



Participants at a seminar titled "Safe Internet: The Next Generation and Our Responsibilities" at The Daily Star Centre. Grameenphone, Bangla daily Prothom Alo and The Daily Star jointly organised the programme yesterday to look for ways to protect children from the adverse effects of the internet.

PHOTO: STAR

## Onus on parents

FROM PAGE 1  
She said ICT was taught at schools but there were not enough ICT teachers.

The former caretaker government adviser said 40 percent of the students were first generation internet users. "It is not easy to reach their parents and teach them how to monitor what their children are doing on the internet. Here, NGOs can come forward and spread awareness among parents."

There were 54 million internet users in the country, according to the latest data, said Grameenphone Corporate Responsibility Officer Debashis Roy during a presentation.

Of them, 80 percent were between the age 17 and 34, he said.

He said another study shows that 100 million children would have internet access in 2017 and 90 percent of them would use the internet via smartphones. "Here comes the responsibility of protecting the children."

"Studies show that half of the children do not share their internet activities with their parents. They do not get support from school. When they face any problems, they turn to their friends for solutions," said Debashis.

Laila Karim, manager for advocacy and communication of the Save the Children, chastised parents for not giving quality time to their children and for not taking the time to monitor what they do on the internet. "Parents who are very busy with their careers try to compensate by giving their children smartphones and internet connections."

She said the latest Child Act, 2013, and the latest Education Policy does not have a single word on safe internet even though the internet was very much in use when they were formulated. "It is very unfortunate."

Tarana Halim, state minister for posts and telecommunications, said shutting down the internet was not a solution. "However, we can see the damages if contents are not filtered."

She urged mobile phone carriers to counsel their subscribers through dedicated numbers or apps, like they have done for health and education.

"It would have been better if there were a counsellor at every school in the country," she said.

Tarana said she would write to Facebook authorities today for signing an agreement with Bangladesh to ensure safe internet.

She said her ministry has started the process of importing internet safety solutions to ensure objectionable content were filtered, in an effort to enhance the safety of the people, especially women.

She said the society and families have not prepared their children to speak out. She said the people who were bullying and harassing women and girls should not be spared.

Yasmin Habib, vice-president of Sunnydale School, said, "We have first-hand experience. Parents or schools do not teach bad things to their children. They learn bad things from the internet and share those with friends."

"These students have lost their compassion ... They are becoming

machines ..."

She said there should be a law banning students from opening Facebook accounts until they become 18. "Otherwise, it will not work," she said.

The teacher said schools could not ignore their responsibility as students spend six to eight hours a day in schools.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said the internet is essential. "We have to accept it. It is part of their [the children's] progress. They can go forward a lot using the internet."

"Internet is freedom and freedom of thought and choice also. The innovations and creativity we see around the world are largely internet based."

He said awareness was the most effective answer and that prevention would not work.

While moderating the discussion, Salehuddin Ahmed, a former pro-vice-chancellor of Brac University, said the good sides of the internet far outdo the bad. "The bad sides are very dangerous. So, we have to ensure that our children are safe from the bad influences of the internet."

He said mobile carriers also have the responsibility and they should look into ways to include counselling in their system.

Jamila Akhter, child protection specialist of the Unicef, said parents, who themselves were not tech-savvy, do not know how to protect their children from the bad influences of the internet.

Shahamin S Zaman, chief executive officer of CSR Centre, said

Bangladesh would have to ensure access to information, if the government wanted to transform it to Digital Bangladesh. "There is no way to stop the internet. But we can step up monitoring to ensure safe internet."

Mahmud Hossain, chief corporate affairs officer of Grameenphone, said Grameenphone launched an initiative to filter child pornography contents three years ago. "We can expand it. But the government or the mobile carriers alone cannot do it. All stakeholders in the society have to come forward."

Anisul Hoque, associate editor of Prothom Alo, said safe internet is not important only for children, but also for the security of the state.

Asif Saleh, senior director of Brac, asked how rural schools could be empowered to fight the abuses over the internet when renowned schools of the capital were struggling to ensure safe internet?

Ejaj Ahmad, founder of Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre, called for upholding values of the country in order to ensure safety of the children.

Ruhul Amin, a student of Govt Azizul Huq College in Bogra, and Zannatul Ferdous of Dhaka University, said the students were living in a world unimaginable without the internet.

Another student from Dhaka University said he used to tutor a ninth-grader. The student used to use Facebook clandestinely as the child's parents had banned him from it. "He used Facebook via mobile phones of friends and relatives."

## ATTACK ON BOGRA SHIA MOSQUE

# Gunmen played tricks before shooting

MAMUN-UR-RASHID, Bogra

As dusk fell on Haripur in Bogra's Shibganj upazila on Thursday, most male members of both Shia and Sunni families of the village went to local markets like any other day. At home, women and girls got busy preparing dinner. Around the same time, some 15 Shia Muslims went to pray at Al-Mustafa mosque, popularly known as Shia mosque.

It was at this very hour that the attackers opened fire on the worshippers who were in the middle of their Esha prayers.

But before going on the shooting spree, the assailants played a masterly trick to divert people's attention elsewhere.

According to locals, the gunmen gave firecrackers to local boys and girls, who then started playing with those in front of Bangladesh Imamia Jana Kalyan Foundation, situated on Bogra-Joypurhat road opposite the mosque.

As the children played, locals focused their attention to them. In the meantime, the gunmen entered the mosque and started shooting at random, killing one and injuring three more. Apparently, locals confused the sound of the gunfire with that of the firecrackers.

As an extra precaution, the attackers locked the main gate of the mosque, and shot eight to ten bullets from 0.22 bore gun, targeting the imam and muezzin, Shahinur Islam, vice-chairman of the foundation, told The Daily Star.

Shahinur, also a lecturer of economics at Shibganj MH Degree College, said the officer-in-charge of Shibganj Police Station had warned them about a possible attack on the mosque follow-

## Six Shibir men held with bombs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police rounded up six leaders and activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the pro-Jamaat students' platform, in the city's Arambagh on Friday.

The six are Motijheel thana Shibir President Abdur Rahman, General Secretary Afzal Hossain, Paltan thana unit President Russel Amin and activists Abdul Quayum, Alamgir Hossain and Masudur Rahman.

Yesterday, they were taken on two-day remand each through a Dhaka court for interrogation, said BM Forman Ali, officer-in-charge of Motijheel Police Station.

Acting on information that some Shibir men gathered at a mess in Arambagh to plan subversive activities, police raided the mess around 8:30am Friday and picked up the six, said Sub-inspector Mofizur Rahman of the police station.

Cops also seized 11 crude bombs and some publications of the organisation from there.

Motijheel police on Friday filed a case accusing the six under the Explosive Substances Act.

According to law enforcers, the Shibir men during primary interrogation admitted that they were planning to carry out subversive activities in Motijheel and Paltan in a bid to obstruct the ongoing war crimes trial.

ing the October 24 attack on an Ashura gathering of the Shia community in the capital, but they did not pay any heed to the warning.

Quoting some children, Abdur Rashid, 45, who lives near the mosque, said two to three unknown youth entered the mosque from the front side looking for toilets. After the shooting, they jumped over the semi-constructed boundary wall and fled, heading towards Haripur-Aliarhat road.

Sabina Begum, 25, said that before the attack she saw three unknown youths sitting and gossiping in an abandoned brick kiln on the far southwest side of the mosque.

A sense of panic still prevails in Haripur and Chokani villages.

Locals said Shia and Sunni Muslims had been living peacefully together for years there, and dismissed there were militants in the area.

Police so far arrested three people over the shooting. Two of the arrestees, Anwar Hossain and Jewel, were placed on remand.

## Teesta char!

FROM PAGE 1  
little bit earlier than they do every year, restricting water from flowing into Bangladesh.

Such a scenario is generally noticed at the end of December or in early January. But this year, it has happened before the end of November, said locals.

All sorts of waterways communication from Gaibandha's Sundarganj to Kurigram's Ulipur upazila remain suspended due to the absence or lack of navigability of the Teesta, making the lives of locals quite difficult.

On the char areas, locals were seen walking to their destinations -- sometimes with their goods or food grains. Many were riding horse carts and motorcycles there, a scene unimaginable had not the river dried up.

During a bike ride from Haripur Ghat to Kashim Bazaar in Sundarganj recently, this correspondent saw boats, tied to poles in the riverbed, awaiting the rainy season when the river retrieves its navigability.

On the other hand, many farmers were seen preparing the riverbed for cultivating corn, onion, tobacco, oil seeds, pumpkin and other vegetables. The river ghats -- Tarapur, Ramdakua, Belka, Haripur, Bochagarh, Lalchamar, Kapasia and Bhati Burail -- in Sundarganj wore a deserted look having no passengers, said Qasem Ali, a local boatman.

"We are passing hard days and all the fishing boats will stand still in the riverbed for the next six months until the rainy season arrives," said boatman Dhireh Majhee at Tarapur ghat.

Fisherman Naren Das said many like him migrated to other places during the dry season every year, but this year they were facing the havoc earlier.

Mozharul Islam, chairman of Haripur union, said they had appealed to different organisations, including the Water Development Board, for dredging the riverbed up during the rainy season so that there remained enough store of water during the dry season.

"But nobody paid any heed to that," he lamented.

## AL wants MP role, BNP needs time

FROM PAGE 1  
"A delegation of our party [AL] will meet the CEC tomorrow [Sunday] to discuss the issue of electoral campaign by MPs."

Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, AL organising secretary and a lawmaker, told The Daily Star, "Lawmakers should be allowed to go for electioneering as the polls will be held on partisan lines. If we are barred from campaigning, we will be deprived of the opportunity to engage with people more closely."

As per the electoral code of conduct, the prime minister, the speaker, ministers, MPs, opposition leaders in parliament, and other VIPs enjoying government facilities are not allowed to take

all the 234 municipalities as some components of the 20-party alliance have not yet submitted names of their prospective candidates. We hope they will submit it today," a BNP assistant office secretary told The Daily Star yesterday.

"After getting lists from all the components, the final list will be prepared on consultation with madam [Khaleda], a BNP central leader told this correspondent.

Meanwhile, the AL, the BNP and the Jatiya Party yesterday sent to the EC the names of those who will pick the mayoral aspirants for each party.

As per electoral rules, political parties willing to contest the polls will

send a letter to returning officers mentioning the names of party-authorised persons who will select the candidates for that party within five days of announcing the polling schedule. Copies of the letter will have to be sent to the EC too.

The AL's mayoral aspirants will be selected by party chief Sheikh Hasina, the BNP's aspirants by party joint secretary general Mohammad Shahjahan and Jatiya Party's candidates by party chief HM Ershad.

The EC on November 24 announced the polls schedule. A day later, the EC issued letters to all the 40 registered political parties with directives to comply with the rules.

## AL going alone

FROM PAGE 1  
However, some AL leaders are of the opinion that municipality polls will be an opportunity for their partners to strengthen their organisations at the grassroots level.

The ruling party on Thursday decided to contest the elections independently, while its archrival BNP would field candidates under the 20-party banner in all 236 municipalities that will go to polls on December 30.

Sources said Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon had already communicated with 14-party coordinator Mohammad Nasim and appealed for jointly participating in the polls. Nasim assured him that he would consult with AL President Sheikh Hasina.

The AL contested the last two parliamentary elections under the banner of 14-party coalition.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Menon said it would be good for the alliance to participate the polls jointly. "As the Awami League has decided to contest the polls without us, we too will participate in the polls independently."

Workers Party presidium member Nurul Rahman Mallik said, "The Awami League should have taken its decision after consulting with alliance partners, as we still are part of the combine."

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal General Secretary Sharif Nurul Ambia said they were not surprised at the AL's decision as the party took such unilateral decisions

before as well.

"Under the current critical situation of the country, we all should stay united. As the Awami League has already taken its decision, we have nothing to say."

He added that the JSD had already sent directives to its district units to take preparation for taking part in the polls independently.

Gonotantri Party Presidium Member Nurul Rahman Selim said the AL had taken the decision to show people how popular it is.

Following its decision, candidates from within the alliance will now become the party's opponent in the election."

Selim expressed hope that the AL would reconsider its decision.

"It would be better if we all participate in the polls under the 14-party banner," National Awami Party General Secretary Enamul Huq told The Daily Star.

AL presidium member Nuh-Ul-Alam Lenin said the party never participated in any local government polls with its allies and, therefore, it decided to contest the polls independently this time as well.

"As this election is not to form government or to run the country, every political party should independently contest the election," he added.

Contacted, AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury said local government election is an opportunity for a political party to reorganise the party and strengthen its structure.

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