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Saviour of expecting mothers

Selfless Manikganj woman provides midwife care to hundreds for over 50 years

ZAHANGIR SHAH and ENAMUL HAQ with ANDREW EAGLE

Human society can be cruel and unforgiving: a lesson for any adult. At the time of birth however, when newborn takes first breath in this complex, contradictory world, one can hope for gentler circumstance. In Manikganj, for many hundreds of people though they will hardly recall it, the world indeed arrived in such a way, with a first greeting of selfless kindness from a woman called Sonajan. The 68-year-old from Choubaria village in Ghior upazila's Baliakhora union has been providing prenatal and postnatal care, free-of-charge, for fifty years.

Sonajan, who never had the opportunity to pursue formal education, was married to farmer Akel Uddin when she was just fifteen. By age seventeen she had given birth to her first son Siddique, at a time when her mother-in-law was also expecting. When her mother-in-law went into labour, there was no midwife to attend. Only Sonajan could assist.

The young mother hardly knew how to cut an umbilical cord safely. Fortunately a midwife finally arrived and Sonajan learnt how it was done. "For me, that was the most challenging birth I have ever assisted with," she says,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



A newborn is attended by Sonajan with the mother seated by her side. The 68-year-old woman from Choubaria village in Manikganj has been providing prenatal and postnatal care to women of her village and adjoining areas for free over the last 50 years.

PHOTO: STAR

Attacks on religious minorities rose in 2016

Reports US-based rights watchdog

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The frequency of violent and deadly attacks against religious minorities, secular bloggers, intellectuals, and foreigners by domestic and transnational extremist groups increased in Bangladesh in 2016, says a report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

The USCIRF's 2017 Annual Report, released on April 25, has documented religious freedom violations in 37 countries, made country-specific recommendations and assessed the US government's implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act.

The report in its Bangladesh chapter said, "Although the government, led by the ruling Awami League, has taken steps to investigate, arrest, and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

11 bad cops to face music

Probe found them involved in snatching money from club

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police probe has found 11 detectives involved in snatching money and valuables from a Kafrul club in the capital on April 18 and recommended punitive actions against them.

The three-member probe body, headed by an additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, submitted the report to DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia on Wednesday night.

"The probe body recommended departmental action against some of the policemen and removal of the others from the Detective Branch of police and Dhaka Metropolitan Police after it found them guilty," said a member of the probe body yesterday, wishing anonymity.

He said the panel made the recommendation as the guilty policemen "tainted the image of the force".

The official said departmental actions was recommended against those officials who had ordered the DB team to raid

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

'Major conflict with N Korea possible'

Says Trump, praises Xi's effort to stem escalating crisis in Korean peninsula

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump said a "major, major conflict" with North Korea was possible over its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, while China said the situation on the Korean peninsula could escalate or slip out of control.

Trump, speaking to Reuters on Thursday, said he wanted to resolve the crisis peacefully, possibly through the use of new economic sanctions, although a military option was not off the table.

"There is a chance that we could end up having a major, major conflict with North Korea," Trump said in an interview at the Oval Office.

"We'd love to solve things diplomatically but it's very difficult," he said, describing North Korea as his biggest global challenge.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said there was a danger that the situation on the Korean peninsula could escalate or slip out of control, his ministry said.

Wang made the comments in a meeting at the United Nations with a Russian diplomat on Thursday, the ministry said in a statement.

China, the only major ally of North Korea, has been increasingly uncomfortable in recent months about its neighbour's pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles in violation on UN resolutions.

The United States has called on China to do more to rein in Pyongyang and Trump lavished praise on Chinese President Xi Jinping for his efforts, calling him "a good man".

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



18 BCL men of DU unit suspended

DU CORRESPONDENT

Chhatra League has expelled an activist and suspended 18 others from the organisation over factional clashes and acts of vandalism in two Dhaka University dormitories this month.

All the 19 are DU students.

The pro-Awami League student front announced the decision in a press release issued on Wednesday.

Talking to The Daily Star, BCL General Secretary SM Jakir Hossain yesterday said they took organisational steps against the 19 for their involvement in anti-organisational activities. The action was taken in line with recommendations from the BCL's DU unit.

On April 20, two Chhatra League factions, led by Salimullah Muslim

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Teddy bears on patrol



REUTERS, Tallinn

Estonia's police will soon carry teddy bears in their patrol cars to comfort children caught up accidents or distressing situations, the organiser of the charity Traumamommi (Trauma Teddy) told Reuters.

The plan will see cuddly toys added to the equipment in the Baltic state's 100 police patrol cars in time for Children's Day, which is celebrated in Estonia on June 1.

Additional bears will be kept at police stations. "The teddy bears will hopefully help these lift the spirits of these kids and be a support if the children need it," 25 year-old Kaur Vahtrik, the organiser of the charity, said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Bhutan to stay out of regional connectivity

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Bhutan has decided to stay out "for the time being" of a sub-regional road connectivity that would link the country with Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

Bhutanese foreign ministry in a statement said it decided to give its consent to the Bangladesh, India and Nepal motor vehicle agreement for movement of passengers and cargo, signed in Thimphu of Bhutan in June 2015, for early implementation of the pact "without any obligation to Bhutan".

The statement issued on Thursday said "recognising the importance of connectivity for expansion of economic cooperation, the transport ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



A wholesale market of jackfruit at Banarupa Samataghat in Rangamati. This floating market sits twice a week -- on Saturday and Wednesday. Growers from remote hilly areas of different upazilas come here to showcase their produce. They sell a jackfruit for Tk 150 to 250.

PHOTO: ANVIL CHAKMA

2 members of trafficking gang held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Police arrested two alleged members of a gang of human traffickers in Narayanganj on Thursday.

Hazrat Ali, 38, of Jamalpur's Melandah and Saiful Islam, 22, of Narayanganj's Fatullah were arrested after a father of a trafficking victim filed a case against them and two others with Fatullah Police Station.

The other accused persons, Harun of Jamalpur and Dulal Hossain of Fatullah, are in Libya.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PRAYER TIMING APRIL 29
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-20 12-45 4-45 6-29 8-00
JAMAAT 4-55 1-15 5-00 6-34 8-30
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Rare fatwa

Indonesia's female Islamic clerics stand against child marriage

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Female clerics on Thursday issued an unprecedented fatwa against child marriage in Indonesia in a bid to stop young girls becoming brides in the world's most populous Muslim country.

The fatwa - which is influential among Muslims but not legally binding - came at the end of an extraordinary three-day conference of female Islamic clerics: a rare example of women assuming a lead role in religious affairs in this mostly-Muslim country.

"Maternal mortality is very high in Indonesia. We - as female clerics - can play a role on the issue of child marriage," conference organiser Ninik Rahayu told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Female clerics know the issues and obstacles women face, we can take action and not just wait for the government to protect these children," she said by phone from Cirebon in the West Java province, where the congress was held.

Indonesia has one of the worst records for under-age marriage - its high number of child brides puts it among the top 10 countries worldwide - and it is common for girls to marry before they turn 18.

Thursday's fatwa, or religious edict, called underage marriage "harmful" and said its prevention was mandatory.

FALLOUT OF EARLY WEDLOCK
One in six Indonesian girls marry before they turn 18, equal to 340,000 girls a year, according to the United Nations children's agency Unicef. About 50,000 wed before they turn 15.

A government report last year showed almost a quarter of married women aged 20-24 had entered wedlock when they were under 18.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5