

Hardly any protection

FROM PAGE 12

She is now staying at her village home in Noagaon of Shahrasti and is fully dependent on the help from organisations like DSB.

Zaheda is one of the thousands of people with Down Syndrome in Bangladesh. They are some of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of the country.

Due to lack of education, inaccessible health care and lack of rehabilitation efforts, they often become victims of exclusion, abuse and live a miserable life.

People with DS show delayed physical and linguistic development, characteristics facial features such as small chin, large tongue, slanted eyes etc. and mild to moderate level of intellectual impairment.

They may also suffer from various gastro-intestinal conditions, cancer and heart diseases.

According to Bangladesh government's ongoing Disability Identification Survey (DIS), so far, 4850 people have been identified with DS in Bangladesh.

Experts, however, say this data is highly unreliable.

Sarder A Razzak, chairman of DSB said, "We have found many people with DS who have been identified as persons with autism or cerebral palsy or even as intellectually disabled in DIS. There are also many people in the remote areas who are left unidentified."

Professor Dr Gopen Kumar Kundu, chairman, department of paediatric neurology of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMU) said, "It is true many people are left undetected and many have been detected wrongly."

"This is because we have a shortage of trained doctors and health workers who have technical knowledge on disability identification. Our training programme is ongoing and we hope that we shall be able to fill up this shortage in the near future," he added.

Prof Kundu is also a deputy director of BSMMU's Institute of Paediatric Neurodisorder and Autism and a deputy director of the autism cell at the health ministry.

Medical procedure to detect these children called Karyotype test is also very expensive and rare in Bangladesh. At present, this test is being done only in BSMMU and Dhaka Medical College Hospital and in a few top private laboratories in Dhaka.

As a result, children with DS are being diagnosed mostly through observance of their physical features during DIS, said Prof Kundu, also a deputy director of BSMMU's Institute of Paediatric Neurodisorder and Autism.

There are various legislations such as Persons with Disability Rights and Protection, 2013; The Children Act, 2013; Protection of Persons with Neuro-Developmental Disability Trust Act, 2013 to ensure full inclusion of children with special needs—particularly those who have neuro-developmental conditions such as DS.

Bangladesh is also a signatory and ratifying state party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which mandates

full rights and dignity for persons with disabilities.

But enforcement of these legislations for people with DS is far below the expectations.

Sarder A Razzak, chairman of DSB, said, "Many children with DS show very mild intellectual impairment. Many of them are very good at cultural activities. However, most of the schools do not enroll these children."

"Few schools in Dhaka that are currently allowing mild DS children do not have trained teachers and other support staff such as psychiatrists, therapists and caregivers. Even parents of non-disabled students often instruct their children not to sit or make friends with their classmates with DS."

"So, we often have no way except enrolling our children at special schools," said Razzak, who has a child with DS.

Bangladesh government's Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust (NDDP) has been formed in 2014 to ensure social inclusion of these children.

Its performance is severely hampered due to lack of manpower. Currently, it has no permanent staff and all of its 15 posts of officers and other support staff are vacant.

Professor Dr Md Golam Rabbani, chairman of NDDP trust said, "We are in the process of recruiting five people within the next fiscal year. Our goal is to open resource centres at every divisional city where parents, teachers and caregivers will be trained. We will also publish academic and recreational contents for children with neuro-developmental disabilities."

"We will establish two shelter homes for orphans with neuro-developmental disabilities. But, execution of all of these plans are being delayed due to lack of manpower. Our high-ranking officials also get transferred frequently which also affect our performance," said Dr Rabbani.

Currently this organisation has training programmes for teachers and parents only in Dhaka with the help of experts.

However, Professor Dr Rabbani thinks their biggest obstacle to ensure inclusion comes from the society.

"Our society is not ready to include and recognise these people. Even reputed institutions, highly educated professionals show utter disdain towards these children. They cannot even imagine that these children can be educated in the same classroom with other students. By expanding our activities to the grassroots level, we need to change this perception," he said.

Professor Dr Gopen thinks that early detection and treatment can ensure inclusion of children with DS.

"If children with DS can be detected early, they can be taught language and mobility within three years with the help of doctors, speech therapists and occupational therapists. If this can be done within three or four years and medical care for other health complications that are typical for children with DS can be ensured, these children can fully participate in the inclusive education programme," he said.



Demonstrators clash with police officers during an anti-government protest in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday. Thai police used water cannon and charged toward protesters who had gathered near the King's Palace in Bangkok to call for the release of protest leaders and demand reform of the monarchy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Huji set up 'madrasa' to train children

FROM PAGE 12

from the capital's Sayedabad area on March 4.

The two other arrestees are: Sheikh Sohan Swad alias Boro Abdullah and Murad Hossain Kabir.

A case was filed with Jatrabari Police Station against the three under the Anti-Terrorism Act. They were remanded in custody in two phases. The three are now behind bars.

Speaking to The Daily Star, a top CTC official said they conducted a drive at the Bandarban "madrasa" and rescued 24 children aged between eight and 12 years from there.

Requesting anonymity, the official said they have already handed those children to their parents and guardians, mostly labourers in hilly areas.

Investigation sources said they found identities of 40 people from some documents of the "madrasa" and also during interrogation of the three arrestees. Of the 40, some allegedly joined the Huji recently while a few others provided funds.

Saiful Islam, deputy commissioner of CT investigation wing, said they have got some details about Huji by interrogating its operations wing head.

"We still have no information regarding militant or criminal activities of the 40 people," he told The Daily Star.

The 40 were under surveillance and they would be given counselling in phases, said Saiful.

According to CTC officials, arrested Mainul was trying to brainwash the local people around the "madrasa".

Saiful said Mainul is a notorious militant. He had planned to snatch jailed militant Abu Jandal. But he was arrested by Rapid Action Battalion in 2015 before he could implement the plan.

Walking out of jail on bail a few years ago, Mainul again started re-organising the activities of Huji. He contacted jailed militants using different techniques, said investigators.

Mainul was tasked with re-

organising the Huji activities, forming a full-fledged Shura committee, ensuring funding from financiers and members of the outfit, recruiting operatives on a large scale, and collecting ammunition and bomb-making equipment, added investigators.

A CTC high official, who interrogated Mainul, said he admitted using the media identity card as it helped him move freely and get access to different places, including offices of law enforcement agencies.

It helped Mainul collect information on Huji's targets and draw plans for sabotage, said the official requesting anonymity.

"We are trying to learn whether Mainul managed journalist ID cards for other Huji members. We have identified the person who issued the card to Mainul. We are now trying to check whether that person, member of a reputed journalists' club, provided the card to Mainul knowingly or unknowingly," added the official.

Protests on defying campaign of fear

FROM PAGE 12

The country has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power in a February 1 coup, triggering a nationwide uprising as protesters call for a return to democracy. Security forces have deployed tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds against anti-coup protesters.

But the movement has pushed ahead – albeit in smaller numbers.

Local media showed protesters in gas masks gathering in northern Shan state, while in the southern coastal city of Dawei, motorists hoisted posters of Suu Kyi and signs that said "end the dictatorship".

Outside of protests, crackdowns continue on the streets and residential areas across Myanmar, said AAPP monitoring group.

"Casualties and unprovoked shootings are increasing day by day," it said.

Some activists say they have had to adapt tactics.

"We protest where there are no police or military, then when we hear they're coming, we disperse quickly," campaigner Kyaw Min Htike told Reuters from Dawei in the south before he and others staged a brief rally outside the town centre.

"We'll protest any way we can until our revolution prevails."

In the central ruby-producing city of Mogok, local media Myanmar Now

reported that a neighbourhood's night guards were shot overnight.

"One died on the spot last night while two others are in critical condition in the hospital," a rescue team member confirmed to AFP, declining to give more details.

The country's commercial hub Yangon has emerged as a hotspot for unrest, as security forces armed with guns continue to root out protesters wielding homemade protection gear.

Sporadic demonstrations persisted yesterday across the former capital, with a small group marching on a residential area chanting for the military to "Surrender if you do not want life in prison!"

Dozens of demonstrators also gathered in the second city of Mandalay. Several were injured when a vehicle drove into them and when police fired rubber bullets, a city news portal reported. It was not clear why the vehicle hit the protesters.

There were small protests in other towns, including Kyaukse and Hsipaw in the northeast, Kawlin in the north, Hpa-an and Myawaddy in the east, Labutta in the Irrawaddy river delta, Myeik in the south and the central town of Yay Oo, according to news portals and social media.

Western countries have repeatedly condemned the coup and the violence. Asian neighbours, who have for years avoided criticising each other, have also

begun speaking out.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo, in some of the strongest comments yet by a regional leader, said on Friday the violence should stop immediately and he would ask Brunei, the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, to call an urgent meeting.

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said he was appalled by the persistent use of lethal violence against unarmed civilians. Singapore has also expressed its disapproval.

But the military has shown no sign of being swayed and has defended its takeover, which derailed a slow transition to democracy in a country that was under strict military rule from a 1962 coup until the generals initiated reforms a decade ago.

The junta says a Nov 8 election won by Suu Kyi's party was fraudulent, an accusation rejected by the electoral commission. The military leaders have promised a new election but have not set a date.

European Union foreign ministers are set to approve sanctions tomorrow against 11 junta officials, according to EU diplomats.

Since the military took over in February, the junta has sunk Myanmar further into isolation, throttling mobile data this week that left citizens without wifi capabilities in an information blackout.

Bhutto faces mass

FROM PAGE 12

of a council of presidential advisers would be acceptable, added Mujib. He also indicated that Bhutto's participation in the cabinet formation would be an insurmountable obstacle given the extreme opposition in the AL to his being a part of the government. The AL leaders also remained skeptical about the relationship between Bhutto and the martial law authority. [Richard Sisson and Leo E Rose, War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh, UCP, 1990, pg. 120]

BHUTTO ARRIVES, MEETS YAHYA Bhutto and his advisers arrived Dhaka today. The entourage was met by a police escort who were wearing black arm bands in protest of the killings of civilians in East Pakistan. Processions were brought out in protest of his visit. Some placards of the protesters read: Bhutto killer of people. The Bhutto delegation was taken to Hotel Intercontinental under heavy military guard. At the hotel they also faced non-cooperation from workers.

Shortly after his arrival Bhutto met Yahya who briefed him about the ongoing negotiations. Bhutto's reaction, in his own words, was: "I acquainted my colleagues with the two-committee proposal. They expressed their misgivings and suggested that I should not accept the proposal as it contained seeds of two Pakistans... We also agreed that [the scheme] had to be put to and approved by the full knowledge of the people. Two or more political

leaders could not ignore the existence of the entire assembly vested with constitutional and legislative power." [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL, 1997, pg. 167]

Bhutto expressed his opposition to the AL's position on the issues of aid and trade. He also sought time to discuss other issues with his advisers.

Yahya told Bhutto to be present at tomorrow's meeting if he wanted to meet Mujib.

BROHI CALLS ON MUJIB

Eminent Pakistani law expert AK Brohi today called on Bangabandhu at his residence. He presented his written opinion to the AL chief where he commented that there was no legal barrier to the withdrawal of martial law and the formation of an interim government before framing the constitution. Formation of an interim government in participation of the elected representatives would rather ensure popular support to the decision, he added.

Bangabandhu, speaking today at a gathering in front of his house, urged people to continue their peaceful and non-violent movement until the rights of the 70 million people of "Bangla Desh" were established. Swadhin Bangladesh Kendrio Chattro Sangram Parishad, in a statement issued today, urged people to observe the Pakistan Day (March 23) as Protirodh Dibos (resistance day).

Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

Lightning may have sparked

FROM PAGE 12

form basic cell structures and cell membranes and even makes up the phosphate backbone of DNA and RNA, said Benjamin Hess, study author and graduate student at Yale University in The Department of Earth & Planetary Sciences.

But this element was elusive on early Earth, trapped inside minerals.

"Most phosphorus on early Earth was trapped in minerals that are essentially insoluble and unreactive, meaning they couldn't be used to make biomolecules needed for life,"

Hess said. "Lightning strikes provide a new mechanism for creating phosphorus in a form that can make important compounds for life."

The study published Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications.

It has long been thought that meteorites delivered the necessary elements for life to appear on Earth. Meteorites have been known to contain schreibersite, a phosphorus mineral that can be dissolved in water. If enough of them crashed into Earth, that schreibersite could have provided the right amount of phosphorus.

Man held

FROM PAGE 12

on Friday evening and raped her.

When the girl returned home, she kept crying. Her mother found the girl was bleeding from her private parts. Then, she was rushed to Jashore General Hospital.

Contacted, the hospital's intern doctor Priyanka said she had found rape symptoms in primary diagnosis.

The victim's father yesterday filed a case with Kotawali Police Station.

Police were trying to arrest the accused, said Tajul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of the police station.

In Noakhali, a man was arrested yesterday on charge of raping a mentally challenged girl in Kabirhat upazila.

The accused is Abul Hossain, 50, of Sonadia village in the same upazila.

Quoting the victim's family members, police said the 17-year-old girl was staying alone at her residence on Friday afternoon.

Taking the chance, Abul Hossain entered the house and raped her.

At that time, the victim's mother came to the room and saw the incident. When the mother started screaming, the accused fled the scene.

A day later, the victim's mother filed a case against Abul Hossain.

Hours later, police arrested the accused, said Tomas Barua, OC of Kabirhat Police Station.

In Sirajganj, police on Friday night arrested a private tutor on charge of raping his female student in Tarash upazila.

The arrestee is Mohammad Abu Sayeed, 35, of the same upazila.

Quoting the victim's family members, police said Abu Sayeed used to tutor the girl. On Thursday night, he went to the victim's residence.

At that time, the girl was alone at her house. Taking the chance, Abu Sayeed raped her. When the girl started screaming, locals rushed there, caught the accused, and beat him.

As his physical condition deteriorated, he was later admitted at the 250-bed Sirajganj General Hospital where he is now undergoing treatment.

On Friday afternoon, the victim's father filed a case against Abu Sayeed, who was shown arrested on Friday night in the hospital, said Fazle Ashik, OC of Tarash Police Station.

The victim was also sent to the hospital for medical tests, the OC added.

Our Benapole and Pabna correspondents contributed to this report

Modi wishes

FROM PAGE 12

"Best wishes to Prime Minister Imran Khan for a speedy recovery from COVID-19," the Hindu nationalist leader said on Twitter.

Modi regularly uses his rallies to lash out at Pakistan.

The two countries -- which fought intense artillery battles on their Kashmir border last year -- have had three wars since their angry split after independence in 1947.

But the surprise accord reaffirming a 2003 ceasefire came amid reports that officials from the two sides had held secret meetings in recent months.

There have been no reported shellings on the Kashmir Line of Control, as the disputed frontier is known, since the accord came into effect on February 24.

Khan has since called for increased trade with India, while Pakistan's army chief General Qamar Javed said this week that the neighbours should "bury the past".

Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 12

the two border forces were underway in this regard.

Several locals said Bappa left his house on Friday evening. Around 4:00am yesterday, a few shots of fire were heard in the border area. His body was seen along the zero line on the Indian side of the border near East Batuli area around 7:00am.

Locals then informed the matter to a Fultala Union Parishad member named Md Moinuddin.

Moinuddin said it appeared that BSF personnel shot Bappa and left his body there. He said he informed the police and the BGB about the incident.

Juri Police Station Officer-in-Charge Sanjay Chakraborty said locals have alleged that the Bangladeshi man was killed in BSF firing. The BGB would be able to give further details, he said.

Contacted, Lt Col Shah Alam Siddiqui, commander of the BGB 52 Battalion, said they were trying to hold a flag meeting with their Indian counterpart.

"Since the incident took place on the other side of the border, it is not possible to say anything until the flag meeting," he said.

Bus crash kills 14 in Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

A crowded bus crashed into a precipice in central Sri Lanka yesterday, killing the driver and 13 passengers in the worst road accident in 16 years, police said.

The privately-owned bus was travelling through the hilly region of Passara when it went off the road and crashed as the driver swerved to avoid an oncoming truck at a narrow pass, police said.

Five of the dead passengers were women and eight were men, police said, while another 30 people sustained injuries.