

Tribute to Rama Chowdhury

ELITA KARIM

Many know about the heartbreaking story of Birangana Rama Chowdhury's life. In May 1971, she was brutally tortured and violated by the Pak bahini; she lost three of her four children over the next few decades and also wrote her stories in many books, of which only 18 have been published.

But what we never realised about the Ekattorer Janani, is the fact that she never stopped dreaming – of sharing and spreading her stories – true stories of pain, struggle and achievement. “She never approached mainstream publishers to publish her books,” says Alauddin Khokan, her personal assistant and close aide, who is more than a family member. “She would publish them herself and I would also help her publish the books.” Her books spoke of the liberation war, the sufferings of the common people in the war zone, the woes of a mother and so much more. “She would also move from door to door, person to person to sell her books,” he adds. “Right till the very end, she was very strict about not displaying her books at bookstores

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Birangana Rama Chowdhury lies draped in the national flag as state honour is being given to her on the premises of Chittagong Central Shaheed Minar yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Birthday turns mourning day

Body of SI Uttam killed in Sunday's road crash taken to his Tangail home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kamona Rani, a resident of Kalihati of Tangail, was supposed to come to Dhaka yesterday to celebrate her son Uttam Kumar Sarkar's 33rd birthday.

Instead, she waited to receive his body at her home.

“Every year we celebrate his birthday together and my mother was supposed to go to Dhaka this time as well,” said Uttam's brother Dipankar Kumar Sarkar.

However, those plans changed as the news of Uttam's sudden demise.

Uttam, a sub-inspector of Rupnagar Police Station, was killed in an unusual road accident in the capital's Mirpur on Sunday.

He left behind his two-and-a-half-month-old baby, wife, mother and a brother.

The accident occurred when he was bringing an Eagle Paribahan bus to the police station from Mirpur Beribadh area.

The Barisal-bound bus was seized four days ago after its brake failed and it hit the car of a Jahangirnagar

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Labour safety ignored at Rampal plant

Allege injured workers

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

The death of 15-year-old Sajib, a worker at the Rampal Power Plant site, brought attention to an issue that went previously unnoticed -- the lack of safety gears and the unsafe conditions that the plant workers have to face.

Sajib, on Friday, was electrocuted during work, as he was not wearing any protective gears. Three others were injured when they tried to save him.

They were rescued and taken to hospital by their co-workers. No authorities concerned of the plant, however, came to their aid.

Workers at the Rampal Power Plant work without any safety gears, said Milton, one of the injured workers who was undergoing treatment at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH).

Another injured, Jafar Ali, 22, was being treated at a local clinic.

Milton, laying injured in Ward-7 of the Medicine Department with burn injuries to his hands and chest, described how the accident occurred.

He told The Daily Star that around 20 workers were assigned to cut iron plates. All of them, however, were not equipped with safety gears for the hazardous job.

“While working, Sajib suddenly got electrocuted. I was working next

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Govt eases trade union rules

FROM PAGE 1

Organisation to ensure labour-friendly atmosphere in every factory.”

Dhaka went to the International Labour Conference in Geneva, held from May 28 to June 8, with the draft of the amended labour law to satisfy the international community. The proposed law was accepted by the conference, according to labour ministry officials.

International bodies, including the ILO and European Union, and also the United States, have been demanding improved labour rights in Bangladesh for the last five years. Among their demands, workers' right to trade unionism was the foremost.

They observed that the last amended labour law adopted in July 2013 after the Rana Plaza building collapse, made it difficult to collect consent of 30 percent workers of a factory to form a trade union. Since then, they have been demanding the threshold be lowered.

The global community even threatened to cut the trade privileges Bangladesh enjoys, particularly in the European market, if the government fails to amend the labour law giving more rights to the workers.

Cabinet Secretary Shafiul Alam said the law proposed formation of a tripartite consultation committee (TCC) comprising workers, owners and government representatives to resolve any industrial dispute.

At the same time, he said, the draft incorporated tougher provisions to strictly prohibit misconduct on the part of owners and workers, reports

BSS.

“A worker or owner would face one-year imprisonment or penalty of Taka 10,000 or both for any misconduct including violation of the law,” he added.

The draft proposed punitive actions for workers for acts like physical assault, issuing threat or mounting undue pressure to compel owners to sign any agreement, disrupting power, gas or water supplies, and unlawful

“Under the proposed law, no child will be allowed to work in factories. If any-

shutdowns.

It said support of 51 percent workers would be required to enforce any work abstention or lock-out while it proposed reducing the jail term of a worker for taking part in any illegal lock-out to six months from one year.

The labour law was originally framed in 2006 to protect worker rights and increase productivity, which was radically amended in 2013.

The new draft proposed increased

allowances and benefits and lessening punitive measures against the labourers. It also suggested that working hour of labourers in general should not be more than 10 hours a day excluding dining and rest time.

“However, the law kept provisions so the government can change the working time for specialised industries,” Shafiul Alam said.

According to the amended law, expectant mothers would be entitled to eight-week maternity leave and other benefits within three days of submission of necessary documents.

“An owner may face penalty of Taka 25,000 on charge of depriving an expectant mother of maternity leave,” he said, referring to the draft.

The law suggested that the labourers would get festival allowances as per the rules, and workers of the export-oriented and foreign exchange earning industries would enjoy the facilities from central group insurance policy.

At the same time, Shafiul said, the law prohibited engagement of children and physically challenged persons in any risky job.

Under the existing law, a child can do light work on condition that it would not be harmful to his health and his education won't be hampered. The draft seeks total ban on child labour in factories.

“Under the proposed law, no child will be allowed to work in factories. If anybody employs child workers, he or she will have to pay a fine of Tk 5,000,” said the cabinet secretary, reports UNB.

Every industrial unit having more

than 25 workers must have arrangement of a dining and rest room with facilities of drinking water.

Workers, if they wish, can enjoy weekly holiday merging with festival holidays.

On any festival holiday, a worker can be asked to work in exchange of one-day alternative holiday and compensation allowances equivalent to wages of two days.

According to the draft law, the government would prepare a standard operating procedure (SOP) for registration of the labour organisations.

A labour organisation would apply for registration in specific form and the director general of the Labour Directorate would resolve the application within 55 days.

A worker of an industry can be a member of only one trade union, the proposed law said but suggested one month imprisonment for dual membership.

The draft also proposed elevated status of the government's inspection unit to be headed by a director general.

“Thus, the post of the labour inspector would be upgraded to inspector general, deputy director to additional inspector general, joint inspector to joint inspector general and assistant inspector to assistant inspector general,” the secretary said.

The position of the director of the Department of Labour would be elevated to the post of director general while other posts would be upgraded accordingly, the cabinet secretary said.

6 held with 14kg gold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion on Sunday arrested six alleged members of a gold smuggling gang with 120 gold bars, weighing around 14kg, on two buses on Dhaka-Sylhet Highway in Narsingdi.

The Rab suspects the gold was smuggled into the country, dodging law enforcers and airport security forces.

Maj Rahat Harun Khan, acting commanding officer of Rab-3, said the arrestees received the gold in Sylhet and were supposed to deliver it in the capital in order to smuggle it to a neighbouring country.

At a press conference at Rab Media Centre, Maj Rahat said they had information that smugglers were carrying gold bars on two buses and likewise set up a checkpoint in Panchdona area of Narsingdi.

Three of the alleged smugglers were arrested on a bus of Ena Paribahan and the other three on another bus of Greenline Paribahan in between 4:30pm and 5:00pm, he added.

The six are Jamal Hossain, 22, Tanvir Ahmed, 25, Raju Hossain, 23, Abul Hasan, 35, Raju Ahmed, 30, and Mohammad Alauddin, 32.

They were carrying 20 bars each in their specially designed pockets. They boarded separate buses to dodge the eye of the law enforcers, Rab officials said.

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Debt trap?

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For those who take part in the Chinese Belt and Road, the hay-day lasted as long as the money poured in. When the time came to repay, the trouble began. Many countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka found their coffers dry.

Much of the Chinese infrastructure loan glut is now being packaged as part of China's ambitious trillion-dollar “Road and Belt” initiative that seeks to connect countries from Asia to Europe on trade with China at its centre.

Peculiarly to the term, the Road means a 6000km sea route connecting China to South East Asia, Oceania and North Africa and the Belt means railway and road infrastructure to connect China with Central and West Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Sri Lanka found its more than \$1 billion Hambantota port built with Chinese loans lying idle and growing

grass as ships cross the Indian Ocean without stopping there.

Unable to repay the loans it had given the port to a Chinese company on a 99-year lease as part of debt relief.

Near the port, the Mattala Rajapaksa international Airport, again with Chinese loans, is dubbed as the world's emptiest airport with barely any flights operating to or from it.

Sri Lanka is now struggling with another mega \$1.4 billion Colombo Port City project to reclaim some 2 sq km of land, on which will sit luxury flats, office buildings, and hotels, not to mention a theme park, marina, and golf course.

After the 2015 elections, Sri Lanka is now reassessing the Chinese projects which have now become part of national political game.

Pakistan also faces financial uncertainty after it has borrowed heavily

from China to revamp its ports, roads and railways as part of its \$62 billion plan, known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is also part of the Belt and Road initiative.

The Chinese plan has pushed Pakistan's deficits to an unsustainable level. Imports linked to the CPEC have swelled its current account deficit by 50 per cent. Pakistan's central bank has devalued the currency twice and yet saw over the past fiscal year, a third of the reserves evaporating.

Pakistan's external debt now stands at \$91.8 billion -- up 50 per cent in last five years. Unable to repay the loans Pakistan has got about two-thirds of the early loans from China extended at as high rates as seven per cent.

Now left barely with two months' import bills in reserves, Pakistan is seeking IMF bailout. The US, the largest contributor to the IMF, is not

very eager for the bailout as it has indicated that it does not want IMF money to be going to China as loan repayment.

Malaysia has just cancelled two Belt and Road projects funded by China -- a rail link to South China sea and a gas pipeline -- as the newly elected prime minister Mahathir Mohammad fears these projects are too costly for his debt-ridden country.

Djibouti in Africa looks about to give up control of a key port to a Beijing-linked company.

Beijing's loans to Africa have shot up steeply in the last five years as the China-Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies indicate.

Angola, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo were the top beneficiaries of these

loans.

Recent data from the Centre for Global Development (CGD), an international think tank, suggests eight Belt and Road initiative participants -- Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, the Maldives, Mongolia, Montenegro, Pakistan and Tajikistan -- are all in deep debt with China for their infrastructure projects. Their debt-to-GDP ratios are going higher and higher.

All this sounds an alarm bell for the rest. While infrastructure is essential for development and while the Belt and Road initiative is a welcome scheme for global trade, countries must take into account their own financial capability and have their own debt repayment assessment. Cheap and easy money does not remain so when corruption creeps into the projects.

Myanmar's army offers rare apology

FROM PAGE 1

abuses, including a report on army activity in an ethnic minority guerrilla zone and the flying of a drone in the capital, Naypyitaw.

Yesterday, a court jailed for seven years two reporters from Reuters on a charge of violating a secrets law.

The military's official newspaper, the Myawady Daily, issued a statement yesterday from its publishing arm, which produced the book 'Myanmar Politics and Tatmadaw: Part I', apologising for two of the photographs.

“It was found that two photos were incorrectly published,” the publishing arm said in a statement carried by the newspaper, referring to the photograph from Tanzania and another showing victims of Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence.

“We sincerely apologise to the readers and the owners of the photographs for the mistake,” it said.

It did not mention the photograph incorrectly captioned as showing Rohingya entering Myanmar when the picture was of them leaving.

Myanmar government spokesman Zaw Htay and military spokesman Major General Tun Tun Nyi could not be reached for comment.

The army's department of public relations and psychological warfare published the book in English and Burmese in July.

‘HEINOUS’

Of the 80 images in the book, most were recent pictures of army chief Min Aung Hlaing meeting foreign dignitaries or other officials visiting Rakhine.

Of eight photos presented as histor-

ical images, Reuters found the provenance of three to be faked and was unable to determine the provenance of the five others.

One faded black-and-white image shows a crowd of men who appear to be on a long march with their backs bent over. “Bengalis intruded into the country after the British Colonialism occupied the lower part of Myanmar,” the caption reads.

The photo is apparently intended to depict Rohingya arriving in Myanmar during the colonial era, which ended in 1948. Reuters determined the picture is in fact a distorted version of a colour image taken in 1996 of refugees who had fled the genocide in Rwanda.

Another picture, also printed in black-and-white, shows men aboard a rickety boat. “Bengalis entered

Myanmar via the watercourse,” the caption reads.

Actually, the original photo depicts Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants leaving Myanmar in 2015, when tens of thousands fled for Thailand and Malaysia. The original has been rotated and blurred so the photo looks granular. It was sourced from Myanmar's own Ministry of Information.

The Myawady's publishing arm, in its statement, made no mention of an alterations of images.

The prime minister of neighbouring Bangladesh, where about 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled from a Myanmar military crackdown launched after Rohingya insurgent attacks in August last year, denounced the use of the photographs when she

was asked in a news conference about them.

“What Myanmar has done is simply heinous. They have lowered their reputation,” Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told a news conference in Dhaka on Sunday.

“They are diminishing their position in the international arena.”

The 117-page book gives the army's account of the crackdown last year which led to reports of mass killings, rape, and arson.

Much of the content is sourced to the military's “True News” information unit, which since the start of the crisis has distributed news giving the army's position, mostly via Facebook.

The book is on sale at bookstores across the commercial capital of Yangon.

Hosts eye

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come up with a strong performance that their predecessors demonstrated when the tournament was played at this very ground in 2003.

There are soaring expectations of turnaround after a brilliant showing at the Asian Games, which was greatly doused when a more experienced Bangladesh side suffered a 1-0 defeat against Sri Lanka in a FIFA friendly last week, and that too in front of a full house in Nilphamari.

However, a win against Bhutan in Bangladesh's opening game, which kicks off at 7:00pm, could be termed as a catalyst to that wind of change. Although holders India will be the team to beat in what is dubbed as South Asia's World Cup, the Championship is more than about just winning for Bangladesh. A credible performance will not only lift the profile of Bangladesh football, it will more importantly serve as a serious attempt to bring back its soul -- the fans -- to the erstwhile theatre of Bangladesh's football dreams.

Vigilance

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The teams of transport owners and workers resumed their drives on Sunday after around a two-week Eid break.

On August 8, following the recent student protest demanding safe roads, DRTOA decided to abolish the system of daily contracts with drivers and helpers, holding it responsible for road accidents.

They also decided to check documents of drivers and vehicles at the terminals to stop driving without valid licences and prevent unfit vehicles from operating.

The next day, they formed four vigilance teams comprising of representatives of transport owners and workers to conduct the drives.