

Crossing hurdles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Her hair was fluttering, and as it caught the sun it was shining and shimmering.

The 11-year-old was riding a horse at full chat on an open field. Soon, she picked up even more speed and went past another rider and kept on riding.

All eyes were glued to the screen when a documentary on Tasmina Aktar, a jockey from a remote village of Naogaon, was displayed at a programme in the capital's Chhayanaut Sanskritik Bhaban yesterday.

The documentary, made by Tanha Zafreen, focuses on Tasmina's life, her struggles and contribution to women empowerment.

Tasmina has been taking part in racing for the last three years in a row and has won several awards defeating male contenders.

But she did not get to keep the prizes she won; rather, they belong to the owners of the horses. She has to ride horses of other people, as she has no horse of her own.

However, Bangla daily Prothom Alo

has recently donated her a horse.

"I'm very happy. Now, I'll win for myself," said an elated Tasmina.

The newspaper organised the programme marking International Women's Day to be observed today, anchored by its associate editor Anisul Hoque.

Manjurin Sabrin Chowdhury Rupanti, from Kushtia, is a popular stick fighter. She displayed her stick-fighting skills on the Kushtia Government College grounds at a competition last month.

She along with Bangladeshi archers Hira Moni, gold medalist, and Bonya Akter, silver medalist, at the first ISSF International Solidarity Archery Championship in January, shared their experiences at the event.

Besides, Samapti Roy, the blind girl who works as a music teacher for Aparajeyo Bangla, Aung Main Chai, a photographer from Bandarban, and Shamima, an acid victim, who recently completed her studies in fashion designing, also shared their journeys.

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Women, children and men hold candles and take oath to prevent domestic violence at the Central Shaheed Minar early today. Amrai Pari organised the event to mark International Women's Day.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

PM urges Jakarta

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themselves to strengthening maritime cooperation for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean.

Hasina was addressing the Leaders' Summit organised marking the 20th Anniversary of IORA at Jakarta Convention Center.

Termining blue economy the common interest of all the IORA member states, she said their quest for development through oceans and seas is part of their larger efforts to transform Bangladesh along with the IORA countries. "Let's set sail together."

The prime minister proposed establishing Indian Ocean Technical and Vocational University in Bangladesh for creating a pool of skilled mariners for the region and thanked the IORA leadership for adopting the IORA Concord and its Action Plan for strengthening maritime partnership.

Hasina mentioned that her government integrated SDG-14 in its 7th Five Year Plan renewing its focus on blue economy.

She said Bangladesh sees the IORA as a natural habitat for the efforts to project its aspirations jointly with the nations of the region and beyond.

"Indian Ocean is of paramount significance to us for security, connectivity, peace and prosperity."

Hasina mentioned that it consti-

tutes the lifeline of the globalised world providing passage to half of its container ships, one-third of the bulk cargo traffic and two thirds of its oil shipments. Connectivity is critical for peace and development and Bangladesh attaches high priorities to connectivity, she added.

"We would like to connect not only physically but also connect through ideas, innovation, trade, finance, culture and tourism. More importantly, we would like to connect human minds to build peaceful and prosperous societies," Hasina told her audience.

Talking about the safety and rights of the mariners, she called upon all to ensure those and said despite global reputation for their skills and dedicated workmanship, Bangladesh seamen and marine engineers sometimes face unwarranted challenges.

Indicating the adverse impacts of climate change, Hasina said Bangladesh still remains hostage of adverse impacts of climate change despite efforts.

"And that means we are advancing towards an alarming rise at the sea level. It is predicted that with one metre rise in the sea level Bangladesh will lose one-third of our most valuable agricultural land and displace about 18 million people."



It was a different day for acid attack survivors. They danced with music at a programme organised by ActionAid Bangladesh in a city hotel yesterday. Fifteen such victims also walked the ramps wearing clothes manufactured by the victims of river erosion in Sirajganj. Noted fashion designer Bibi Russel choreographed the show attended, among others, by US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Bernicat and actress Suborna Mustafa. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Gas price hike

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a writ petition by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

The increase in the gas price might hamper reaching the government's overall export target of \$60 billion, more than 80 percent of which will be garment exports, by 2021, according to the statement.

The energy commission decided to increase gas price on February 23 at a time when the country's garment sector is losing competitiveness in the international market due to the fallout of Brexit that weakened the value of pounds and the purchasing power of people in the UK, the third largest export destination of Bangladeshi garment products.

On the other hand, the prices of cotton and yarn, two basic raw materials for apparel production, have gone up by 20-25 percent in the domestic market.

The gas price hike will take away Bangladesh's competitive advantages in sectors like garments, leather and footwear since industry-based power plants consume a large portion of the

gas produced in the country, said MCCI.

The amount of daily gas supply is 2,750 million cubic feet, of which 300mmcf is pilfered by unscrupulous people in Dhaka and Chittagong, it added.

The chamber suggested that the government should keep the public transport out of the purview of the gas price hike as it would add to the sufferings of people who are already under pressure because of high commodity prices.

The government should go for different alternative sources of energy to ensure its future stock.

"It is not possible to overcome all the challenges in the energy sector by only increasing the price of gas," MCCI said in the statement.

As per the latest decision, industries that use generators for producing electricity from gas saw the gas price rise to Tk 8.98 per cubic metre from Tk 8.36 on March 1. The cost will be Tk 9.62 from June if the second phase hike is implemented.

Tk 44cr shares, lot of questions

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The money Sakhi and Mannan paid for buying shares in the NRBC Bank was disbursed from their foreign currency accounts with Mercantile Bank's Gulshan Branch. The accounts were opened while they were abroad, and Shahidul was found directly involved in opening and managing the accounts, said the report.

The dividends awarded to Sakhi against her NRBC Bank shares in 2015 were deposited with Shahidul's savings account at Mercantile Bank, and he withdrew the money. He also attended the NRBC Bank's annual general meeting as proxy director for Sakhi on April 4 last year, it said.

The BB report, however, didn't mention what links Shahidul has with Sakhi and Mannan or whether he has any business dealings with the two.

The Daily Star couldn't contact Sakhi and Mannan for comments.

Central bank officials told this correspondent that Sakhi is a loan defaulter at more than one bank in Bangladesh. They, however, didn't give details.

According to the NRBC Bank website, Sakhi, who is from Chittagong, is now a Canadian citizen. She is involved in real estate development business and also runs a gas station in Canada.

The website also mentions that Mannan, born in 1944 in Dhaka, is an established businessman in the US. He has business experience of more than a decade at AAA Wash & Clean in the US.

In its 45th meeting on July 24 last year, the NRBC Bank board decided to transfer Sakhi's shares to Md Harun, an expatriate Bangladeshi in Dubai, on the basis of a letter signed by Sakhi.

Scrutinising Sakhi's emails to the NRBC Bank regarding transfer of her shares, the BB enquiry team found a letter signed by her on July 17 in this regard.

The letter, which the NRBC Bank chairman referred to the bank's secretary, said the shares would be transferred to Harun. In the letter, Ahsan Tower, owned by Shahidul, was mentioned as Harun's address in Bangladesh, said the BB report.

While checking Sakhi's emails to the NRBC Bank, the BB team found that she asked the bank chairman on October 4-5 not to transfer her shares in her absence or without verification by the Canadian High Commission in Bangladesh.

Sakhi, who left Bangladesh for Canada in 2009, also attached a letter to one of the e-mails in which she mentioned that her husband was very ill, and that was why she couldn't come to Bangladesh.

LOAN IRREGULARITIES
The NRBC Bank board approved a Tk 140-crore loan for AG Agro, a concern of Ahsan Group, on May 8, 2013, four days after Shahidul submitted an application for the loan.

Since the collateral against the loan was only Tk 3.91 crore, the BB advised the NRBC Bank to bring down the loan amount. But the board ignored the advice. Instead, it raised the loan amount to Tk 183 crore in May last year, putting the bank at risk, the report stated.

Shafiqul Islam is a director of AG Agro and Golam Farouque is its adviser. Both are alternate directors of the NRBC Bank.

The NRBC Bank also gave a loan to Aziz Chowdhury and his son Salauddin Chowdhury for building a house. But the money was later transferred to AG Agro's account with the NRBC Bank. Another loan was given to Stylish Garments, owned by the Chowdhury family, and the money was also transferred to the same AG Agro account.

The report noted that instead of generating money from his own business, Shahidul kept paying regular instalments

for his loans from the NRBC Bank by having disbursed more loans from the bank under different names. And he did it all with the support of the managing director and a section of directors of the NRBC Bank board.

Besides, the NRBC Bank's head office approved loans of Tk 19 crore against Begumganj Feed Mills, an associate company of Ahsan Group, without any loan application from the client and proposal from the branch concerned. Later, the client submitted a backdated application to the bank.

At a meeting on May 11 last year, the bank board raised the loan amount to Tk 118 crore without verifying the company's capacity to pay back the loan.

Following disbursement of the loan, Shahidul's brother Shafiqul Ahsan was relieved of the post of Begumganj Feed's managing director in a bid to give a false impression that the company is not associated with Ahsan Group, said the BB.

Huge amounts of money were transacted between the loan accounts of Begumganj Feed and AG Agro, and both firms used the same address in their trade licences.

AG Agro is the ultimate beneficiary of the loans taken against Begumganj Feed, stated the BB report.

According to the report, the loans the NRBC Bank gave to Begumganj Feed and AG Agro totalled Tk 301.35 crore, which was 56 percent of the bank's capital of Tk 540.43 crore as of June last year.

But the BB rules say no bank can sanction loans more than 35 percent of the bank's capital.

Despite several attempts, this correspondent couldn't reach NRBC Bank Managing Director Dewan Mujibur Rahman over his mobile phone. A text message was also sent to his mobile phone, seeking his comments. But there was no response.

Fatema persisted

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ministry asking it to give her a posting in some other cadre service.

Fatema Begum, the first woman to become an additional inspector general of police, now feels that it was by sheer luck that her application was rejected and she stayed on in the police force.

"Firm in their belief that the police force was no place for women, they tried to make us leave from the very first day -- beginning with barring our entry at the orientation for new officers," Fatema told The Daily Star in a recent interview at her office at the Police Headquarters.

After the training was over, the male officers were ordered to pack and go to the Police Academy. But there was no instruction for Fatema. She waited and waited, but no orders came. A couple of days later, she wrote to the Police Headquarters saying she would not give up her job and that she would rather wait further.

"It was only then that they sent me to the academy. So my male counterparts had a seven days' head start at the training... But look at the force now; we have come a long way," said the second highest official in the police, hinting at the rising number of female police members.

Indeed, the police force now has 11,347 women out of its total 1,95,020 members. The number of woman officers stands at 1,416. There are two women each in the posts of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) and Additional DIG, according to Bangladesh Police Women Network.

As the world observes the International Women's Day, it should be remembered that it is not yet time to bask in the glory of what has been achieved. "Rather there is still a long way to go," said Fatema, who retires next month.

Pointing out that over half the population is women, she said there

should have been more female cops. In some situations -- for example the ones involving women and children -- female officers can do better than their male counterparts.

"To my fellow women aspiring to be in any field of work, I say, be ready for challenges and work harder. Mistakes that are usually overlooked in a male officer are often magnified when done by a woman. Make people realise that there is nothing that a person can't do just because she is a woman."

Born on April 14, 1958, in Tongbari upazila of Munshiganj, Fatema completed her SSC from a school in her village. After graduation from Central Women's College in Dhaka, she did her master's from Dhaka University. She sat for the BCS exam in 1984 and joined the police force on January 21, 1986.

"It is particularly difficult for a woman to have a thriving career without the support of her family, colleagues and the society in general," she said.

Her mother died when she was only two and it was her eldest brother who raised her. "He has been my mentor throughout my life."

She got married three years into her service and has always got the support of her husband, who has retired from government service. The couple likes to travel and read in their spare time.

"I grew up playing in the fields, swimming in the river and climbing trees. Unlike many other girls of the time, I have always been an outgoing person. It just never occurred to me that I wouldn't be able to do something just because I'm a woman," she said.

Recalling her days in the academy, she said she effortlessly completed her training with 23 male colleagues.

"What was particularly taxing was being scrutinised and frowned upon

all the time. In fact, at the end of a year at the academy, one of my bosses told me that they had been constantly putting me to test with new challenges and keenly observing how I performed," Fatema said.

In her 31 years of service, she worked in Khagrachhari as assistant police superintendent and then police superintendent in Thakurgaon. She also served in the Rapid Action Battalion, Special Branch of police, and the SB Training School.

In 1997, she got a scholarship from the AusAid to take a degree in environmental studies at the University of Adelaide, Australia. In 2000, she received the Peace Medal for her outstanding performance in the UN Peacekeeping Mission. She served the mission for a year in Sierra Leone.

Back in her early days in the police, things began to change after the first few years. "My male colleagues started to respect me," she said.

People were so amused to see a woman police officer that she had to give a motivational speech to a crowd of several hundred while inspecting a homicide for the first time as the SP of Thakurgaon in 1999.

"People would often stand in front of the vehicle and ask me to say something," she said, smiling.

WOMEN IN OTHER FORCES
The air force is the first among the armed forces to recruit women officers in 2000. The force now has 162 officers. Recruitment of commissioned women officers in the army and the navy began in 2001, sources said.

Now there are about 700 women officers in the army. Recruitment of female soldiers began in 2015 and now there are 1,800, according to the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR).

The navy now has 92 officers, two of whom have become commanders. It began taking female sailors last year, sources in the navy said.

SHIFTING TO OWN CAMPUS

No govt move against errant pvt univs yet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Apart from issuing warnings, the government virtually did not take any steps against the private universities that failed to move to their permanent campuses over the last few years.

After extending deadlines for the universities four times, the government formed a committee yesterday to identify the reasons behind the universities not moving into their own permanent campuses.

The committee was formed at a joint meeting between the education ministry and the University Grants Commission (UGC) at the latter's office in the capital's Agargaon.

Led by UGC member Prof Md Akhtar Hossain, the four-member committee would submit a report with recommendations by June 30.

"We will take steps on the basis of the report," said Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid after the meeting.

The committee, however, would find other problems in the private universities and come up with reports periodically, he said.

The Private University Act-2010 makes it compulsory for a private university to have a permanent campus within seven years of launch.

Currently, there are 84 functional private universities in the country and 51 of them are over seven years old.

Soon after the passage of the act in 2010, the education ministry insisted that the private universities move to their permanent campuses. It issued four deadlines to the universities so far and the last one expired on January 31.

The minister had warned that if the universities failed to comply, their temporary approvals would be cancelled. He had also directed the universities not to enrol new students until they moved into their permanent campuses.

But, only 12 of the 51 universities moved into their permanent campuses until last month while the rest did not move to their campuses completely, according to UGC sources.

Asked about the non-compliance of the 39 universities, Nahid said the government did not want to be hostile towards private universities as the sector had huge potentials.

"Our aim is not to shut them down. We want to develop this sector as our children are studying at these institutions. We want the private universities to run following rules," he said.

The minister said when the government assumed power in 2009, there were 56 private universities and most of them had a tendency to ignore the rules and regulations.

"We had to put pressure on them over the years and at the same time, we tried to persuade them into complying with rules and conditions," he added.

The 39 universities were either operating their academic activities partially at their new campuses or were building their campuses, he said.

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Tk 1.53cr snatched

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away from Aboni Textiles Ltd, six masked muggers on three motorcycles attacked the car. One of them opened fire while others vandalised the vehicle by cricket bats, he said, quoting the officials in the car.

At one stage, the criminals took the key of the car from its driver and opened its boot, where Tk 2 crore was kept in four bags, he said, adding that they took away three bags containing Tk 1.53 crore and fled.

All the officials, who were in the car, were hurt when the criminals were vandalising the car. They took first aid.

On information, high officials of law enforcement agencies visited the spot.

SM Kamruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Savar Model Police Station, said they were trying to arrest the muggers and recover the money.

Dohar singer

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Gurap area around 10:00am. Five other members of the band were also injured in the accident.

Kalika was rushed to Burdawan Medical College and Hospital where doctors declared him dead, the correspondent reports.

He is survived by his wife and daughter.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has expressed her shock.

Alongside his music career, Kalikaprasad also acted in the award winning Prasenjit starrer Jaatishwar (2014), Moner Manush (2010) and Bhuvan Majhi (2017).

He founded the band Dohar in 1999 and excelled in Bangla folk songs. Dohar's albums were successful and the band gained a huge following. Their music was loved for its unique style and also the band's extensive research into folk traditions in bringing together their music.

The singer with his band collected more than 6,000 folk songs from different parts of India and Bangladesh.