

'Malala of Bangla'

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deprived families like mine are often married off against their will. I felt at one with them and decided to inject in them a sense of their rights to education," said Shorna.

President of Gazipur's Mawna Union Shishu Forum of Plan Bangladesh, where she had joined back in 2006, Shorna is now a marriage-buster in her community and also an icon. She has stopped six child marriages in her union so far.

She tries to stop child marriage by persuading at first the parents of any under-aged girl, and then by seeking support from teachers, members of Union Parishad, Upazila and police administration.

Humayun Kabir, assistant headmaster of Bartopa High School where Shorna had studied her SSC, said whenever the school organised any sports or cultural event, Shorna would come forward of her own volition.

"Shorna always took it upon herself to organise students for different events. She evinced her leadership quality during those programmes," Kabir said.

Shorna recently went to Norway to participate in the Annual Conference on "Because I Am A Girl", a global campaign of Plan International. It was at this confer-

ence that she was compared with Malala by the Norwegian PM.

Her speech as the special guest speaker in a session on child marriage and her performance in a demonstrative act on the issue were heartily appreciated by the Oslo audience. She also participated in Oslo Freedom Forum Meeting and was interviewed by Norwegian electronic and print media.

Shorna's fight is not over yet. Besides studying honours, she works as a tutor. Her younger sister Rumana also works part-time to provide for the family.

Side by side with this constant fight with poverty, Shorna manages to find time for her social work with Plan Bangladesh. She is an advisor of Shishu Forum of Mawna Union Council under Sreepur Upazila in Gazipur and also a member of the Child Protection Group in the same union.

In 2013 Shorna was honoured as Joyeeta by the Ministry of Woman and Children Affairs from Sreepur Upazila for her outstanding contribution towards ensuring girl children's rights.

Shorna who once wanted to be a doctor now wants to serve the society by becoming a university or college teacher. Her dream is to work for the neglected children and women of the country.



A woman with her child touches the idol of baby Jesus at Kakrail Church in the capital yesterday during a Christmas service.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Hero of Jamalpur war

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while talking to this correspondent recently at his residence in Kolkata. "My father was on the ground to receive them."

Interestingly enough, neither the father nor the son knew anything about each other's position.

"I did not have regular communication with him during the war," Jay Kler explained.

Finally, the Pakistani troops sent a message on December 11 to Brig Kler, offering surrender. More ironic is the fact that Brig Kler went to the surrender venue riding in the jeep used by Sultan, which had already been captured by Indian troops, to accept the Jamalpur-based Pakistan Brigade's appeal for surrender.

The Pakistani side suffered heavy losses in the battle. Approximately 300 Pakistani soldiers were killed and another 379 captured. Large quantities of Pakistani weapons and ammunition were also captured by Indian troops.

Escaping the Jamalpur war front, however, Lt Col Sultan managed to go to Tangail.

The victory at Jamalpur further boosted the spirit of Brig Kler and his men. They continued their advance southwards and secured Tangail the very next day without any opposition. Then they advanced towards the capital,

Dhaka.

Jay Kler, who retired as the wing commander of the IAF, said that before marching towards Jamalpur, the mountain brigade led by his father had taken control of the Kamalpur border outpost from the Pakistan army in early December. Control over this outpost was vital for their advance towards Jamalpur.

The Indian troops under the command of Brig Kler kept advancing through Kamalpur towards the Turag river, which saw resistance from Pakistani troops in Kamalpur, Bakshiganj, Jamalpur, Tangail, Mirzapur and the west bank of river Turag.

Brig Kler himself directed all these operations. Although he was injured, he did not backtrack from his decision of leading his troops in person, his son claimed.

"My father had wanted to complete the battle as the commander of his brigade. This is why he had even declined to get promoted to the rank of major general during the war," he remembered.

While inspecting a Pakistani military base after the capture of Kamalpur border outpost, Brig Kler, along with a major general, was injured when their jeep was blown up by an anti-tank mine on December 5.

As the wounds received by the major general worsened, he was replaced by Maj Gen G.S. Nagra who took over the command of 101 communication zone.

"Interestingly, I got some information about my father's health condition from a Pakistani army officer," Jay Kler recalled.

On December 11, as he was walking out of the Dum Dum airfield, he saw a few soldiers escorting a Pakistani army officer, a prisoner of war.

The Pakistani army officer saw Jay Kler's name on his badge and inquired whether he was related to Brig Kler.

"I am his son," Jay Kler replied.

"I surrendered to your dad this morning at Jamalpur," the Pakistani army officer informed.

In response to a query by Jay Kler, the Pakistani officer told him that he saw his father standing on his feet.

"This gave me relief as I heard that both of my father's legs were seriously injured in a mine explosion," said Dee Jay Kler. "That [information] was a relieving piece of information for me."

The Pakistani officer then requested him to post two letters for him, which he did.

Before his father started operations in early December, Jay Kler had already become a known face among the Indian armed forces for his coura-

geous air battle against Pakistani forces at Boyra in the Jessore border area.

Several days before the formal start of hostilities, the first air war between the air forces of India and Pakistan had begun on November 22.

While launching air strikes against the Bangladeshi freedom fighters, Pakistani air force jets often intruded into the Indian side.

"We were operating from the Dum Dum air field. We were ready to attack them the moment they cross into our side," Jay Kler recalled.

"We intercepted four hostile aircraft, which had intruded into our territory," he said.

The Indian air force shot down two Pakistani air force fighter planes and captured two fighter pilots during the battle.

"It was a joyful and exciting moment for us. The two captured pilots were brought to Fort William in Kolkata. Media gave extensive coverage of the incident," he reminisced.

Jay Kler's moment of terror came when his aircraft was shot down by Pakistani troops at the battle of Daulatpur in Khulna.

"I got a bullet," he said with a smile, showing the large size of the bullet kept in a showcase of his drawing room.

"My aircraft was damaged. I was asked to eject from the aircraft. But I did

not, even though my aircraft was losing fuel. I was asked to go to Jessore and to land there," he said. "But when I approached Jessore, I found the situation not suitable for landing. So I had no choice other than flying towards Kolkata with little fuel to land."

The battle came to an end with Pakistani troops surrendering on December 16.

Jay Kler also reflected on his father's meeting with Lt Gen AK Niazi in Dhaka. Prior to the surrender ceremony, Jay Kler said, Brig Kler and Maj Gen Nagra were the first ones to enter Niazi's office in Dhaka.

Niazi, then chief of the Pakistan army's eastern command, talked to Brig Kler about his strategies in the Jamalpur battle. His meeting with his father was also an exciting and pleasing moment for him to reminisce.

Perhaps on December 17 or 18, he said, an aircraft was going to Dhaka from Dum Dum. The captain of the aircraft was his old instructor who asked him if he wanted to meet his dad in Dhaka. "Your dad is quite famous in Dhaka," the captain had told him.

"With my boss's consent, I jumped into the aircraft. I landed in Dhaka but I did not know anybody," he said. "Some youths saw my name on the badge and shouted 'Kler, Kler'. I told

them I was the son of Brigadier Kler. They picked me up and put me in somebody's car, and took me to my dad."

"My father was giving an interview to Australian Broadcasting Corporation. He was surprised to see me and called my surname to make sure it was me. I responded: hey dad!"

After the surrender, he said, his father was in charge of all the prisoners of war and Lt Col Sultan was among them.

"My father asked Sultan why he had taken such a foolhardy decision as to continue fighting in Jamalpur causing deaths of 300 of his men. Sultan replied: 'I could not understand how your troops had surrounded us.'"

[Brig Kler, who was later promoted to Major General, was awarded Maha Vir Chakra, the second highest military decoration in India, by the Indian government for his outstanding leadership role in the Jamalpur battle. His son Dee Jay Kler too was commended for his gallantry in the battle.]

Both of Brig Kler's knees, which were injured in the December 5 mine blast, were replaced in 1995. The left knee was again replaced in 2004. However, his left leg got infected again and after suffering for over 9 years, it was amputated at the knee on September 3 on his 91st birthday. He is now undergoing treatment in the USA.



Sheikh Md Ali sitting in his Paltan flat with a DB official as detectives and customs officials search his home for gold bars and foreign currencies yesterday.

PHOTO: AKRAM HOSEN

Loads of gold

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Four passports, one of which belongs to Ali's wife Gulshanara, were also seized.

Briefing journalists about the drive last night, Mainul Khan, director general of the customs intelligence, said they will scrutinise the seized passports to obtain more information and will also investigate further to find out whether anyone else is involved in the smuggling.

The briefing took place at Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate office.

Mustafizur Rahman, deputy director of customs intelligence, said Sheikh Md Ali smuggled gold into the country dodging tax and sold it to local clients. He added that Ali was detained after the drive.

When the officials went to his house for the raid around 4:30pm, Ali denied storing gold and currencies in his flat.

Manzur Morshed, assistant commissioner of detective branch of police, said they also seized currencies from Ali's son's flat on the 10th floor of the building.

Ali, however, claimed that the gold belonged to his friend, an upazila chairman in Sirajganj.

"He recently gave it to me for keeping in my house," he said.

Gulshanara told The Daily Star that she had got some Tk 2 crore about two weeks ago by selling a piece of land she inherited from her parents in Sylhet. The rest of the money came from his husband's business, Ali Sweets, at Dhanmondi.

STOVE BLAST Burn victim dies at DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A young mother who was critically burnt on Wednesday in a kerosene stove explosion in a Mirpur slum died last night at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The deceased is Shanta Akter, 21. Her minor daughter Bristi and two of her neighbors -- Rubel, 13, and Abdul Gani, 40 -- were also burnt in that explosion.

All the survivors including Bristi suffered 35 percent burns. They are getting treatment at the DMCH burn unit.

Rupali too gives Beximco

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review the Beximco Group's proposals.

At a meeting early this week, the BB Board discussed the matter and decided that large loans wouldn't be rescheduled or restructured on an ad hoc basis.

It is unusual in the banking sector that loans to a business entity are rescheduled by different banks at low interest rates for a long period.

In the past, Beximco Group's loans from various banks, including Sonali, Janata and Rupali, had been rescheduled several times.

According to central bank rules, there is no scope for rescheduling loans more than three times. Since Beximco Group's loans were already rescheduled at least thrice, the conglomerate approached the BB in August to get the facility, said bank officials.

The Group lobbied high-ups of the BB as well as other banks to get the facility, they said.

In the last two decades, Beximco Group Vice Chairman Salman F Rahman, who is close to the current ruling party, found himself at the centre of controversies over share market scams and defaulted loans.

A number of bank officials and businesspersons said if this Group is given such a benefit, other business groups may demand similar facilities from banks.

The decision from Rupali came on Tuesday more than four months after Salman approached the central bank with a debt rescheduling plan of Tk 5,269 crore, mostly taken from seven banks including Janata and Sonali.

In a letter to the BB in August, Salman appealed to the BB to bail the company out of a liquidity crisis, prompting the regulator to forward the proposals to all seven banks that gave loans to the Group.

Sonali and Janata approved the conglomerate's loan rescheduling proposals without taking any down payment.

However, Rupali took Tk 11 crore as down payment and okayed the rescheduling proposal, said an official of the bank.

The amount included full repayment of Tk 4.60 crore that had been given as loans to Beximco Computer Ltd.

The Tk 604 crore loans to Beximco Ltd are to be rescheduled till June 30, 2024.

The rescheduling time would include a grace period of two years, meaning the Group wouldn't pay any instalment from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2016.

However, the conglomerate would forfeit the rescheduling facility if it fails to pay two instalments consecutively. It has to repay the loans in 96 equal instalments.

Janata Bank rescheduled the loans to the Group with an interest rate of 11 percent for 11 years. However, Sonali set the interest rate at 10 percent for it with a repayment period of 10 years.

Talking to The Daily Star, acting Rupali Bank chairman Amalendu Mukherjee said the Rupali Board approved the Group's rescheduling proposal, as it had given the bank collateral equivalent to the amount of loans.

The Board also considered the Group's contribution to the country's economy and employment generation, and similar decisions by other banks, he said.

In his letter to the central bank in August, Salman showed two reasons behind the Group's liquidity crisis -- politically motivated credit restrictions on the Group between 2001 and 2008, and repayment of Tk 800 crore in bank loans in the last three years.

"Because of politically motivated credit restrictions on the group from 2001 to 2008 as well as other forms of harassment in the past, the group has been facing insufficiency of working capital for some time," Salman told The Daily Star at that time.

Pictures tell it all

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run the thumbnail
photographs of a dozen
BCL leaders who were on
the scene. See online for the
full pictures. You can also
scan the QR code
given below.



BAKSHIBAZAR CLASH BCL denies links with armed cadre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Chhatra League has denied its links with the gun-toting BCL man whose photo was published in different dailies yesterday following Wednesday's clash at Bakshibazar in the capital.

About the organisation's stance on the armed cadre, Abdul Aziz Faiz, joint secretary of the recently dissolved BCL Dhaka College unit, BCL President HM Badiuzzaman Sohag claimed, "It is not true. Arms and sticks were seen in the hands of BNP men during the clash."

Addressing a press conference at the BCL central office yesterday, he also said the BNP men first attacked the Chhatra League men.

Wednesday's clash took place after around 200 BCL men, equipped with iron rods and sticks, swooped on a

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