



A homeless sex worker with her four-year-old son on the yard of a brothel, now closed down, in Madaripur. She is one of over 400 workers who have been evicted from the ages-old brothel recently.

PHOTO: ZYMA ISLAM

# Greed, not piety

Land-grabbing behind brothel eviction in Madaripur

ZYMA ISLAM And SUBIR DAS

The eviction of around 400 sex workers from a Madaripur brothel by an Islamist organisation unravels a mystery of grabbing the land on the pretext of safeguarding the town from sins.

Hundreds of activists of Islamist organisation "Islahe Qoum Parishad" along with the influential quarters evicted the sex workers from the brothel on August 27 to purge the town of sins.

"The motive behind the eviction is to grab the nine-bigha land worth around Tk 70 crore," said Mamata Rani, one of the seven madams (leaders) who used to run the brothel, and supervise the sex workers inside.

The major portion of that land belongs to the seven madams, who claimed that they had inherited the 160-year-old place.

Situated in the middle of the town's business hub, the brothel is encompassed by the oldest market in the area.

Some of the leading members of the Islamist organisation own shops right across the brothel.

They had been hatching a conspiracy to grab the land for long, said the madams, who are currently staying inside the brothel.

They added that the vested quarters had been successful this time.

Jamal, one of the members of the organisation, himself owns a shop just a few steps away from the site of the brothel.

A sex worker, who is hiding in the town, identified Jamal as one of the attackers.

She lamented that the very people who had sought her company before snatched her only means in their own narrow interests.

Jamal, however, brushed aside the allegations brought against him while talking to The Daily Star correspondents.

Islahe Qoum, which means "purification of soul", was formed one and a half years back to evict the sex workers, said Monir Uddin, an activist of the organisation.

Sharif Mujibul Haque, a self-proclaimed pir (spiritual leader) at Shah Madar mazar, has

been leading the organisation.

Interestingly, the pir, who wants to cleanse the soil of Madaripur from sins, has a previous record of land grabbing.

He had built his own house on a piece of land grabbed from a Pal family before the Liberation War in 1971, said a close relative of the pir on condition of anonymity.

Locals, therefore, call him "Pal Hujur" to refer to his previous misdeeds.

Besides, allegations run rife that different political forces also played a significant role behind this eviction.

Shipping Minister Mohammad Shahjahan Khan, at a programme at Madaripur circuit house on August 16, asked the organisations working for the rights of the sex workers to stop their activities, according to a rights activist of PIACT Bangladesh.

>Contacted, the minister justified his stance, and said different projects run by the human rights groups would further limit the sex workers' world to the brothel instead of rehabilitating them.

"The sex workers are gone. Allah has saved us all," Shahjahan added.

The madams said they could not become hopeful about getting any help from the police. They claimed that the law enforcers had delayed reaching the spot on the day of eviction.

"It takes just 10 minutes to come here from the police station ... they did not arrive until the damage was done," said a madam.

Khondoker Faridul Islam, superintendent of police of Madaripur, however, claimed that law enforcers had been deployed as soon as they came to know about the incident.

Earlier, Islahe Qoum gave an ultimatum to the brothel insiders to vacate the land by August 31.

The High Court issued an order on July 22 asking the law enforcers to let the sex workers continue their occupation for a year.

Meanwhile, the sex workers came under attack four days before the ultimatum expired.

(Madaripur correspondent contributed to this report.)

# Nasheed leads

FROM PAGE 16

Television Maldives tweeted that it could "predict a runoff round of elections based on current election results".

Mohamed Aslam, a senior member of Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and a former minister of housing and environment, said his party was "preparing for a second round".

"We didn't get what we wanted from Male," he said. The capital is one of Nasheed's strongholds.

Nasheed was running against three rivals, including Waheed, who succeeded him as president.

Yameen is a half-brother of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who ruled for 30 years and was considered a dictator by opponents and

rights groups. "I hope to get through in the first round itself," Yameen told reporters before he cast his vote.

Also on the ballot was Gasim Ibrahim, a resort tycoon, media business owner and an ex-finance minister under Gayoom. Gasim and Wahid had 24 and 5 percent respectively of votes counted.

Officials at the Election Commission said turnout could be around 80 percent, compared with 85 percent in the 2008 vote.

"I've been waiting 19 months for this day. So I got here as early as I could. It's my way of standing up against the coup," said voter Ismail Shiyaz, 39, a supporter of Nasheed.

Others, like Rooya Hussain, were less certain.

# Hajj flights

FROM PAGE 1

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# Travesty

FROM PAGE 1

authority, will be followed. Justice will be delivered to those who are found guilty, noted the official.

On Friday, a special court in the Indian state of West Bengal ruled that lone accused Amiya Ghosh, a constable of Indian Border Security Force (BSF), was found not guilty of shooting Bangladeshi girl Felani Khatun.

The 15-year-old girl was shot dead as her clothes got stuck in the barbed-wire fence at Anantapur border point in Phulbari upazila of Kurigram while she was crossing into Bangladesh from India on January 7, 2011.

Terming the judgment "unexpected", NHRC chief Mizanur Rahman, also a law professor at Dhaka University, said the judgement has gone against justice and it was nothing but a "travesty."

"It [judgement] has created a wound in our heart.... It has not only cheated Felani's soul or her family, but also the whole nation," he told newsmen after attending a discussion at the Liberation War Museum in the capital.

The foreign ministry should place the matter before the Indian government, he added. "I think it is necessary to inform India that we were shocked and didn't get justice."

The NHRC would request the Indian national human rights commission so that it took part in the process of challenging the verdict in an upper court, mentioned Mizanur.

Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir, while talking to newsmen after laying the foundation stone of Nageshwari Police Station building in Nageshwari upazila, Kurigram, said the killing of Felani is a tragic incident, which is shameful for both Bangladesh and India.

The government will give its formal reaction to the verdict after receiving the relevant case documents, he added.

Talking to newsmen after attending a workshop at a city hotel, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said the two neighbours must take effective steps to check border killings in the interest of bilateral relations, reported BSS.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, while addressing a programme at the city's Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh, said the government was showing its subservient attitude towards India by not registering a strong protest with it against the verdict.

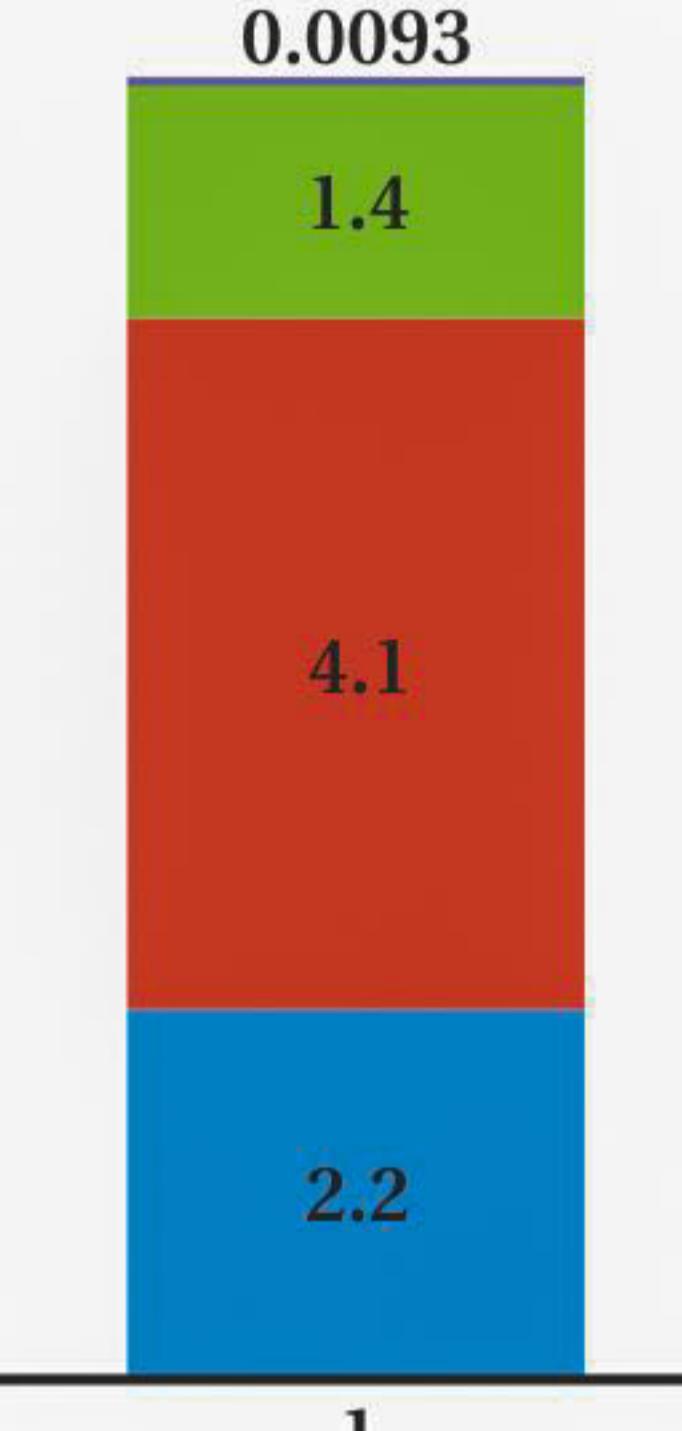
# Food production to double

## PRESENT CROPPING INTENSITY

Total Cropped Area	Net Cropped Area	Single Cropped Area	Double Cropped Area	Triple Cropped Area	Quadruple Cropped Area
14.94	7.84	2.2	4.1	1.4	0.0093

(In million hectares)

**CROPPING INTENSITY**  
■ Single cropped area  
■ Double cropped area  
■ Triple cropped area  
■ Quadruple cropped area



areas of the country so that the four-crop model is suited to diverse agro-ecological environments.

"In some regions, we'll promote 'Aman-mustard-Boro-Aus' pattern while in some other regions we'll suggest the combination of 'Aman-potato-Boro-Aus', and in other areas farmers can go for 'Aman-mustard-mung bean-Aus'. The choices of crops can vary from place to place but the

minister said since cultivation of irrigated-rice Boro gets taxing for an over-exploited groundwater reserve. "We want to discourage Boro in the uplands and rather want to give the farmers the option of growing two cereals (Aus, Aman), oilseeds and vegetables. In the South, farmers can go for sesame and burley too."

Apart from increasing farm production, BARI scientists said, crop rotation also mitigates the build-up of pathogens and pests that often occurs when one species is continuously cropped, and can also improve soil structure and fertility by alternating deep-rooted and shallow-rooted plants.