

# 'Riverbank grabbers mustn't contest in polls'

Savar residents demand at demonstration

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

Savar residents yesterday urged authorities to bar riverbank grabbers from contesting in elections.

Under the banner of Savar-based Nodi O Poribesh Unnayan Parishad, thousands holding placards formed a human chain and rally at Savar Thana Stand area at 10am. Later, they formed human chain on boats.

They urged the government to save Bangshi and Dhaleshwari rivers from grabbers and pollution. They also demanded conducting immediate drives to remove all illegal structures on land surrounding Bangshi.

They provided a list of Bangshi River grabbers, prepared by Savar upazila administration in 2016, to journalists.

Meanwhile, most placards had slogans related to the upcoming Savar municipality election, such as "Be alert election commission, keep grabbers away from polls" and "Grabbers should not be nominated".

Dr Rafiqul Islam Mollah, environmentalist and president of the parishad, said Bangshi and Dhaleshwari are getting polluted due to poor monitoring by authorities. "We are also concerned that authorities are yet to take steps to evict

illegal structures on both riverbanks."

A huge quarter of influential people, including Savar Municipality Mayor Hazi Abdul Goni, and his son Kamrul Islam Shahin grabbed land surrounding Bangshi at Nama Bazar area, but no action was taken against them, even after the administration prepared a list naming 65 grabbers, claimed Dr Rafiqul, also brother of Nazrul Islam Manik Mollah, secretary of Awami League's (AL) Savar municipal committee, who is vying for AL's nomination for mayoral post.

He questioned how a mayor and his son could do such a thing. "We are now hearing that the mayor will participate in the next municipality election," he said. "We are urging the government to ensure that such grabbers be unable to contest in elections."

Shamsul Haque, secretary of the parishad, said if the government takes steps to save Bangshi and Dhaleshwari, like they did for Buriganga and Turag, residents will be happy.

Rokeya Haque, vice-president of Savar Nodi Rakha Community, and Saran Shah, general secretary of Sangskritik Jote, Savar, also spoke during the programme.

Contacted, Shamim Ara Nipa, upazila nirbahi officer of Savar, told The Daily Star



Many Savar residents formed human chain on boats yesterday to press home their demand of saving the rivers from grabbers and pollution.

PHOTO: STAR

that they will investigate the matter and take proper steps against grabbers.

Asked, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Dr Enamur Rahman, told this reporter that he is not aware of Abdul Goni's matter. The department concerned will investigate and take steps.

Refuting the allegations, Abdul Goni, in presence of Dr Enamur at Savar Govt College yesterday, told this correspondent that Abdul Goni named in the list is someone else. Some people are trying to tarnish his political image before the upcoming

election and are falsely accusing him.

However, he did admit to his son's involvement in grabbing land.

Goni, also president of AL's Savar municipality committee, said, "I admit that my son has a piece of land on Bangshi riverbank at Nama Bazar area, but around 650 grabbers occupy land there. If the administration starts an eviction drive, I will at first evict my son's structures."

"It's true that my son's name is stated in the list, but I am not involved with it," the mayor claimed.

## 'How long must we wait for our rights?'

Activists demand full implementation of CHT Accord

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Full implementation of the CHT Peace Accord 1997 is a must to ensure the rights of the indigenous peoples in CHT, said rights activists yesterday.

They said this at a rally in front of National Museum at Shahbagh in the capital.

Indigenous rights activists under the banner of Jatiya Nagarik Uddyog organised the programme marking the 23rd anniversary of the accord that was signed on December 2, 1997 between the government and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) during the first tenure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to put an end to conflict in the three hill districts.

The activists also placed a six-point demand, which include fully empowering the CHT regional council, making CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission effective and putting an end to the eviction of indigenous people in the name of tourism or development.

Although the government claimed they have implemented 48 clauses out of 72 in the Accord, only 26 clauses have been implemented in the last 23 years, according to indigenous rights activists.

"The progress for implementing the accord took place during the first couple of years of the signing, then it slowed down..." said researcher and writer

Syed Abul Maksud, taking part in the event virtually.

It has been 23 years already; if the process delays more, the frustration (of the indigenous people) towards the government will grow in the same proportion as well, he added.

Speaking at the programme, Adivasi Forum General Secretary Sanjeeb Drong said, "Twenty three years back, the accord was signed with a hope. But majority of the clauses haven't been implemented yet. How long must we wait for our rights?"

He cautioned that if proper implementation of the accord does not take place, the situation in the CHT can become the way it was before the accord. "So, its proper implementation is a must," he said.

Dhaka University Prof Robaet Ferdous said there is mistrust among Bangladeshis and indigenous people now as the accord have not been implemented properly even after so many years.

Those who are vocal about rights are being labelled as criminals, extortionists, and armed miscreants, he said, adding that if this continues, there will be unrest again in the hills.

Condemning the recent incident of constructing a luxury hotel in Chimbuk hill of Bandarban, DU Associate Prof Zobaida Nasreen said Mro people from four villages will be ousted if the hotel is established. Gradually, the entire hill will be encroached, Nasreen feared.

## Star wins

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has earned the gold award in the category "Best Special Project for Covid-19".

This project was jointly initiated with Sheba.xyz and Samakal to help the underprivileged groups of the country during the pandemic. After starting its journey in March this year, the funds collected through this initiative were utilised to provide groceries for underprivileged citizens and financial support to small businesses. The initiative collected almost \$0.2 million in 3 months and helped more than 0.1 million people during the pandemic.

Another digital campaign by The Daily Star called "Bondhutte Bondi" (Locked in Friendship) has earned a bronze award in the category "Best in Audience Engagement".

This was a digital campaign marking International Friendship Day 2020 where the publisher partnered with two brands, Pathao and ShopUp. The campaign engaged the youth in celebrating the new picture of friendship during lockdown and to spread the spirit of friendship to every corner of the country through storytelling, 10 Minute School, Youth Opportunity, Smartifier Academy and Pop of Colors were youth engagement partners of the campaign.

This is the fourth time The Daily Star has won the prestigious South Asian Digital Media Award.

The awards are presented in 10 categories including Best Website, Audience Engagement, Native Advertising / Branded Content, Paid Content Strategy, News Literacy, and Covid-19 Projects, among others.

Twenty judges from across the globe evaluated the entries and selected the winners. The other winners of SDMA 2020 along with The Daily Star are BBC News, The Telegraph, The Hindu, The Quint, ABP Pvt Ltd, NDTV etc.

The winners will be presented trophies and honoured virtually at the upcoming Digital Media India 2021 Conference on March 2-4, next year.

## 1 killed, 5 hurt as 3-wheeler, tractor collide in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A CNG-run three-wheeler driver was killed and five of its passengers were injured when the vehicle collided with a brick-laden tractor in Tangail's Nagarpur upazila yesterday.

The deceased -- Md Senu Miah (35) -- was from Chasha Bhadra village in the upazila, said police.

Five service personnel took Hoimonti (65), Polash (24), Rafiq (35), Kabil (32), Amit (32) to Nagarpur Upazila Health Complex, said upazila health and family planning officer Dr Md Rokunuzzaman.

Of them, two were referred to Tangail General Hospital, he said.

Police seized the tractor but its driver managed to flee, said Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Nagarpur Police Station.

Meanwhile, Jharna, who lost six of her family members in a Manikganj road accident earlier, shared her grief while talking to journalists yesterday.

Seven passengers of a CNG-run three-wheeler, including six members of the family from Chasha Bhadra, were killed when the vehicle collided with a bus on Manikganj-Doulatpur Road at Mulkandi in Doulatpur, Manikganj on Friday.

The family members are Horekrishna Badyakar (55), his only son Govinda Badyakar (28), Govinda's wife Bobita Badyakar (25), their only daughter Radha Badyakar (3), Govinda's grandmother Khuki Badyakar (70), and his another relative Ramprasad Badyakar (35).

Horekrishna's wife Jharna, who received the bodies, wailed, "I have lost all in the accident. Why am I alive?"

Horekrishna used to pull rickshaw-van and his son Govinda was a barber. His two other daughters were married off previously.

## 2 expelled ULAB students arrested

Walk out on bail hours later, in case filed by university authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The two expelled students of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), were released on bail yesterday hours after they were arrested from Dhaka's Mohammadpur Beribadh area in a case filed by the university authorities.

The arrestees are -- Mahmood Sadaat Ruhul and Raihan Atique, both 8th semester students of media studies and journalism department. They have been demanding a 50 per cent waiver of tuition fees.

"We arrested them following the case filed by the university's security officer on Friday," said Dulal Hossain, inspector (operations) of Mohammadpur Police Station, also the investigation officer of the case.

ULAB authorities alleged that the students vandalised CCTV camera and other infrastructures of the university.

The two were produced before the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Yasmin Ara who granted the bail on bond Tk 10,000, court sources said.

Protesting students, however, termed it a false case.

ULAB Proctor Wazir AF Ahmed told The Daily Star that the arrestees along with few others were trying to pursue an agenda.

claimed that the students shared "false" information regarding tuition fees, termination of staff members and more on social media and to the press.

Protesting the authority's decision, a group of students have been holding a sit-in in front of the university's Ramchandrapur campus for the last three days.

A protesting student, wishing not to be named, yesterday said that the authorities didn't allow them to enter into the campus on the first day. However, they allowed vehicles and staff of a private company.

"When we argued over it, they said we can't enter as ULAB is closed now. A scuffle took place over it. On Friday, they were taking photos of the protesters including the girls, secretly. Another scuffle took place when Sadaat injured his leg there."

"Yesterday, when we went to the campus, Mohammadpur police picked up Sadaat and Raihan," the student said.

Sadaat is also a leader of Bangladesh Chhatra Union's Dhaka city unit.

Terming the case false, Chhatra Union condemned the arrest of the two students and demanded their release.

## Draft law

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provided with interpreters, said Tapas Kanti Baul, adding that the ethnic minority community reported that they do not get justice because of this language gap.

The draft also takes into account psychological distress experienced by a witness or victim. "The office shall, at its cost, arrange to give the victim counseling by a qualified counselor, if necessary, immediately after rescue," it said.

Rape victims who have gotten pregnant can claim abortion costs, or child support, adds the draft. Minors who lost guardians can seek support.

If the accused person is convicted, she or he will be directed to deposit the sum paid to the victim to the fund. In the case that the accused fails to deposit this money, it will be realised from her or his property, says the draft.

As per the draft, any person who threatens or in any way harms a victim or a witness will be sentenced for as long as twelve years, and fined Tk 30 thousand.

## Consider youth, gender issues in Five-Year Plan

Speakers at webinar urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youths and women have been two of the most disproportionately impacted groups during the pandemic, said speakers at a webinar yesterday.

They also discussed the priorities and policy implications, particularly in the youth and gender context, that must be considered in the 8th Five Year Plan of the government.

The webinar titled, "Reflection of Youth and Gender Issues in Five Year Plans in Light of Pandemic" was jointly organised by South Asian Network of Economic Modeling (SANEM) and ActionAid Bangladesh.

Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha, a professor of Department of Economics at Dhaka University and research director of SANEM, moderated the event. She expressed concern over the youth unemployment rate (10.7 percent) which is higher than the national average; and the proportion of youth classified as NEET (not in employment, education or training), almost 30 percent of youth population aged between 18-29.

She also said a major challenge posed by the pandemic has been the disproportionate impact on women, both financially and through gender-based violence.

Chairing the event, Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said the

Covid-19 crisis must be taken into special consideration while designing strategies for the implementation of the 8th FYP.

She suggested increasing soft-skill training in the education system, encouraging youth entrepreneurship and investing in women by giving them digital devices as part of social safety net coverage.

Keynote speaker Eshrat Sharmin, senior research associate of SANEM, pointed out that over 60 percent of households in Bangladesh do not have access to internet which makes obtaining virtual education difficult for a significant number of students.

Nobonita Chowdhury, director of Gender, Justice and Diversity and Preventing Violence against Women Initiative at Brac, stressed on special attention to challenges faced by women amidst the pandemic.

Planning Minister MA Mannan in his speech as chief guest said pre-existing gaps in youth employment and gender inclusiveness will be further exacerbated due to the pandemic.

Dr Selim Raihan, Executive Director, SANEM; Md Jahangir Alam, director of Directorate of Technical Education, Ministry of Education; Md Sayed Ali, deputy secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sports; Malika M Quadir, founder and managing director, Shohoz Limited, also spoke.

## People's interest

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The JP chief said their party wants to exercise positive politics for making people interested in election and bringing enthusiasm and vibrancy back to politics.

"We want to create people's attraction to politics. We want people to be interested in voting again. We also want to ensure an atmosphere so that common people's hopes and aspirations are reflected in elections," said GM Quader.

He also said their party's objective is to serve people by gaining their confidence.

The JP chairman said lack of liveliness in politics and enthusiasm are the main reasons behind the new generation's apathy for voting. "It can never be good for democracy. If such a situation continues, many parties will become name-only ones."

Jatiya Party Secretary General Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu said people now are not willing to go to polling stations since they have lost their confidence in the election system.

He said the Awami League and the BNP claim that they have 35-40 percent votes, but the voter turnouts were only two to 10 percent in the recently-concluded polls and by-polls.

Bablu said the Election Commission must find out the reasons behind people's lack of confidence in the election system.

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