

Brick kilns killing their dream of education

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

Seventeen-year-old Sumi Akter was seen walking on a brick kiln premises with her three-year-old daughter Ayesha Akhter in her lap.

Dreaming of a better future, she ended up at the brick kiln, where she has been working as a cook and her husband Rahul Amin serves as a brickfield worker.

Being deprived of proper education, Sumi, a victim of child marriage, came to this brick kiln from Khulna's Paikgachha upazila along with her husband in search of a better life.

Though they want to educate their daughter Ayesha, there is little opportunity for education as they usually work in the brick kiln for six months a year and stay at their village homes half of the year.

During a recent visit to the brick kiln correspondent saw about 20 to 25 houses have been built on the west side of the kiln, where the workers reside with their families.

While talking some of the inmates of those houses, this correspondent came to know that owner of the brick kiln built those houses so that workers can live there along with their families.

A bamboo fence has been erected



Deprived of educational facilities, 21-year-old Minarul has been working as a labourer at MRC Bricks in Manikganj for the last four months. He has been engaged with the profession for the last couple of years now.

PHOTO: STAR



around the houses so that children cannot go out of their houses and stay safe. Champa Begum, who was seen sitting in front of her room with her 10-month-old boy Ariyan, said her husband Mohammad Ensan carries out the backed brick from inside the kiln by a rickshaw-van. One of Champa's neighbours Amena said her father, who also hails from Khulna's Paikgachha, does

the same hazardous work.

Meanwhile, 19-year-old Brishti Akter was seen playing her 2-year-old son Rakib Hossain, and 15-year-old Beauty Akter, who got married only four months ago, was looking after Jamshed Ali and Taslima Begum's 5-year-old daughter Jamela Akter.

Brishti, Beauty and Taslima, who were gossiping sitting in front of Brishti's house, said they came to the brick kiln along with their husbands from Koira village in Paikgachha about four months ago.

They will stay at the brickfield premises for at least two more months and then return to their respective village homes.

Usually, their husbands work in shrimp enclosures for half of the year, and work as brick kiln labourers in the remaining six months of the year, Brishti said.

Another teenager Rumi Khatun said her husband Abir Sana has been working in the brickfield for the last six years.

She has deprived of proper education as her parents married her off at the age of 14, Rumi said, adding that she does not want her daughter to remain uneducated just like her.

Twenty-year-old Minarul, who was seen driving a rickshaw-van with his mother Sakhina Begum sitting on the top, said his mother and father Zahirul has been working in the brick kiln for the last four months.

He could not continue his study due to extreme poverty, Minarul said.

While talking to a number of workers and their family members at the brick kiln,

it was learned that despite strong desire, they could not educate their children due to poverty.

They cannot send their children to schools as they often have to go distant places in search of work, many workers said.

Moreover, as they remain engaged in the work all day long, they do not get the opportunity to take their children to school.

Liakat Ali, owner of MRC Bricks, said a total of 150 workers are currently serving in his brick kiln and about 100 of them hail from Khulna's Paikgachha.

"I have visited Paikgachha on a number of occasions and found that being driven by poverty many of them come to our region and work as brick kiln labourers," Liakat said.

The images of almost all the 112 brick kilns in Manikganj are the same, he said, adding that the workers' children are being totally deprived of proper education facilities.

Manikganj Deputy Commissioner Rehana Akhter said she was unaware about any children staying in brick kiln premises and will try to bring them under educational facilities.

Rawalpindi commissioner says helped

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heinous crime, I will hand myself over to the police," he said, also implicating the head of the election commission and the country's top judge.

The election commission rejected Chattha's allegations, but said in a statement that it would "hold an enquiry".

Leading advocacy group the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said after Chattha's announcement that the "involvement of the state bureaucracy in rigging in Pakistan is beginning to be exposed".

Candidates from the PML-N and PPP claimed most of the seats

in Rawalpindi, sweeping aside candidates loyal to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan — the target of a sweeping crackdown.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party called nationwide protests against the alleged rigging on Saturday.

A small number of supporters took to the streets in major urban centres, with the largest gathering of around 4,000 people in its stronghold northern city of Peshawar.

In the central city of Lahore, police detained senior party member Salman Akram Raja and around a dozen supporters — surrounding the party headquarters — but said

they had all been released by late afternoon.

Senior PTI official Ali Muhammad Khan said after the protests that Chattha's statement proved his party was cheated.

"We must be returned our mandate," he told reporters in Islamabad.

PTI defied a months-long crackdown that shattered its campaigning and forced candidates to run as independents, gaining more votes than any other party.

But it has been unwilling to enter a coalition with its opponents, paving the way for PML-N to form the next government.

270 mourners held at events in Russia

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Western leaders led by US President Joe Biden paid tribute to Navalny's courage and, without citing evidence, accused President Vladimir Putin of being responsible for the death. Britain said there would be consequences for Russia.

The Kremlin said the West's reaction was unacceptable and "absolutely rabid". Putin has yet to comment on Navalny's death.

Meanwhile, a protest monitoring group said more than 270 people had been arrested across Russia at meetings and memorials to Navalny since his death was announced.

Elsewhere, British foreign minister David Cameron said UK will take action over the death in prison and it is calling on other countries to do likewise.

"There should be consequences when appalling human rights outrages like this take place," Cameron told Sky News.

"What we do is we look at whether there are individual people that are responsible and whether there are individual actions that we can take."

Navalny's 69-year-old mother, Lyudmila, braved Arctic temperatures of minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 degrees Fahrenheit) yesterday to visit the penal colony where her son perished.

She was given an official death notice stating the time of death as 2:17pm local time (0917 GMT) on February 16, Navalny's spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh, told Reuters.

"When Alexei's lawyer and mother arrived at the colony this morning, they were told that the cause of Navalny's death was sudden death syndrome," Ivan Zhdanov, who directs Navalny's

Anti-Corruption Foundation, said on social media platform X.

"Sudden death syndrome" is a vague term for different cardiac syndromes that cause sudden cardiac arrest and death.

It was also unclear where Navalny's body was, his team said. His mother had been told that the body had been taken to Salekhard, the town near the prison complex but when she arrived at the morgue it was closed.

When contacted by Navalny's lawyer, the morgue said it did not have Navalny's body, Yarmysh said.

Later, they were told by officials that the body would not be handed over until the investigation was complete, though earlier they had been told that the investigation had discovered no traces of criminality.

"Right now we don't have access to the body and we don't know for sure where it is, and we demand that the Russian authorities immediately give Alexei's body to his family," Yarmysh said in an interview.

An employee at the only morgue in Salekhard told Reuters that Navalny's body had not arrived.

The death of Navalny, a former lawyer, robs the disparate Russian opposition of its most charismatic and courageous leader as Putin prepares for an election that will keep the former KGB spy in power until at least 2030.

Navalny's supporters — including in the West — had cast Navalny as a Russian version of South Africa's Nelson Mandela, who would one day walk free to lead the country.

Some Russians, though, dismissed such a view as a classic case of wishful thinking, and pointed to an opinion

poll showing that most Russians disapproved of him and that Putin was vastly more popular.

Russian authorities viewed Navalny and his supporters as extremists with links to the CIA intelligence agency, which they say is seeking to destabilise Russia. Navalny always dismissed accusations he was a CIA asset.

Some Russians laid flowers in Moscow and other Russian cities to honour Navalny, though overnight hundreds of flowers and candles were removed in black bags.

In central Moscow, several dozen roses and carnations remained in the softening snow on Saturday at the monument to the victims of Soviet repression, which sits in the shadow of the former KGB headquarters on Lubyanka Square.

PM for trade

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"The relations between the countries are getting stronger day by day," he said, adding that the two leaders discussed the issues during the meeting.

Quoting Jaishankar, Hasan said, "Our relations will further be closer in the days ahead."

Bangladesh Ambassador to Germany Md Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and PM's Deputy Press Secretary Md Noorelahi Mina were present during the briefing.

Hasina arrived in Munich on February 15 on a three-day official visit to join the Munich Security Conference 2024.

Upon completion of the tour, she will leave tonight and is scheduled to reach Dhaka tomorrow.

5 Rohingyas reach Cox's Bazar on boat

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injured in the fighting between Myanmar troops and Arakan Army in the Rakhine State."

However, neither Teknaf's Border Guard Bangladesh nor the upazila administration have issued any statement in this regard.

The boat was at the jetty until at least 8:00pm, when the report was filed.

Mohammad Zubair, chairman of Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, said Rohingyas living in the of Nalbunnya Patancha, Nurulla and Hassurata in the Rakhine State have moved to either Maungdaw township or safer places due to the fighting in and around their villages.

Speaking to this correspondent on Friday, he said around 400-500 Rohingyas took shelter on boats after fleeing their homes in Nalbunnya area of Rakhine.

"Many of them were in contact with their relatives in the Cox's Bazar

camps as they got cellular signals from Bangladesh. However, we lost contact with them today [yesterday]. They might have taken shelter further inland, out of mobile network reach."

He added that they also received information about some other boats where Rohingyas have taken shelter. "Those boats are anchored in different canals connected to the Naf."

Meanwhile, locals of Shahporir Dwpip are living in a state of panic due to loud sounds of explosions and gunfire coming from the Myanmar side of the border.

The sounds of gunshots and explosions are getting louder, which suggests the fighting between Myanmar troops and the rebel Arakan Army has further intensified along the border of Ghumdhum union in Bandarban's Naikhongchhari and moved towards areas opposite to Hnila, Teknaf town and Shahporir Dwpip in Teknaf.

Union Parishad Member Abdus Salam said, "Around 10:00am, loud

sounds of explosions and gunfire were heard and the fighting continued intermittently until 2:00pm."

He said the intensity of the fighting was apparently less yesterday compared to that of the past two days.

"The Naf, flowing between Bangladesh and Myanmar, is at least three kilometers wide at this point, so there is no risk. But the people are frightened because of the loud sounds."

Commanding Officer of Teknaf-2 BGB Lt Colonel Mohiuddin Ahmed said, "We are keeping an eye on the border. I heard news of shelling inside Myanmar this morning [yesterday]. BGB has strengthened its patrols at the borders."

Earlier this month, countless bullets and mortar shells crossed the border, forcing people from neighbourhoods along the border in Bandarban to flee. Besides damaging property, the bullets and explosives killed at least two people and injured several others in Bangladesh.

Pabna dist admin leasing out rivers

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legal mandates."

Abdul Hamid Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) Pabna unit, said, "While a jalmahal may be leased, manipulating the system to occupy stretches of rivers under the guise

of leases, often with administrative support, raises serious concerns about powerful individuals exploiting public resources."

He demanded that the district administration reverse its decision.

Contacted, Farista Karim, assistant commissioner (RDC) and

member secretary of the Jalmahal Management Committee in Pabna, said, "This list of 63 waterbodies that are leased predates our current administration. We are only referencing existing records for the management of these resources."

40-DAY JOB SCHEME Wait for wages gets longer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Even after over a month of completion of the government's 40 day job scheme project labourers in five upazilas of the district are yet to receive their wages.

A total of 8,368 labourers in five upazilas started working under the government's work scheme in November last year and completed their work in the first week of January this year.

As per the agreement, each worker is expected to get a total of Tk 16,000 at Tk 400 per day.

According to Lalmonirhat Relief and Rehabilitation Office sources, the government is implementing the 40-day job scheme project from November till April every year.

Usually, members from the ultra-poor families get the opportunity to work under the project.

Under the project, the beneficiaries mostly do earth filling work along the unpaved roads and premises of different mosques, temple, graveyards, crematoriums, and educational institutions.

After completion of the work, the concerned ministry directly pays the workers' wages through mobile financial services.



PHOTO: STAR

Beneficiaries under the government's 40-day job scheme project in Lalmonirhat are yet to receive their wages even after completion of the project.

One of the beneficiaries Sufia Bewa of Bhelabari village in Aditumari upazila said she has been working as a labourer under the government's 40-day job scheme for the past seven years, but they never remain unpaid for so long.

Though they used to get paid on time every year, she said, adding that their work has been completed nearly six weeks ago this year, but they have not received any wages yet.

Due to non-payment of wages on time, she has been running her family by borrowing money from local moneylenders, she said.

Kajoli Begum, another labourer from Bhatibari village in Sadar upazila, said they have been repeatedly contacting the project implementation officer (PIO) for their wages, but yet to get any satisfactory answer.

Abdur Rahim, a member of Mughalhat Union Parishad (UP), said the PIO's office is not taking necessary steps in order to pay the workers' wages.

Sadar Upazila Project Implementation Officer (PIO) Mashhur Rahman said all the beneficiaries will get their wages within a week.

Japan successfully launches

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lunar surface.

The H3 launched from the Tanegashima Space Center in southwestern Japan at 9:22am (0022 GMT).

Cheers and applause could be heard from the JAXA control centre after the agency's live stream announced the H3's engines had successfully burned, meaning the rocket had made it into orbit.

Developed jointly by JAXA and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, the H3 is the successor to the H-IIA launch system, which debuted in 2001.

Designed for "high flexibility, high reliability, and high cost performance", the craft will "maintain Japan's autonomous access to space", JAXA says.

Unlike the reusable Falcon 9, the H3 is expendable, but scientists say the trial of its world-first technology

is significant.

"The H3 rocket has a unique and novel first-stage engine that delivers greater thrust compared to state-of-the-art rockets," said Michele Trenti, director of the Melbourne Space Laboratory at the University of Melbourne.

The H3 "has the potential to be the most cost-effective rocket", making the exploration of the solar system more affordable.