should not

think about the children of urban areas only, the situation of the children in rural areas should also come up in our minds," the minister said.

"Upholding the spirit of Bangalee nationalism, many children participated in the liberation war... But we are still far away from the spirit of the liberation war -- Bangalee nationalism and secularism -- in the last 38 years," he added.

"The trial of war criminals would be executed. It only needs some time. All processes to execute the criminals are almost finished," he said, adding that the children and people of the country will see it.

He claimed that the quarters, which tried to distort the country's history, took position against the liberation war and killed the dreamer of the liberation war Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, are still continuing conspiracies against country, liberation war and its spirit.

countrymen to become united and work from own spaces to keep our achievement -- the liberation war -- intact.

Pointing to the vested quarters, Dilip said, "From 2001 to 2006, only one work was done, which was establishing the interests of fundamentalists."

Termining children the country's future leaders, speakers at the session called on the guardians to make their children familiar with the real history of Bangladesh, liberation war as well as with the country's core culture.

Former secretary Syed Margub Morshed, Dr Shamsuzzaman, poets Asad Chowdhury and Aslam Sani spoke at the session as the special guests with Padakkhep Bangladesh President Badal Chowdhury in the chair.

Children would participate in an art competition in the function today where a movie will also be shown and a drama staged.

JS body asks PSC to follow FE, dist quota properly

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary subcommittee yesterday asked the Public Service Commission (PSC) to follow freedom fighters' and district quota properly while recruiting officials at different levels of the government.

Few members of the committee expressed dissatisfaction over the recent activities of PSC for not following the freedom fighters' quota.

The subcommittee on parliamentary standing committee on establishment ministry at its meeting hoped to find out an 'appropriate and satisfactory' way to resolve the issue of candidates who were dropped from the successful list of candidates of the 27th BCS examinations.

It asked the concerned officials to place a detailed report on 1,114 candidates who passed the 1st exams but were dropped from the list of 2nd phase results of the 27th BCS exams.

"We are hopeful to find out an appropriate and implementable solution of the 27th BCS examination," ABM Ghulam Mostafa, head of the subcommittee, told The Daily Star.

"We are trying to detect the problems and then find out the solution," he added.

"We have asked the concerned officials to submit a detailed report on how many candidates were nominated in which quotas and in which cadres among the 1,114 candidates to the committee's next meeting."

A parliamentary standing committee on April 26 formed a subcommittee to find out a way to resolve the 27th BCS issue in line with the prime minister's assurance given to its candidates who were dropped from the 2nd list of the successful candidates.

The five-member committee has been asked to submit its report to main committee within one month.