

Shazneen

FROM PAGE 3

They are: domestic help Shahidul; a contractor renovating the house Syed Sajjad Mainuddin Hasan and his assistant Badal; domestic help Estema Khatun Minu and her sister Parvin; and carpenter Shaniram Mandal.

After the lower court verdict, the death reference reached the High Court for confirmation of the sentence. At the same time, the accused appealed to the HC against their convictions and sentences. The HC acquitted Shaniram on July 10, 2006.

The verdict of death sentence of the other five was upheld.

Later on, Hasan, Badal, Minu and Parvin appealed to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court against the HC verdict. Shahidul filed a jail appeal.

On August 2 in 2016, the Appellate Division granted the appeals of Hasan, Badal, Minu and Parvin and dismissed Shahidul's appeal.

On March 5, 2017, the apex court rejected Shahidul's petition for review of the verdict. He sought presidential clemency, which was turned down.

He was executed on November 29 of that year.

Due to the ongoing "strict lockdown", prayers for the salvation of Shazneen's departed soul were offered by family members at home.

Dr Hameeda

FROM PAGE 3

Forum played a critical role in raising awareness of the systemic inequities and discrimination suffered by the people of East Pakistan. Between 1968 and March 1971, she served as the magazine's editor.

After Bangladesh's independence, she joined the University Press Limited in Dhaka as an editor. Following the 1971 Liberation War, Dr Hossain became actively involved in the rehabilitation of the women survivors of wartime sexual violence.

Her efforts to develop and market local artisanal crafts led to the formation, in November 1974, of Karika - Bangladesh Hastashilpa Samabaya Federation Ltd.

She has also published widely on a variety of topics, including women's experiences of the war, arts and crafts, the ready-made garment industry, women workers and human rights.

The award will be formally presented at BDI's next international conference (date TBA).

One more top Hefajat

FROM PAGE 12

was produced before a Munshiganj court yesterday. The court set April 26 for hearing the remand prayer and sent him to jail, said police.

"DB men arrested Noorani from his house. There are allegations against him that he instigated a chaotic situation during strike called by Hefajat," Minhazul Islam, additional superintendent of police (Sadar circle), told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, Hefajat yesterday claimed that its central leader Nazmul Hasan Kashemi was arrested by DB police from his Uttara home in the capital. However, DB has not yet said anything about his arrest.

So far, at least 13 central and top leaders of the Qawmi madrasa-based organisation were arrested on different charges following the Hefajat's violence in different parts of the country in protest against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on March 26.

At least 418 people, mostly supporters of Hefajat, have so far been held from different parts of the country for their alleged involvement in the recent violence.

Over 160 cases have been filed since 2013 till date over violence involving Hefajat. The cases were against 1.30 lakh unnamed people.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday placed two Hefajat leaders on different periods of remand in two cases filed with Paltan Police Station over the 2013 mayhem and recent violence in Dhaka.

They are Khaled Saifullah Ayubi, joint secretary general of Hefajat, and Maulana Ihteshamul Haque Sakhi, joint office secretary of the organisation.

Police arrested the duo on April 22. Saifullah was on a five-day remand in a case filed with Paltan Police Station over the violence on March 26 in the capital, while Ihteshamul was on a four-day remand in a case filed with the same police station over the 2013 mayhem in Dhaka.

Metropolitan Magistrate Nivana Khair Jesi passed the orders after two investigation officers sought a 10-day remand for each of them.

B'BARIA ARRESTEES
Police arrested 10 Hefajat men from different areas of the district after identifying the accused from CCTV footage and photos taken during the violence, said Roish Uddin, additional superintendent of Brahmanbaria

police.

So far, 56 cases have been lodged over the mayhem in Brahmanbaria. Of them, 49 are filed with Brahmanbaria Sadar Model Police Station, four with Ashuganj Police Station, two with Sarail Police Station and one with Akhaura railway police station.

At least 414 people have been named in these cases alongside more than 39,000 unknown individuals. Until yesterday, 346 people were arrested.

Among the arrestees, 305 are Hefajat activists and supporters, 38 BNP leaders and activists and three Jamaat-Shibir activists.

At least five people were killed and over 50 others, including 25 police personnel, injured in clashes between members of law enforcement agencies and Hefajat men during Hefajat's demonstrations in Sadar upazila's Nandanpur area.

During Hefajat's countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on April 28, its activists set fire to three buildings, including the land office in the district's Sadar upazila and rail station, vandalised several private and government establishments, including Zila Parishad building, municipality building, police lines, industrial school, Alaudin Music Academy and Foirtala Bus Stand in Sadar upazila.

In another development, Abdur Rahim Kashemi, joint general secretary of Hefajat's Brahmanbaria district unit, yesterday resigned from the organisation seeking justice for those involved in the violence carried out by Hefajat in the district from March 26 to 28.

He announced his resignation through a written statement.

In the statement, the influential Hefajat leader said, "I am officially quitting from all the activities of Hefajat and from all the posts of national and district committees of the organisation."

"The mayhem carried out by Hefajat across the country in protest against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit was inhumane and unacceptable."

Earlier, Maulana Abdullah Mohammad Hasan, a nayeb-ameer of Hefajat, resigned from the organisation, citing the same ground.

[Our Munshiganj and Brahmanbaria correspondents contributed to this report.]

Rohingya

FROM PAGE 12

a consignment of yaba tablets would be smuggled to Bangladesh through the border.

When the BGB men challenged a group of five-six people, they opened fire, triggering the "gunfight", he said.

At one stage, the criminals fled. Later, the BGB team found a body lying on the spot which was sent to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy, the BGB official added.

Process of filing a case in this connection is underway.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 12

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) the same day and, since then, has been staying at her Gulshan residence.

On August 27 last year, the government extended her release for six more months and it was extended again for the same period on March 15.

On February 8, 2018, Khaleda was sent to the Old Dhaka Central Jail after a lower court sentenced her to five years imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

The High Court later doubled her jail term. Khaleda was found guilty in another corruption case the same year. Her party claims both the cases are politically motivated.

Robots

FROM PAGE 12

"The ocean is extremely important to the climate, to the sustainability of the earth, its supply of food, protein to enormous numbers of people. We don't monitor it very well," said Ken Johnson, GO-BGC's project director and a senior scientist at the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI) in Moss Landing, California.

Johnson said the sensors help survey a larger portion of the ocean more consistently than people collecting samples on ships, adding, "The goal is to be able to monitor the health of the ocean in places where people only go once a decade."

At the MBARI lab, team members have been busy calibrating each of the sensors, which will measure acidity, or pH levels, salinity, temperature, pressure, oxygen and nitrate.

US urges restraint in wake

FROM PAGE 12

The US had forcefully conveyed to the government of India that it too should act with restraint.

Commenting on the points, Hilaly complained India says one thing and does something quite different. He cited Indian involvement in a ceremony just across the border in East Pakistan announcing establishment of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh. He also condemned Indian handling of the Pakistan deputy high commission problem in Calcutta. India's objective was to internationalise East Pakistan situation to the extent possible and in process involve other countries in its efforts, he added.

Hilaly, however, gave assurance that the Pakistan government wished to avoid providing any pretext that India might use as *casus belli*. He indicated that the Pakistan army was staying away from the Indian border.

On the situation of East Pakistan, Hilaly said a military "mopping up" operation would be complete in about five days. He dismissed threats of monsoon rains as inhibition to military operation and also dismissed threat of terrorist assassinations of pro-Pakistan Bangladeshis.

He referred to the appeal by Tikka Khan to politicians, Awami League members and even rebel military to associate with the government or rejoin army. He asserted that they would not be shot. In fact foreign press would be invited back to bear witness to the return of East Pakistan to normalcy. He added that restoration of port operations in Chittagong and Chalna was given top priority.

In a somewhat heated reference to possible international assistance, the Pakistan ambassador strongly criticised ICRC intervention through sending plane from Geneva without permission of the Pakistan government. He asserted that ICRC vice president had opposed the move

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

Indian hospitals run

FROM PAGE 12

for medicine and oxygen, and stop hoarding and black marketeering.

"Every state should ensure that no oxygen tanker, whether it is meant for any state, is stopped or gets stranded," he was quoted as saying in a statement.

Daily infections hit 332,730, up from 314,835 the previous day, when India set a record that surpassed a US figure of 297,430 new cases set in

but "Indian influence" had prevailed.

Hilaly went on to accuse foreigners in East Pakistan of strong partisanship and total acceptance of Bangalee charges against the Pakistan government.

"Americans in Dacca are anti-West Pakistani," Hilaly said. Despite these feelings about foreign offers of relief aid, Hilaly expressed his personal view that Pakistan government would ultimately accept such aid.

As to the meeting with Indian Ambassador Jha, Sisco reported that he had told him of US humanitarian concern, and indicated that the US was considering what contributions it might make if some international programme was mounted.

PAKISTAN ALTERS IMPORTING POLICY

The Pakistani government, in a press note released today, banned the import of 46 kinds of goods ranging from razor blades to refrigerators.

Explaining the ban, to last until June, and several other changes in import policy, Pakistan said: "The dislocation of trade and industry during recent weeks has resulted in pressure on the balance of payments position. The government has therefore decided to take immediate steps to rectify the situation."

Banned items are basic goods and luxuries. They include many kinds of motor vehicles, bicycles, phonograph records, gas heaters, earthenware toilets, thermos bottles, television sets, hurricane lanterns, enameled bathtubs, musical instruments, cameras, fountain pens, dates, cigars, shaving brushes and toothbrushes. No penalties for violating the bans were given, and no estimates have been made public yet of the amount of foreign exchange that the government hopes to save.

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

SPECIAL REPORT

Unity is strength

Civil society groups pave the way for ending child marriage

ANWAR ALI

While experts have been urging speedy improvement of Bangladesh's worrying child marriage rate, some civil society groups have shown the path to resolving the issue. The groups have volunteered to defend young girls' rights in four districts of the country's Rajshahi division. Even during the coronavirus pandemic, the groups' strategies have restrained the illegal practice by building a wider network, involving government officials, and using supportive laws.

The groups have been pioneered by people like Moriam Begum, 36, one of the civil society group members from Sapahar Upazila in Naogaon district. From a simple homemaker, she rose as an Upazila-level leader stopping at least 20 cases of child marriage and dealing with several incidents of domestic violence since 2018. "We've changed the situation in our locality and areas surrounding us," she says. "Child marriage was a weekly affair three years ago. It has now become a phenomenon that occurs after more than a month or so," she adds.

believes girls become ready for marriage as soon as they begin menstruating. Others even consider girls to be burdens on the family. "I faced a lot of threats from villagers who opposed our activities," she adds.

But Moriam had a strategy - to unite more people willing to end child marriage and advance through effective discussions. She widened her network with other conscious people in her union and beyond. They established the network's connections with local government leaders, law enforcers, administrative officials and national level development workers. Whenever the group members came to know of a child marriage case, they counselled the involved families; when counselling failed, they called the national call centre or sought interventions of law enforcers. They learnt about different social safety net opportunities using the Right to Information Act of 2009 and arranged allowances for families to help them support their girls.

Moriam and her group members were able to achieve all of this after coming across a human rights development project of NETZ.



Girls are taking self-defence training and disseminating the knowledge in their neighbourhood in Chapainawabganj.

4,800 students on women's rights, preventing violence against women and democratic practices. Allied, these groups have successfully stopped at least 300 child marriages and addressed 1500 cases of gender-based violence. The CSO members facilitated access to social safety net services for 13762 people from the local government, institutes and public authorities during the project period between January 2018 and December 2020.

The project has ended, but the activities of the volunteers are still going strong. Amina Khatun, the Upazila women affairs officer in Sapahar Upazila, appreciates the activities of the groups. "I have attended two of their programmes in the last six months. I was amazed by their enthusiasm. They love their job, and that's why they are successful in making people understand that child marriage is a crime," she says.

"Although it was a small-scale project, its impact is massive," says Akramul Haque, Chief Executive Officer of DASCOH, who implemented the NETZ project in Naogaon and Chapainawabganj districts. The civil society members identified that most child marriages used to occur in collusion with the local marriage registrars and Notary Public. The civil society groups drew the attention of district-level officials and assisted in taking actions against child marriage across the district," mentions Haque.

Moriam Begum continues to share stories about her groups' activities. At the end of 2020, she came to know about a girl in Sironti village who became pregnant at the age of 12, within two months of her marriage. Moriam and her group reached out to help her. "We discovered she was ill and unable to speak up due to the trauma and torture she had endured. It seemed she would not survive,"

shares Moriam. The girl used to go to school before marriage and was among the healthy children of the village. After her marriage, she had to face excessive torture for dowry and had to do all household chores. Moriam's group rescued the girl and admitted her to a hospital. Later they helped her get a divorce. The girl's father repented and said that he didn't know about the laws that could help his daughter. The girl, who is yet to recover from her trauma, is still undergoing treatment.

In late 2019, a girl of Tatoi village was married to a 31-year-old man when she was only 11 with barely any understanding about her menstruation. Her marriage occurred after the death of her mother and her father's second marriage. She was raped by her husband every day. Once she went to visit her parents, she refused to return to her husband. Her parents were negligent towards her mental and physical changes and were insisting on her return. When her in-laws went to take her to her husband one day, she fled from home. "A businessman of Sapahar market rescued her," recalls Moriam. The girl later told Moriam that she had run because she didn't dare to end her own life. "We talked to her parents and in-laws, but they were hell-bent on preserving her marriage," says Moriam. She had to shelter the girl in her own home for two weeks. Later the girl was returned to her parents upon her father's assurance that he would not force the girl to go to her husband's house. Within a few days, Moriam's group assisted the girl in getting a divorce. A few weeks later, the father attempted to marry her off again, but this time, she informed the group members. She was later shifted to one of her relative's houses and is now studying at high school.

"Despite our continuous watch, some marriages are taking place beyond our

knowledge. Parents are 'tricking' us by taking their girls outside the villages for their marriage," shares Moriam.

"A child marriage was taking place in a running microbus. We stopped it after receiving information from the microbus driver," says Iftexhar Alam, a member of the civil society group of Moharajpur union in Chapainawabganj. He said that the girl's parents were only convinced after the local administration gave them cattle and other facilities. Alam was among a total of ten activists under the NETZ project who shared similar stories. All of the activists mentioned they feel the need for expanding the villager network to all villages. "If the network extended to every village in the country, none would be able to marry off their girl children. Most child marriages are ending in divorce and injuries to the girls, after all," adds Alam.

While talking about the overall impact of the project, Shahidul Islam, Director, NETZ, comments: "Besides the tremendous work carried out by the local CSOs, I think, the most important impact of the project is the emergence of high school girls and boys as future representatives of CSOs for their community. Girls are taking self-defence training and disseminating the knowledge in their neighbourhood. Girls and boys are preparing harassment maps to stop gender-based violence at public places in their localities, which has been one of the critical causes for early marriage. They are developing theatre scripts on the negative consequences of child marriage and performing them for mass awareness. Many active youths have also become the contact points for girls at risk of early marriage. These young CSOs are keeping close contact with the relevant local authorities responsible for stopping child marriage. They have plenty of success stories of how they have stopped child marriages and gender-based harassment in public places."

He further adds that these young people are willing to stay with their community and continue their good work even after the project ended. The local authority, along with relevant government officials, should use this strength in the future. Their activities should be encouraged and followed up regularly.

"Our experience shows that there are progressive laws for preventing gender-based violence, but what is missing is proper implementation. Lack of local community engagement in planning and implementing gender-related activities is one of the major concerns that hold us back on this. Effective partnership between local CSOs, including youth and government authorities, can ensure our girls are living their lives to the fullest," says Shahidul Islam.

Anwar Ali is Rajshahi Correspondent of The Daily Star



CSO groups hold meetings regularly to make the community members aware of women rights and gender-based violence in Chapainawabganj.

"The fate of the girls would upset me, but at the time, I didn't have any idea about the laws and the ways to prevent these incidents," shares Moriam. After learning about the laws, specifically the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017 and the Domestic Violence Act of 2010 that protect the rights of girls and women, she faced another obstacle - the society.

"Stopping a child marriage is not an easy task. You can't do it alone," she says. The job is especially difficult in a country where the majority of the underprivileged population

NETZ, a German-Bangladeshi development organisation, was implementing a project titled "Strengthened Civil Society Projects and Promotes Women's Rights." Financially assisted by the European Union and locally partnered with DASCOH and WE CAN, NETZ implemented the project in 32 unions of eight Upazila in the four districts of Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, Pabna and Sirajganj. They trained at least 4168 civil society members in 172 groups, provided self-defence training to 660 students in 32 schools and educated