

# Small venture, huge impact

## B'baria's Rupali Kutir Shilpo changes life for 40 women

SHEIKH MD SHAHIDUL ISLAM, *Brahmanbaria*

The Brahmanbaria Rupali Kutir Shilpo, a small cottage industry enterprise, started by Aklima Akter Shiuly in 2005, has slowly become a source of living for dozens of poor, jobless women and girls.

Each of them now earn between Tk 2,000 and Tk 5,000 a month by making a variety of mostly jute-based products such as carpets, travel bags and buttons, which have attracted attention of both local and foreign buyers.

Some of the girls in Alkima's workforce were ditched by the society as they previously worked as prostitutes but later choose to return to normal, respectable life.

The Rupali Kutir Shilpo offered them work and hopes for a descent living.

The products they make include jute carpet, woollen carpet, cotton carpet, travel bag, jute button, cotton button, yarn button, floor mat, wall-mat, showpiece, flower vase, lamp post, diary cover, and jewelry box.

Aklima, the managing director of Rupali Kutir Shilpo, said jute carpets are sold at Tk 200 to 50,000 a piece, jute rug sold at Tk 50 to 400. Such products have

strong demand in the Middle East, United Arab Emirates and India.

The jute, cotton and yarn buttons are specially made for "jubba," a flowing long robe used by most Muslims in Saudi Arabia and other desert countries.

Foreign buyers do not come to shop at the Rupali Kutir in the Brahmanbaria town directly. They have agents in this country who buy and supply to the foreign customers.

Aklima said her enterprise could not meet growing demands for its products due to lack of manpower and fund.

Aklima said she actually started the venture back in 2000 using her sewing and painting skills learnt from her mother. Later she took trainings at the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), an autonomous national institution for training, research and experiment on rural development, and also from some NGOs.

In 2005, she officially opened Brahmanbaria Rupali Kutir Shilpo aiming to produce jute based products and give a platform to jobless rural women and socially ostracized girls.

Now 40 women and girls work in the small enterprise.



Aklima Akter Shiuly, managing director of Rupali Kutir Shilpo, showing carpets made by her enterprise. Inset, some items made by the business house on display. The products Rupali Kutir Shilpo makes include jute carpets, woollen carpets, cotton carpets, travel bags, jute buttons, cotton buttons, floor mats, wall-mats, showpieces, flower vases, lamp stands, diary covers, and jewellery boxes.

PHOTO: STAR



### Clarification

The Daily Star report headlined "War trial a joke" on its July-22 issue mentioned that Chowdhury Mueen Uddin is a trustee of Muslim Aid. Bangladesh field office of Muslim Aid-UK in a statement yesterday clarified that Chowdhury Mueen Uddin was a trustee until mid-April this year.

### NU gives in to protests

Decides to promote unsuccessful students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the wake of street agitation, the National University authorities decided to promote first year honours students, each obtaining maximum five "F" grades, to second year on special consideration.

In a press release yesterday, the university said a huge number of students had failed to get promoted to second year, as they could not qualify in the first year examination held in 2011.

"Taking into consideration the students' future and their parents, the authorities have decided to promote the examinees, who obtained less than 40 marks or "F" grades in five courses, to second year on special consideration," the release said.

It, however, said the students being promoted would have to pass these courses later as per the examination rules.

The authorities hoped that the students would attend classes regularly and concentrate on their studies to do well in the next examinations, the release added.

Soon after the publication of the results based on grading system on July 17, the unsuccessful students took to the streets in front of the NU campus in Gazipur, in Dhaka and elsewhere demanding a re-evaluation of their results.

According to the result, 54 percent passed while the remaining 46 percent failed.

The agitated students also demanded that their results be published in accordance with the previous system which allows them to be promoted to the next year even if they pass in one subject.

The university will hold a meeting of its academic council today on how to make the provisions of grading system easier, said a source at the university.

The NU introduced the grading system in the 2009-2010 academic session, replacing the division system.

## Salinity creeping into croplands

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the Madhumati river in Gopalganj during the summer and it was advancing at a rate of one kilometre a year, pointed out the report.

The salinity level in some areas was as high as 25 ppt (means 25 grams of salt dissolved in one kg of soil or water) where probably no crops will grow throughout the year. At some other points, the salinity was moderate and mild.

"The situation in Satkhira is the worst as the mouths of the Ganges -- the Mathabhanga and the Jalangi -- have been totally filled up and Satkhira doesn't get any fresh water supply from upstream basins," leading hydrologist Prof Ainun Nishat told The Daily Star.

"Salinity in other districts would reduce if the government builds a barrage across the Ganges and supplies fresh water to the Garai and Madhumati. But I don't see any hope for Satkhira," he added.

To prevent salinity, the government had dredged

some silted rivers, including the Garai, Kabadak, and Mukteshawari, in the south-western region. But it did not help improve the situation due to lack of fresh water flow in these rivers which could carry the sediments and push back the sea water.

Shrimp cultivation has become very popular in the area since the 1960s. Flooding with high saline water in the area every year was causing higher soil salinity, mentioned the report.

Experts also blamed depletion in groundwater level for the expansion of salinity problem.

"If the groundwater level drops, water from the sea intrudes on the groundwater system, which is happening in the southern districts," said Iftekharul Islam, a groundwater expert now working as national consultant (environmental safeguard) at the agriculture ministry.

Regarding the study, Khorshed Alam of SRDI said, "The soil and water

samples were collected before cyclone Aila hit the area. We believe the salinity level has increased further in the mean time. So we plan to make a new map to help farmers choose suitable crops considering the level of salinity."

DEATH OF GARAI

The death of the Garai river system is one of the major reasons for salinity in the region.

Since the Farakka Barrage was launched in 1973 on the Ganges river, India had shut down all the sluice gates of the barrage in September to retain water for its irrigation for several months. Across the border, as there had been no water flow for several months, silt filled up the river Garai at the confluence of the Padma near Kusthia over the years.

Consequently, the Garai became totally disconnected from the Padma and was unable to pump in fresh water to the south-western districts down below.

After India and Bangladesh reached the Ganges treaty in 1996, India

started supplying minimum of 27,400 cusec of water in the dry season. By then, the Garai became so disconnected that this water could not feed the Garai-Madhumati-Pashur river system.

"The Garai river, which used to supply fresh water to a large portion of the southern districts and the Sundarbans, is absolutely dead now due to the Farakka barrage," said eminent hydrologist M Inamul Haque.

Dredging the Garai mouth would not help much due to extensive siltation, he added.

But if the Ganges barrage is built to retain water during the rainy season, it could ensure water flow through the Garai-Madhumati and thereby reduce the salinity level in the Khulna-Jessore area, suggested experts.

During the lean period, the country used to get 4,000 cusecs of water daily before the Farakka was built. The amount now has declined to around 2,700 cusecs.

## Twin quakes

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Nearly 3,000 firefighters, police, soldiers and local government workers had been sent to the area, Xinhua said, but rescue efforts were being hampered by landslides and roads which had been blocked by heavy rain in previous days.

President Xi Jinping ordered an "all-out rescue effort", Xinhua said.

A red rainstorm alert was issued for the area, which could further obstruct rescue attempts in the mountainous region.

The civil affairs ministry has allocated 10,000 tents, 30,000 cotton quilts, 5,000 folding beds and 10,000 sleeping bags to Gansu, while the provincial government has set aside 5 million yuan (\$830,000) for relief efforts, Xinhua said.

The US Geological Survey said the initial 5.9-magnitude quake hit at 7:45am local time at a depth of just 9.8 kilometres.

A second 5.6-magnitude tremor hit the same region

at 9:12am and was 10.1 kilometres deep, USGS said.

While Gansu is one of China's more sparsely populated provinces, Dingxi city, which includes Min and other affected counties, has a population of about 2.7 million.

The quake was felt in the provincial capital Lanzhou and as far away as Xian, the capital of the neighbouring province of Shaanxi, Xinhua reported.

Beijing's own China Earthquake Networks Centre put the magnitude of the larger quake at 6.6.

The China Earthquake Administration said the same fault zone was linked to a magnitude 8.0 quake on July 21, 1654, it reported.

Much of western China is prone to earthquakes.

A magnitude 6.6 earthquake in neighbouring Sichuan province killed about 200 people earlier this year, five years after almost 90,000 people were killed by a huge tremor in the same province.

## Vertical farms

FROM PAGE 16

They may look more like tower accommodation blocks usually found in big cities, but these 187-metre-high skyscrapers would only be used to grow vegetables and fruit.

The plans to build in the vertical farms in Tai Po, Hong Kong, come after the country's rapid urban expansion in recent years which has seen much of its usable farmland disappear.

Spain-based architectural firm JAPA believes its model could solve this problem with its Dyn-net or Dynamic Vertical Networks model.

This would be a series of high-rise towers located on the outskirts of cities that could supply the food needs of the metropolises.

The structures would be made out of lightweight yet high tensile materials using as many recyclable resources as possible.

The shifting floors of the structure, inspired by China's traditional rice farms, means each ring of the building can change its position to best suit the plants, such as making them receive the maximum amount of sunlight or moisture.

## I don't want Modi as PM

FROM PAGE 1

"Yes, I don't want him," Sen told CNN-IBN in reply to a question on whether he wanted him as his prime minister.

"As an Indian citizen I don't want Modi as my PM ... He has not done enough to make minorities feel safe," he said.

Despite proving himself as a very successful chief minister, Modi remains a highly divisive figure in Indian politics over allegations that his government did nothing to stop the 2002 Gujarat riots.

Some 2,000 people mainly Muslims were

killed during the month-long unrest, according to rights groups. One of Modi's former ministers was jailed for life for instigating the killings but several investigations have cleared Modi of personal responsibility.

On being asked why he did not want so, Sen said, "He could have first of all been more secular and he could have made the minority community feel more secure."

"I don't think the record is very good. I think I don't have to be a member of the minority in order to feel insecure ... We Indians don't want a

situation where the minority feel insecure and could legitimately think that there was an organised violence against them in 2002. I think that is a terrible record and I don't think Indian prime minister as an Indian citizen ... Of who has that kind of record. No, I do not."

Sen said physical infrastructure in Gujarat may be good but Modi has not done enough for minorities or for the majority. He also said that the Gujarat model needs to do much more on the health and education sectors and bring equity.

He said Modi could

have made the majority community feel that they are not mistreating the minority and going against the long Indian tradition of being tolerant.

BJP recently anointed Modi as chairman of its election campaign committee. He is widely believed to be the party's choice for the prime ministerial candidate in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

And BJP President Rajnath Singh yesterday virtually anointed Narendra Modi as its man to the top job after he ruled himself out of the prime ministerial race.

## Govt raises allowances

FROM PAGE 16

Bikrams Tk 125 and Bir Pratik Tk 100 as allowance apart from their 'honorary allowance' of Tk 2,000.

Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan briefed reporters about the proposal after the meeting held at the secretariat.

He said the cabinet approved the proposal to bring uniformity between the civil and military freedom fighters honoured with different titles.

Among the 676 awarded freedom fighters in the country, 459 from various forces have been getting the increased amount from

2011. But the 217 civil freedom fighters were not getting the amount due to bureaucratic tangle.

The respective heirs of the awarded freedom fighters will get the allowance in case of the expiry of any of them, Musharraf said adding the allowances would be sent to a bank account.

The cabinet also decided to increase the monthly allowance of ordinary freedom fighters from existing Tk 2,000 and directed the liberation war affairs ministry to fix the amount, added the secretary.

The cabinet also approved the draft of Vested

Property Return (amendment) Ordinance 2011, keeping provisions for extending timeframe for lodging claim appeal.

The deadline for filing appeal with the tribunal has been extended up to December 31 which was June 30, said the cabinet secretary adding that an ordinance would be promulgated soon by the president in this regard as the House is in recess now.

The amendment also proposed to extend the number of the tribunals headed by additional district judges and sessions judges for speedy disposal of the cases.

He said as the workers had

## SC concludes hearing today

FROM PAGE 16

at his office after the court concluded yesterday's proceedings.

In his closing arguments yesterday, Abdur Razzaq, chief defence counsel for Quader Mollah, said the government's appeal seeking death penalty for Mollah was not acceptable under the amended International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, since the amendment was passed after the International Crimes Tribunal-2 had convicted his client of war crimes charges.

The prosecution had

placed poor evidence and documents in the case against Quader Mollah, and therefore, he could not be punished in this case, he argued.

Razzaq, however, said the SC had inherent power to enhance or reduce the sentence given by any court to a convict.

The customary international laws were applicable for trying the accused in the cases filed for crimes against humanity during the country's Liberation War in 1971, he added.

Earlier in the day, amicus curiae (friend of court) AF

Hasan Arif told the apex court that the amendment to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, which clears the way for challenging inadequate sentences of convicts, was not applicable to the case of Quader Mollah, as the amendment was made after the tribunal had delivered a verdict against Mollah.

Five amici curiae -- Mahmudul Islam, Rafique-Ul-Huq, M Amir-Ul-Islam, Rokonuddin Mahmud, and Ajmalul Hossain -- opined that the amendment was applicable to the case of Mollah whereas another

amicus curiae TH Khan differed on the issue.

On February 5, ICT-2 jailed Mollah for life for committing five crimes during the Liberation War.

The government filed the appeal on March 3 seeking death penalty. The convict filed another appeal the following day seeking acquittal.

A five-member bench of the Appellate Division of the SC headed by Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain held the hearing on the appeals for about 35 days.

## Rescue 27 expatiates

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He said they had not been allowed to go out of the camp that had been guarded by security men.

"As we demanded jobs, salaries, and sufficient amount of food and water, the employer's staff threatened to beat us up. Please help us get out of it," Shaon said.

Mamun Miah, relative of another victim Shaheen Miah from Narsingdi, said the workers had spent Tk 3-4 lakh to go to Iraq that they had managed by taking loans and selling their property.

"The lenders are demand-

ing repay of the loans. In failure, its interest is going up," he told The Daily Star.

Despite repeated attempts, M o h a m m e d Rokonzaman, managing partner of Morning Sun Enterprise, could not be contacted for his comments.

Joyal Abedin Joy, chairman of Bangladesh Migrants' Foundation, said they had actively helped 10 workers in getting loans from the Expatriates' Welfare Bank, and verified their visas and job documents to ensure the workers' safe migration to Iraq.

He said as the workers had

been in trouble now without jobs, they had contacted Morning Sun Enterprise that had assured them of payment of three months' salaries to the victims' families by July 25.

Joyal said he had also contacted the Iraqi employer, Abu Tarab Project authorities.

The authorities said they could not start the project work as about 400 workers of the firm had not yet reached Iraq, he added.

"Morning Sun Enterprise is trying to ensure all necessities for the 27 workers in Najaf," Joyal said.