

Ordeal of a female migrant worker

PORIMOL PALMA

Ranu, a migrant worker who has won her struggle to protect her purity in a far-off country, is now fighting another battle at home to prove her innocence to her husband.

She went to Lebanon for a better life, but returned with bruises and pains all around her body. With the help of a human rights organisation, she was treated, but is still too weak to work.

Promised by a broker of \$150 monthly salary, Ranu Abdul Rashid, 24, went to the Middle East country in December last. She, however, returned home on May 22, failing to endure the torture, because she refused to sleep with her employer and other men.

"After getting treatment, I tried to work in a garment factory in Dhaka, but I was so weak that I could not continue for over two hours," she told The Daily Star. Ranu now stays with her elderly mother at her sister's rented tin-shed house at Mirpur in the city.

However, more shocking is that her husband does not want to accept her into his home, labelling her as a 'fallen woman'.

Early last year, the elderly mother gave Ranu and her sister Tk 80,000 each after selling their ancestral land. One day, a neighbour, Jamshed, proposed that she could help her go abroad for a job with good salary.

Although Jamshed said Ranu would be given a job in a hospital, she was given a household job in Lebanon. For this job, Ranu had to spend Tk one lakh.

The first family she worked for two weeks was good, Ranu

said. She, however, was transferred to another house after a discussion between Sana, an agent in Lebanon, and the house owner Gigi.

"They both asked me about my whereabouts and my parents. I said my mother was very old and there was none to look after her at home."

But during Sana's conversation with someone in Bangladesh, Ranu got a hint that she could be sold somewhere else.

She was then transferred to another house. She said though it was hard for her to clean the three-storey building and do other household chores, it was manageable. But, the problem began three days later.

One day, Mardah, the master of the family, knocked on the door of her room at midnight. "I thought there could be some emergency. I

answered the door. But he asked me to go to bed with him."

"I ran to the room of his wife, Gada, and informed her of the embarrassing situation. After that when Mardah left, I returned to my room. But Gada made no intervention," Ranu said, adding that she faced similar incidents several times.

She said after some days, four men came to her with similar motive. "I refused to comply. I even pretended to take chemicals used to clean toilet in order to discourage them."

Those men also tried to lure her, saying they would give her a lot of money, Ranu said. "I repeatedly made complaints to my mistress about them, but she beat me with an iron rod. She also started giving me electric shocks."

One day, she had fainted

for several hours after a beating.

She then called her brother-in-law Rafiq at home several times requesting him to arrange for her return.

Ranu also requested Sana to send her home. "But, Sana said he bought me from my broker for three years and I can neither return home nor can get any salary. I was totally shocked."

Sana even referred to another Bangladeshi woman, saying if she could sleep with those men, why Ranu could not. "I said you kill me and send my body home, but don't ask me to sleep with those men."

A few days later, Sana took Ranu to his office and talked to a broker in Bangladesh. The broker said if her family pays Tk 30,000, she could be brought back home.

In response, Ranu said it would not be possible for her mother to pay that money, prompting Sana to transfer her to another house, but the situation remained the same.

She went on saying that five to eight men came to her in the evening regularly and asked her to go to bed with them, but she continued to refuse by pretending to take toxic chemicals.

"As such incidents frustrated me, I gave a phone call to human rights organisation IMA in Bangladesh, saying I would commit suicide if I cannot return home soon."

In mid-April, one Sayeed came to that house and took her to his office by a car, Ranu continued.

He then admitted her to a hospital, and after five days' treatment sent her back home. Ranu is now back home, but her agonising ordeals in Lebanon still haunt her.



PHOTO: STAR

Migrant worker Ranu.

DEVIATIONS FROM RAJUK-APPROVED DESIGNS 3,000 buildings identified Parliament told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 3,000 buildings built with deviations from Rajuk-approved designs, have been identified. State Minister for Housing and Public Works Abdul Mannan Khan told parliament yesterday.

He also said the process of identification of such buildings is going on.

"Actions are being taken against the owners of the buildings under the Building Construction Act 1952 and Dhaka Metropolitan Building Construction Rules 2008," the state minister said in a scripted answer while replying to a query of Awami League lawmaker Waresat Hussain Belal.

He, however, said it is not possible to find out the exact number of buildings built in Dhaka metropolitan city without the approval from Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk).

Replying to another query

from AL lawmaker Aslamul Haque, the state minister said a project has been taken under the Building Research Institute to ensure proper application of the national building code and update it.

Bangladesh National Building Code was formulated in 1993 in order to reduce damage in the event of earthquake, he said, adding that the building code will be updated under the project.

EDUCATION
Replying to queries from several ruling alliance lawmakers, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said a high-powered committee led by Prime Minister's adviser Dr Alauddin Ahmed has been formed to prepare a draft policy to bring non-government educational institutions under monthly pay order (MPO) system.

Tk112 crore has been allocated in the proposed budget for the next fiscal year to this

end, he added.

In response to a query from BNP lawmaker Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anee, the minister said the government has no plan to abolish the National University.

Replying to a query from lawmaker Farida Akhtar, he said the government has decided, in principle, to introduce double shifts at 80 government high schools at the district headquarters.

A proposal to create 2,640 posts of teachers in these 80 schools has been sent to the establishment ministry, the minister said.

In response to a query from BNP lawmaker Mahbub Uddin Khokon, Nahid said the government is conducting a survey to assess the overall situation of Qaumi madrasahs across the country. "On completion of the survey, a policy will be formulated to grant official recognition to them," he added.

EXTORTION CASE Bahauddin Nasim acquitted

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday acquitted Awami League leader Bahauddin Nasim and his brother Khalid Hossain Yeas of an extortion case finding no evidences brought against them.

Nasim was earlier on June 16 this year acquitted of a sedition case filed against him in March 2002.

Judge Mohammad Nurul Islam of the Sixth Joint Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court yesterday gave the acquittal order in presence of Nasim and his brother at a packed courtroom.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence had completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of seven prosecution witnesses.

Additional Public Prosecutor AFM Rezaul Karim Hiron told The Daily Star Rawshan, who got AL ticket to contest 2001 parliamentary election from Comilla-4, had given his statements before the court saying that he had a business transaction with Nasim and his brother and they had settled the matter amicably.

According to the trial, AL leader Rawshan Ali Master, managing director of Famous Steel Mills Ltd, filed the case with Shyampur Police Station against Nasim and his brother Yeas on August 1, 2007.

In the first information report, the complainant alleged that he paid Tk 25 lakh as extortion money from July 4 to October 28, 2006 after being threatened by Nasim and his brother.

Advocate Najibullah Hiron defended the accused.

Nasim was also accused in a case filed for amassing wealth through illegal means and concealing wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission.

He was arrested in 2001 and two cases were filed against him for possessing local and foreign currencies illegally and on sedition charges.

Anwarul Alam Parvez stressed the need to recruit more educated and trained people at mid-management level to solve problems.

GTZ Programme Coordinator Dietrich Stotz called for a change in the mindset in order to maintain good relations between workers and owners, which would help avert violence.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, assistant executive director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, presented the keynote paper.

Touhidur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Poshak Shilpa Samik Federation, also spoke at the discussion moderated by woman leader Shirin Akhter.



PHOTO: STAR

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed speaks at a conference titled 'Right to Information: Law, Institution and Citizens' at Hotel Sheraton in the city yesterday. On his right are Cabinet division joint secretary Khandaker Anwarul Islam, Convener of Right to Information Forum Shaheen Anam, Centre for Policy Dialogue Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan and Shailesh Gandhi, commissioner of Central Information Commission of India. (Story on Page 16)

Harassment of govt staffs for political beliefs not acceptable PM tells secretariat employees

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina categorically said that any kind of harassment of government employees for their political beliefs cannot be acceptable.

She said all incidents of oppression during the four-party alliance government would be dealt with as per law.

The PM made the remarks when a delegation of Bangladesh Sachibabala Karmachari Sangjukta Parishad led by its President M Arai Ali and Secretary General M Ruhul Amin called on her at her Secretariat office yesterday and apprised her of past repressive actions.

She said the way the last BNP-Jamaat government had oppressed the pro-liberation government officials beggared description.

"We believe that government employees cannot be treated from the point of view of their political belief. They are the servants of the republic," she said.

Cabinet Secretary M Abdul Aziz, Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman and Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad were present.

Hasina said through their spontaneous mandate in the December 29 parliamentary polls the people reposed a great

responsibility on the present government to work for their welfare and development.

"We must fulfill the expectations of the people," she said.

She said the resources of the country are limited, but if all worked with sincerity and honesty, Bangladesh would certainly be a country of prosperity and peace.

She said the present government has already been able to bring the prices of essentials within the buying capacity of the commoners.

The PM reiterated that the government is considering introducing general rationing system for lower-income people.

She said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had introduced fair price shop for welfare of the people, but Ziaur Rahman had closed the shops in 1978.

Hasina said, "The BNP-Jamaat government had plotted to cling to power through vote rigging by means of a fake voter list, but they failed as people in the last polls got a flawless voter list."

The last caretaker government had been able to detect 1.23 crore fake voters on the list made by the BNP-Jamaat government, which ensured a free and fair parliamentary election, she told the delegation.

154TH ANNIVERSARY OF SANTAL REVOLUTION ON JUNE 30 Demand for constitutional recognition of adivasi people reiterated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 154th anniversary of historic Santal revolution will be observed on June 30 urging policymakers to ensure rights of adivasi people.

To mark the occasion, Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolan has drawn up a daylong colorful programme with a call for the implementation of its 16-point demand.

The demands include con-

stitutional recognition of adivasi people, ensuring primary education in their mother language, their right to land, implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Treaty, census on adivasi population, trial of

criminals involved in repressing adivasi people and compensation to the victims, cancellation of fake cases against adivasi people, and ensuring security to adivasi women.

The programme was announced by General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolan Prof Mesbah Kamal at a press briefing at Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium yesterday.

Kamal Lohani, columnist Abul Maksud, and adivasi leader Sanjib Drong were present on the occasion.

The programme includes discussion, distribution of awarding among the artists, litterateurs and educationists, and cultural programme.

The programme will be held at the Institute of Engineers Bangladesh with the cooperation of SDC, ActionAid and Ashroy.

The Santal revolution started in 1855 against the British rule. It lasted for two years until the killing of its main leaders Sidhu and Kanu.

Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolan has been observing the day for last five years.



PHOTO: STAR

Columnist Abul Maksud speaks at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the city yesterday. On his right is Prof Mesbah Kamal and on his left is Jannat E Ferdousi.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Diploma Medical Association observes a token hunger strike at Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday to press home their five-point demand.

GARMENTS INDUSTRY

'Form participatory bodies to avert violence'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday stressed the need to introduce participatory committee based on legal framework in each factory to peacefully resolve various problems facing the workers and owners through dialogues.

They also emphasised the need to find out the real reasons behind the violence in the garments factories and take steps accordingly to avert any untoward situation.

There are allegations that a vested group is behind the violence in the garments industry, they said and called for proper investigation into the allegations and punishment to

those involved. Karmojibi Nari (KN) and GTZ Bangladesh jointly organised the discussion at IDB Bhaban in the city.

Speaking as the chief guest, Industries Minister Dilip Barua said there is no alternative to introducing participatory committee in every factory to avert violence.

If every industry introduces participatory committee or bargaining association in line with the existing laws, there will be better interactions between workers and owners, which would help reduce problems regarding wages and working hours, he added.

The minister also called for developing social corporate

responsibility to ensure a win-win situation for workers and owners.

Hasanul Haq Inu MP, who was present as the special guest, said the neutral role of state, recognition of trade union, recognition of legal framework and developing partnership between owners and workers are the preconditions for dialogues between owners and workers.

BKMEA Vice President Abul Baset called for developing responsible trade union. Shafiqul Islam, second vice-president of BGMEA, said, "We have to formulate laws according to our own perspective instead of following ILO and IMF rules."

Former BGMEA President

Anwarul Alam Parvez stressed the need to recruit more educated and trained people at mid-management level to solve problems.

GTZ Programme Coordinator Dietrich Stotz called for a change in the mindset in order to maintain good relations between workers and owners, which would help avert violence.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, assistant executive director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, presented the keynote paper.

Touhidur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Poshak Shilpa Samik Federation, also spoke at the discussion moderated by woman leader Shirin Akhter.

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