

Breaking the Silence

New modules launched to combat abuse among children of sex workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Children of sex workers face high risk of sexual abuse due to their mothers' profession, said speakers at an event yesterday.

"The Formal Journey of Module", organised by Breaking the Silence, was held at The Daily Star Centre's conference hall in the capital.

Two modules to raise awareness in this regard and in turn, prevent sexual abuse and commercial exploitation of children were launched at the event.

The modules look to make female sex workers and their children aware of their rights, safety and avenues for assistance through dialogue. They also aim at highlighting the vulnerabilities of this marginalised demographic, and provide necessary support and resources to prevent future victimisation.

Around 3,641 sex workers are active at ten brothels across the country. These places are home to 1,287 children, including 653 girls, according to a visual presentation at the event.

Breaking the Silence has

been focused on safeguarding children's rights since 1994, with the aim to promote awareness, effectiveness, and advocacy in underdeveloped communities, said Roksana Sultana, executive director of the rights organisation.

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Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal, director general of social welfare department, said, "Many such children are studying and gradually integrating into the mainstream by moving away from their mother's profession. If brought forth, their success stories can inspire others."

Dr Moktar Hossain, director of the social welfare department, also spoke at the event among others.



Workers welding the ceiling of a footbridge on Savar-Aricha highway while pedestrians, including children, pass from beneath. Their lack of safety gear and measures not just puts their life at risk but also compromises the safety of others. The photo was taken in Bank Town area, Savar yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Bhutanese King arrives tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck will be arriving in Dhaka tomorrow on a four-day visit.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin and the First Lady will receive the king and Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Monday morning.

During the visit, the Bhutanese king is scheduled to hold meetings with President Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud will meet the king at his place of residence, officials concerned said.

Bangladesh and Bhutan are likely to sign a number of MoUs.

"Bhutanese businesses are eager to expand their businesses, but Bhutan does not have much plain land. So, they have planned

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Five more arrested over Faisal murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five more have been arrested over the murder of Faisal Russel, a craftsman from Pallabi, in Mirpur on March 16.

They are Akash alias Tan Akash, Fozle Rabbi alias Hitar Rabbi alias Golakata Rabbi, both prime suspects of the murder, and their associates Md Imran, Rasel Kazi, and Nayan, disclosed Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday.

The arrests were made from Narsingdi and Gazipur on Friday. The murder was a result of a feud between two teen gangs—"Paper Sani" and "Golakata Rabbi" over drug money and establishing supremacy, said Rab. The two groups locked into a clash on March 15. The next day, Faisal Russel, and his friend Rashed alias Rana, both members of "Paper Sunny", were hacked indiscriminately in broad daylight by the Golakata Rabbi gang members, said Khandaker Al Moin, director of the legal and media wing of Rab.

Foyzal succumbed to injuries while undergoing treatment at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital on the day, he added.

Rab recovered the blood-stained knife and machete used in the murder from a garden near the crime scene upon arresting Rabbi and Akash.

"Arrestee Rabbi earlier used to work as hitman of the Paper Sunny gang. But he left the gang four

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In search of pure drinking water

Shrimp enclosures worsening crisis in coastal areas

DIPANKAR ROY

When Sonaban Bibi, 62, got married 46 years ago, there was a pond next to her house, from which she managed to fetch drinking water.

However, some 20 years ago the water of that pond in Betbunia village of Khulna's Paikgacha upazila became unfit for consumption, due to salt intrusion caused by a nearby shrimp enclosure.

So for the last 20 years, Sonaban has been fetching drinking water from a pond in nearby Golbunia village, 1.5 km away from her house.

Fetching three to four pitchers of water daily for her family of nine remains a strenuous task, despite the assistance provided by her sons and daughters-in-law.

This phenomenon, unfortunately, is far from unique. Bangladesh's coastal regions have long grappled with a lack of safe drinking water, a crisis fueled by a multitude of factors. The country's geographical location, low river flows caused by upstream barrages, mismanagement of coastal polders, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events all play a significant role. But a more insidious contributor is emerging — shrimp culture. While this aquaculture practice provides a livelihood for many, it comes at a heavy cost. Shrimp enclosures need saline water to thrive and as a result, salinity intrusion increases with the expansion of shrimp culture. The extent of salinity in groundwater is also increasing because of continuous

shrimp cultivation in the fresh agricultural land. Residents are forced to travel vast distances for usable water, a daily struggle that Sonaban Bibi knows all too well.

"It's a year-round routine, whether it's winter, summer, or rainy season, we need to fetch water from Golbunia," said Sonaban, when she was returning

"I don't know where will we go if the water of the pond in Golbunia turns salty as well," she added.

The story is the same for people living in 32 villages of Soladana union of Paikgacha. Around 34,000 people deals with drinking water crisis due to saltwater intrusion.



home after fetching water with a big pitcher last week.

While we try to harvest rainwater during the rainy season, it still is not enough to run the house, she said, adding, "I spent my whole life drinking pond water, as there are no functioning tubewells here."

Rafuza Begum, another resident of Betbunia, said, "Earlier there were five ponds around our village. Now you can't drink water from any of them. Saline water from shrimp enclosures has contaminated the ponds."

Meanwhile, at least 10,000 people of seven villages depend on the pond in Golbunia. However, that last resort is currently at risk of saline-water intrusion, say locals.

Chairman of Soladana union, Abdul Mannan Ghazi said, "All 32 villages are saltwater-prone areas. Saltwater shrimps are cultivated everywhere, which has caused the water in the ponds to become salty. Six government ponds have been abandoned for years due to saline water intrusion and lack of renovation."

"Only 25 percent of households have been able to get water tanks from government. Some of the solvent people have bought tanks by themselves, but most can't do so," he said.

"Only 8 to 10 shallow tubewells are functional, while there are no deep tubewells in the union. So the water shortage is acute throughout the year, and even more during summer," he added.

Saikat Mallick, fisheries officer of Paikgacha, said, shrimp farming is being conducted on a large scale in 10 unions and one municipal area of the upazila.

"It is the largest saltwater shrimp farming zone of Khulna. This year 3940 salt water shrimp gher is being cultivated on 17,075 hectares of land. Out of this only Soladana Union has 1,037 shrimp enclosures on a plot of 3,495," he added.

Md Akmol Hossain, executive engineer of Department of Public Health Engineering told The Daily Star that deep tube wells are not functioning anywhere in ten unions and one municipal area of the upazila. Even the government does not give allotment to any deep tube well. There are 42,00 shallow tube wells in all the upazilas, one-third of which are functional, while others are lying idle.

Some NGOs provide a few water technologies and sources including Rain Water Harvesting (RWH), Pond Sand Filters (PSF), and Reverse Osmosis (RO). But it only functions for a short time. Thus, they drink poisoned water from local sources, he added.



Workers cleaning up the chemical factory that went ablaze early yesterday in Islambagh, Chawkbazar. The fire originated around 3:00am and was doused around 6:00am. The photo was taken in the afternoon.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Gulshan Fire doused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire that broke out at the AWR Tower near Gulshan-1 circle in Dhaka yesterday afternoon has been doused.

The fire originated on the eighth floor of the 17-storey building around 4:20pm, Rafi Al Faruk, duty officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star.

According to witnesses, the fire was extinguished around 4:50pm.

Rafi Al Faruk said three fire engines reached the spot around 4:35pm. But locals doused the fire before that, he added.

The fire might have originated from the outdoor unit of an air conditioner, the official added.

At least 27,624 fires killed 102 people and injured 281 last year, compared to the previous year, according to data from the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Bijoy Express derailment was avoidable: JS body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on railways ministry yesterday said the derailment of Bijoy Express on March 17 at Tejer Bazar in Cumilla's Nangalkot upazila could have been averted.

The committee came up with the observation after visiting the accident site to take a first-hand experience about the accident.

ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury, ruling Awami League lawmaker and chairman of the parliamentary watchdog, led the committee. Railways Minister and a member of the committee Zillul Hakim, and its other members Gazi Shafiqur Rahman and Nurun Nahar, were also present among others.

They spoke to several eyewitnesses, who blamed negligence of railways staffs behind the incident that saw nine compartments of the Jamalpur-bound train from Chattogram derailed, leaving several injured.

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MEGHNA TRAWLER CAPSIZE Two more bodies recovered

STAR REPORT

Two more bodies were recovered from Meghna river yesterday after a trawler capsized in the river after a collision with a bulk carrier between Kishoreganj's Bhairab and Brahmanbaria's Ashuganj last night.

The victims are Mousumi Akter, 25, wife of missing police constable Shohel Rana, of Fatehabad village under Debidwar upazila of Cumilla, and Aradhya Dey, 10, daughter of Tuton Dey of Amlapara area in Bhairab municipal town.

Three bodies have been recovered so far in this incident while six people are still missing, said Inspector KM Moniruzzaman Chowdhury, in-charge of Bhairab River Police Outpost.

Their bodies have been handed over to their relatives, he said.

A diving team of Fire Service and Civil Defence recovered the bodies from the submerged trawler in the afternoon, he added.

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