



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

A cockroach floats amid sweets at a manufacturing factory of the sweets brand Rosh in Demra, Dhaka. A Rab-10 mobile court yesterday fined the factory Tk 12 lakh for producing sweets and vermicelli in unhygienic conditions. Roaches and mosquitoes were found in the sweets, food was being made with unpurified water and some packaging had wrong manufacturing dates, said Sarwoer Alam, *inset*, who conducted the drive. The factory was fined two years ago, but the condition has not changed, he said.

## Giving forsaken girls a shot at better future

ActionAid raises funds for 'Happy Home' project

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Sonia Akhter has not seen her mother for more than eight years, nor has she spoken to her ever since she was abandoned at an orphanage. After her father died when she was a child, her slum-dweller mother got married to someone who did not want Sonia to live with them.

And then one day, the orphanage authorities told her they could not accommodate her due to lack of funding.

"When I was told that I would not be able to stay in the home, I felt abandoned all over again. There was no one to take my responsibility," said Sonia.

In 2013, a member of ActionAid Bangladesh found Sonia, and took

her to "Happy Home". She lives and studies there, currently in ninth grade of vocational studies.

Sonia is one of 150 homeless, underprivileged girls -- aged between 6 and 18 -- staying at Happy Home, where they get free education, shelter, food, clothes, medical treatment and professional training to become self-dependent.

"I have found a new family here," Sonia said at a programme on Tuesday.

Like her, a number of girls from the Happy Home shared their stories at the programme organised by ActionAid Bangladesh at a city hotel.

Handcrafted products by the girls of the Home, signed bats of cricketers Tamim Iqbal and Nasir Hossain,

and different antique pieces were on auction at the programme to raise fund for the girls.

Media personality Abdun Noor Tushar conducted the auction. Photographer Prito Reza, singer Elita Karim, actor Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed, model and TV host Maria Nur and journalist Anik Khan were present at the programme as goodwill ambassadors of Happy Home.

Happy Home began its journey in 2006 as a three-year project, but ActionAid continued it after the term. "We continued the project because we thought if the project stops, so will the dreams of the girls. Since no one would take their responsibility, they could end up worse off," said Country Director of ActionAid, Farah Kabir at the

programme.

Happy Home started in five areas of Dhaka -- each accommodating 30 girls -- in Mohammadpur, Mugdapara, Sutrapur, Karwan Bazar and Lalbag. In 2017, the five homes shifted under one building in Mohammadpur.

ActionAid Bangladesh so far has sheltered 1,035 girls, and has provided them with mainstream education, said the organisers.

"The biggest problem of street children, who are girls, is safety," said Farah Kabir, while calling on the well-offs of society to financially support them.

"Lack of sanitation facilities and healthcare can affect their lives. Street children in their later life often engage in risky occupations," she said.

### ANTI-NARCOTICS DRIVE

## US for capturing 'kingpins'

UNB, Dhaka

Expressing concern over the growing number of people dying in crackdown on drug dealers, the United States yesterday emphasised catching "kingpins" and finding the sources of illegal drugs.

It also stressed bringing those responsible to justice, respecting human rights.

"I always ask [that] human rights are

respected and people everywhere can have the confidence that right individual has been caught, right individual is punished and that no one is taking the law in their own hands," said US Ambassador in Dhaka Marcia Bernicat yesterday.

The US diplomat said it is really important to find out the sources and capturing and convicting not only the dealers but also the kingpins.

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