



Children on a pickup van being used for electioneering in Dhaka's Banani area yesterday. Some of the boys even have campaign stickers pasted on their foreheads and shirts. Though prohibited, using children in election campaign has become all too common ahead of the polls. These children, from low-income families, are often paid Tk 200-500 per day to participate in political events, shout slogans, put up posters and distribute leaflets. What's more disconcerting is that this practice is turning fatal. At least 28 children were killed and over 100 injured in political violence over the last six years, according to Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Social challenges hold back women's economic participation

BISHAKHA DEVNATH and SHADMA MALIK

Social challenges have held back women's economic participation over the last decade, despite headway made in education, training, entrepreneurship, and jobs overseas.

While delivering the budget speech in parliament for fiscal year 2018-19, Finance Minister AMA Muhith acknowledged that women's economic participation was low compared to the growing literacy rate.

The number of women - aged 15 and above - who could read and write increased to 65.3 percent in 2016-17 fiscal from 54.3 percent in 2009.

The female labour force participation rate has hovered around 36 percent since 2010, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics surveys.

This means strategies adopted by the government in the last decade to facilitate women's employment did not make any significant change.

Success of government programmes like easy loans for aspiring women entrepreneurs, employment opportunity in Saudi Arabia, and training on ICT is visible but is not enough to offset the social challenges a woman has to deal with.

Not much attention had been given to social issues that pose challenges for women trying to enter the labour market,

according to Sayema Haque Bidisha, an economics professor at Dhaka University.

In a patriarchal setting, the responsibility of caring for children and the elderly mostly falls on female members of a family. Social services like child care or elderly care are yet to get an institutional shape in Bangladesh. Two other factors are safe commute to work and positive work environment, Bidisha said.

Had these issues been addressed, women would have been able to make significant contribution to the economy.

Muhith, during the budget speech for fiscal year 2016-17, projected that a 10 percent increase in female labour force participation over the next five years would bring one additional percentage point of GDP growth each year.

### THE PROGRAMMES

Easy, collateral-free loans from Bangladesh Bank's refinancing scheme seem to have enabled a significant number of rural and urban women entrepreneurs.

According to data from Brac Bank, the number of women borrowers increased seven times since 2013. As many as 1,952 entrepreneurs took out loans of Tk 215.6 crore last year to expand their small and medium businesses.

The recovery rate of such loans is 98 percent.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## Voters in slums miss out on pre-polls 'gifts'

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

With electioneering for the parliamentary polls winding down to a close, residents of the capital's slums are feeling left out, apparently because of a rather one-sided campaigning.

No election camps, posters, leaflets or any activities of the main opposition alliance, Jatiya Oikyafront, could be seen during visits in the last few days to four large slums in Dhaka city -- Korail, Banani-Mohakhali, Bhasantek and Karwan Bazar-Tejgaon railway areas.

The situation has frustrated voters of the slums, who said they are not getting enough attention from candidates, like they did before in previous general elections.

Candidates of main political parties before previous polls had tried to sway voters, often by providing clothes and blankets. Slum dwellers said since this time there is no presence from BNP on the ground, they are not being given due importance.

However, the slums are seeing full-swing campaigning of Awami League candidates, with election camps, posters and leaflets aplenty. Small-scale electioneering by some

other political parties -- like Islami Andolon Bangladesh -- were also seen there.

Abdul Ali, 60, a dweller of Korail slum, said there has been a common trend of distributing clothes, saris and blankets to slum dwellers before general elections. But this year, the picture is completely different due to a lack of campaigning by opposition parties, especially BNP.

"None of the parties contesting the polls have distributed any clothes or blankets, but we are hoping that they would distribute it before the election, considering our sufferings in winter," said Ali.

Another slum dweller said they usually get benefits from both large political parties -- BNP and AL -- during elections, but now they are being deprived due to the one-sided campaign.

Many voters also do not know who are contesting in the national polls with the symbol of "sheaf of paddy" -- the symbol of BNP and other Jatiya Oikyafront candidates in their constituencies.

Dhaka-17 constituency is formed with Gulshan, Banani, Cantonment and Bhashantek areas, while Dhaka-12 comprises Tejgaon and Tejgaon Industrial area, and

parts of Ramna, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and Hatirjheel area.

A good number of voters of the constituencies live in the slums. According to sources, there are around 26,600 votes in Korail slum, majority of who are women, while the Bhashantek slum houses some 9,800 voters.

Moulona Abdus Sobahan, president of Korail Slum Development Committee unit-1 and also a local Awami League leader, said, "I didn't see any activities of 'sheaf of paddy', though they have some supporters in the slum."

He said Awami League leaders distribute clothes and blankets to the poor in winter every year. This year they will distribute it when winter sets in properly, he added.

Nagor Miah, chairman of Bhashantek slum and also vice president of Awami League in Bhashantek thana, said though there are supporters and activists of BNP in the slum, they are not conducting any campaign.

Some residents of Bhashantek slum, however, claimed that activists seeking vote for "sheaf of paddy" attempted to distribute leaflets in their slum recently, but retreated in the face of resistance from opponent supporters.

### LOANS GIVEN TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (number)



### LOANS GIVEN TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (volume, in millions of Taka)



## BFUJ, DUJ condemn attack on journalists

UNB, Dhaka

Two organisations of journalists yesterday condemned the attack on journalists in Nawabganj on Monday.

At least ten journalists were injured and 18 cars were vandalised during the assault, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) said in a joint statement.

Unidentified assailants attacked journalists at Shamim Guest House in Kolakop on Monday night. The newsmen had gone there to cover electioneering.

BFUJ and DUJ demanded exemplary punishment for the attackers.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

## 3 burned in fire at cotton warehouses

UNB, N'ganj

Three people sustained burn injuries as a fire broke out in two cotton warehouses at Dhamgar yesterday.

The injured -- Anowar Hossain Anu, Kayum and Rashed -- were admitted to Al Baraka Hospital in Madanpur.

The warehouses caught fire in the early hours when a part of an electric pole collapsed.

Two fire fighting units from Bandar doused the flames after two hours of frantic efforts around 8:00am, while the power supply of the whole area remained suspended for eight hours.



Rapid Action Battalion men display a huge stash of money, including Tk 8 crore in cash and Tk 10 crore in cheques, to journalists at the United Corporation office in Motijheel yesterday. Rab said the money was being used to influence the upcoming national election and instigate violence. Three people were also arrested.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



PHOTO: PID

CHRISTMAS PROGRAMME AT BANGABHABAN

## President urges all to exercise voting rights

BSS, Dhaka

President Abdul Hamid yesterday called upon citizens irrespective of religion, caste and creed to continue the country's ongoing development trend by exercising their franchise in the December 30 Jatiya Sangsad election.

"Only four days are left of the 11th parliamentary election... I hope that you all irrespective of religion and caste will exercise your voting rights on the day," the president said while exchanging greetings with the Christian community on the occasion of Christmas Day at Bangabhaban in Dhaka.

President Hamid greeted Christians on the holy occasion, wishing a happy, prosperous and cheerful life in the days to come.

Noting that the country has a long illustrious history of communal harmony, he said, "This communal harmony has an immense contribution to our development and progress."

Terming Jesus Christ an ambassador and beacon of emancipation, the president said Jesus Christ had preached the sermons of peace in the world as his philosophy was to establish a peaceful society full of love, services, forgiveness, compassion and justice.

"I think the teachings and ideals of Jesus Christ are very rational to establish peace, harmony and unity nation-wide of this problematic world," he added.

President Hamid urged all to work together for building a happy, prosperous and non-communal Bangladesh dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The president and his spouse Rashida Khanam hosted the reception at the president's official residence where a Christmas tree was set up with candles.

Cardinal Patrick D'Roario, dean of diplomatic corp Archbishop George Kocheri, ambassadors, representatives from different foreign missions, distinguished persons of the Christian community, religious leaders and professionals joined the reception.

A group of singers performed Christmas carols at the reception.

Later, President Hamid cut a Christmas cake with members of the Christian community and joined a photo session.

### DCAB gets new committee

CITY DESK



Raheed Ejaz

Nurul Islam Hasib

Raheed Ejaz of the daily Prothom Alo have been elected president and Nurul Islam Hasib of bdnews24.com general secretary of the Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) for 2019.

Other members of the 11-member executive committee are Vice President AKM Moinuddin (UNB), Joint Secretary Israt Jahan Urmi (DBC News), Treasurer Mahadi Hasan Talukder (Kaler Kantha) and Office Secretary Abu Hena Emrul Kayesh (Bangla Vision), says a press release.

Besides, Angur Nahar Monty (News24), Mahfuzur Rahman Mishu (Jamuna TV), Sanaul Haq (ATN Bangla), Touhidur Rahman (banglanews24.com) and Md. Khurram Zaman (Barta24) were elected executive committee members.

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