

Students of Golap Kha Shishu Shadan take part in physical exercise on the premises of the foster home. Inset, Bilkis Banu, the co-founder of the institution.

PHOTO: STAR

## Bilkis Banu's foster home now houses 75 orphans

ABDUL WAHED, Kurigram

Orphan Pritilata Khatun is in her teens now and last year she passed SSC exams.

A resident of Golap Kha Shishu Shadan in Nageshwari upazila town of Kurigram, her mentally challenged mother disappeared after handing her over to the Sadan's cofounder Bilkis Banu.

Thanks to the initiative of Bilkis, two other residents of the foster home passed SSC (Secondary School Certificate) last year and got admission at different colleges.

Bilkis, now 45, is known as "maa" (mother) to the children of the foster home that she built on one acre of land near Nageshwari Degree College.

Her husband Rabiul Islam retired from the college as a professor of economics. He is a director of the Sadan.

The Sadan currently has 75 residents, including 27 girls, and seven staff members.

Aside from the foster home, Bilkis has set up a school named Golap Kha Primary and Secondary School. The school now has 317 non-resident students and twenty students.

Recalling how she started it all, Bilkis said, "In the late 90s, I used to look after five orphans in my house located not far from the present Shishu Sadan. I also did some social work like giving free tuition in Bangla and social science to poor children in my neighbourhood."

"On a winter day in 1999, on the 27th of Ramadan, a mentally challenged woman named Jharna came to my house with a baby girl," said

Bilkis, recalling how Jharna had given birth to the child one and a half years earlier on the porch of a shop in Nageshwari Bazar.

"She could hardly take care of her daughter. She never cleaned her or gave bath to her. The baby used to sleep with her mother almost everywhere, even with the dogs sometimes," Bilkis said.

"One day I asked Jharna for the child and she gave her to me. I named her Pritilata."

The night Bilkis took Pritilata into her arms, she had a vision in her dreams. She saw none other than Mother Teresa, the Roman Catholic missionary who dedicated her entire life for the poorest of the poor, especially orphans and abandoned children.

"After that, my husband and I decided to build an orphanage named Golap Kha Shishu Sadan after my father-in-law on his land, inherited by my husband," she said, adding that the orphanage was shifted to its current location on June 26, 2009.

In addition to formal education, the children of the orphanage are given religious and moral lessons. They also take part in physical exercise and perform in cultural events held within the walled compound of the orphanage. The students of high school are also given training on ICT.

A charming and healthy atmosphere prevails inside the orphanage compound which includes a playground, a garden, a prayer house, a rest house, separate sleeping quarters for boys and girls, a dining room and classrooms.

In 2013, Bilkis moved to the orphanage with her

husband, university going son and school going daughter. The family lives with the girls in their quarters.

The orphanage is primarily funded by income from Pritilata Super Market owned by Bilkis and her husband located beside Bhurungamari-Kurigram road in Nageshwari town.

Rent from a girls' hostel near Nageshwari Degree College and other income from the family's land property are also used to run the Sadan. Local donors sometimes extend a helping hand too.

Bilkis said she has nothing much to ask for herself. "When the children call me maa, I feel proud... I think I have nothing else to ask for in my life. Now I don't have a personal life; my personal life is the Shishu Sadan."

She said she has plans to construct a new orphanage complex on 2.25 acres of family land where orphans from all over the country can find their home.

"I will make sure it has all the facilities needed. To ensure that the children get fresh, unadulterated food, I will start poultry, fish and dairy farming and also grow fruits and vegetables," said the loving mother.

"I will do everything needed to fulfil the wishes of the children in whatever fields they choose to study... My aim is to bring up the children as good human beings," added Bilkis, who herself could study only up to HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate).

## Pheromone trap appears as blessing for Teesta char farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The use of environment-friendly sex pheromone trap for killing harmful insects has become very popular among char farmers along the Teesta river basin in Sundarganj upazila of the district.

In sex pheromone trap, a capsule containing female sex hormone of insects is hung in a small plastic drum with one inch of water and two holes are created in the middle of the container for entrance of insects.

Set in the crop field with two bamboo sticks, the bottle attracts male insects that drown in the soap water. Thus, mating and spread of pests are checked, said Upazila Agriculture Officer Rashedul Islam.

Four traps are enough for a bigha of land to check pest attack. The price of each trap is Tk 65.

Upazila agriculture department has been conducting Farmer's Day at the crop fields in different areas to encourage farmers for using the natural method instead of random use of

toxic pesticides.

They are conducting the 15-day programme since Monday, said the agriculture officer.

The growers have cultivated maize potato, wheat and different kinds of vegetables on vast tract of char lands as the riverbed is nearly dried up due to scanty water flow from upstream.

Many farmers are now growing maize as a cash crop, but insects are extensively damaging the corn fields, said char people.

According to the agriculture department, 3,200 hectares of land have been brought under maize cultivation in the upazila this year.

Farmer Faizer Rahman of Singerjani village said he cultivated maize on four bighas of land.

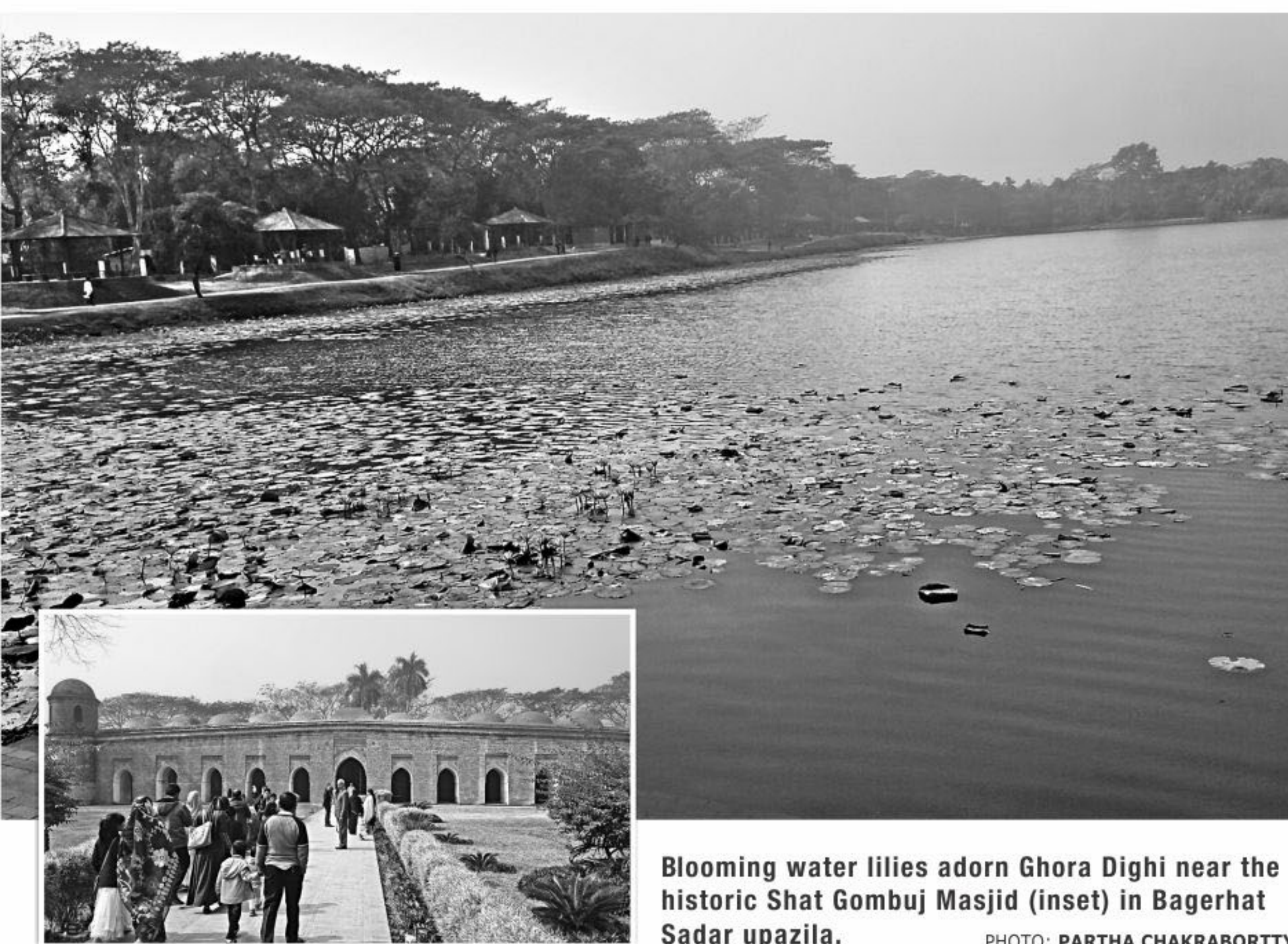
He is expecting a good yield this time as he used the natural method in the crop field for killing harmful insects. Besides, the price of pheromone trap is not so high, said Faizer.

Due to the siltation, char land along the river basin is now more fertile, he said.



Agricultural officers train farmers how to set up pheromone trap in a maize field at Kapasia Char in Gaibandha's Sundarganj upazila.

PHOTO: STAR



Blooming water lilies adorn Ghora Dighi near the historic Shat Gombuj Masjid (inset) in Bagerhat Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTY

SHAT GOMBUJ MASJID

## Visitors demand standard hotels, better roads

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Thousands of water-lilies of Ghora Dighi at the premises of Shat Gombuj Masjid in Sadar upazila, which usually buzz with visitors in the winter season, are ready to welcome the tourists from home and abroad.

The Mosque, also known as the Sixty Dome Mosque, was built by the Muslim saint Khan Jahan Ali about 600 years ago.

Authorities concerned said local tourists have to pay Tk 20 while the foreigners Tk 200 for entering the world heritage site.

One of the visitors from Dhaka Afsana said, "The environment here is very calm, quite and clean. We have enjoyed the scenic beauty of the 600-year-old mosque with holiness

in our heart."

Moreover, the water lilies in Ghora Dighi and the tress and sheds surrounding its bank are always seemed welcoming the guests at the world heritage site, she added.

Abdur Rashid, another visitor from Faridpur, said, "I have offered my Zohr prayer at the historic mosque and thanked the almighty Allah for helping me visiting the site."

"After enjoying the aesthetic design of the mosque and scenic beauty of Ghora Dighi I am feeling very happy," he said.

"While visiting the historic site tourists have to face serious problems due to insufficient hotel facilities and troublesome road communication," Rashid said, adding that

the authorities concerned should make necessary arrangements to attract more tourists.

Tourist Ripon Sheikh, who came from Gopalganj, said, "Everything here including the holy mosque is magnificent. My kids are very happy as the authorities concerned have arranged some rides for the children as well."

Bagerhat is famous for its 17 archaeological establishments of the Sultani era, Bagerhat Archaeological Department Custodian Golam Ferdous said, adding that after completion of the Padma Bridge the district will buzz with more tourists.

The government has earned about Tk 70 lakh revenue from the historic site last year and hope to earn Tk 1 crore this year, he added.

## Upazila polls

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election is free, fair and acceptable, not those who run for them, Mahub said.

He said, "Keeping this in mind, you should create an environment so that people can get more confidence in the election system."

"Whatever the political situation is, election must be free and fair. The Election Commission does not want any controversial or questionable election."

Mahub also asked the election officials to be neutral while conducting polls.

One national election and seven city corporation polls have been held under this commission, but there has been no self-assessment on its failure and success in those polls, he said.

He also asked the officials to correct their past mistakes as they have experiences of both success and failure.

At the programme, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda reiterated that the commission would not compromise with any irregularities in the election and if needed, it would stop voting.

"If any returning officer thinks that there is no congenial environment for

voting, the officer can recommend stopping it. The commission will stop the voting."

The CEC asked the election officials not to be loyal to any political party or group as they are only loyal to the constitution.

Election commissioners Rafiqul Islam, Kabita Khanam and Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury also addressed the event, presided over by EC Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed.

### 3RD PHASE POLLS

The third phase election to 127 upazila parishads will be held on March 24, said EC Joint Secretary (public relations) SM Asaduzzaman.

The last date for submitting nomination papers is February 26. The papers will be scrutinised on February 28, and the last date for withdrawing candidatures is March 7.

EC officials said they were planning to hold the fourth phase of the election on March 31 and the fifth on June 18.

The first upazila polls were held in 1985, while the following three were held in 1990, 2009 and 2014.

## Jamaat torn over apology question

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told this newspaper that at an emergency meeting in December last year, the party's central executive council comprising mid-level leaders decided in principle that the party should apologise for its role during the 1971 Liberation War.

The Jamaat leader also said many leaders at the meeting were in favour of renaming the party and adopting a new strategy for its survival.

Some of them even said the party had become almost an underground organisation as many of its leaders and activists have been in jail in politically motivated cases filed since 2010, added the leader.

The emergency meeting of the council was convened days before the December 30 election in which the Awami League won a landslide.

In a landmark verdict on August 1, 2013, the High Court declared illegal the Jamaat's registration as a political party with the Election Commission. The EC last year scrapped the party's registration.

"Many of our young leaders think that we are not getting people's support due to our role in 1971. The situation may change if we offer apology to the nation," a member of the party's executive council told this correspondent over the phone.

But the party's senior leaders think otherwise.

At a meeting in mid-January, Jamaat's Majlish-e-Shura didn't approve the decision the executive council made in principle.

Asked, a top leader of the party and member of the Majlish-e-Shura said that offering apology for the party's role in 1971 and renaming it may jeopardise the organisation.

"Our top leaders, including the ameer and the secretary general, were hanged in the name of their alleged involvement in crimes against humanity. Their conviction and hanging in politically motivated cases will be justified if we offer apology for our role in 1971," the leader said, seeking anonymity.

On the pretext of protecting Pakistan's integrity, the religion-based political party embarked on a notorious mission to wipe out the Bangalee nation in collaboration with the Pakistan occupation army.

Following Bangladesh's independence, the government banned five communal outfits, including the Jamaat, which not only opposed the birth of the nation but also actively helped the Pakistan occupation forces commit genocide and other war crimes.

After the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, the banned

parties, including the Jamaat, were given the green light to do politics during the tenure of Ziaur Rahman's regime.

In 2010, the AL-led government formed the International Crimes Tribunal to try those, including Jamaat leaders, involved in crimes against humanity in 1971.

As the party's top leaders were arrested on the charge of crimes against humanity, most members of the party and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, went into hiding.

Since then, a section of the Jamaat and Shibir men has been calling for apologising to the nation to steer the party out of difficulties.

Following his arrest in war crimes cases in mid-2010, the then Jamaat assistant secretary general Mohammad Kamaruzzaman sent a message to party high-ups to remove from the party the leaders facing war crimes charges, and hand over the party leadership to young leaders.

Later, a move was made to bring changes to the party, but it couldn't make any headway due to strong opposition from the high-ups, said party insiders.

"If the party had offered apology after the arrest of its senior leaders, it might not have fallen in such a bad situation," said a central Jamaat leader and also a former president of Shibir.