



Piles of trash lay on the bank of the Buriganga near the Kamrangirchar area. While talks about restoring Dhaka's rivers and canals continue, this is the ground level reality of how these water bodies and their surrounding areas continue to be polluted over the years. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Committed to ensuring rights of Garos Says Rizwana

UNB, Dhaka

Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan has reaffirmed the government's commitment to protecting the rights of the Garo community.

During her speech as the chief guest at the Wangala festival yesterday, held at Banani Bidyaniketan School and College, she emphasised that legal measures would be introduced to safeguard the community's land rights, water rights, and their ability to extract forest resources.

Wangala, a significant cultural event for the Garo people, symbolises the deep connection between nature and human society, celebrating the harvest season with gratitude toward nature.

Rizwana urged all to protect the environment and preserve natural resources, as the Garo community has long done.

She also highlighted the government's ongoing efforts to address conflicts between forest dependent communities and the forest department.

## Death anniversary of Begum Fazilatunnessa

STAR REPORT

Today is the 9th death anniversary of Begum Fazilatunnessa.



She was wife of late Lt AM Ataul Haque, a freedom fighter of Bangladesh Navy who played an important role in building the Naval Force after the Liberation War in 1971. Fazilatunnessa, mother of 10 children, died on November 9, 2015 at the age of 80.

## PRAYER TIMING

NOVEMBER 9  
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 5:00 12:45 3:45 5:25 7:00  
JAMAAT 5:35 1:15 4:00 5:30 7:30  
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Star journo Ahsan wins DRU Best Reporting Award



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Daily Star's Senior Staff Correspondent Ahsan Habib and 10 other journalists won the Best Reporting Award-2023 in four categories given by the Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) and Desh TV on November 8.

Habib won the prize in the print media category for his reports on "Aamar Bond not IFIC's".

Mahmudul Hasan Nayon, staff reporter of Daily Prothom Alo, also received the best reporting award in the same category for his report on "Benazir earns PhD degree from DU without enrollment qualifications".

Financial Express's two reporters Jasim Uddin Haroon, and Farhan Ferdous won the award in the same category for their joint news on "Women investors outperform men, challenging stereotypes".

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul handed over the awards at a ceremony at Dhaka Club as the chief guest. Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan spoke on the occasion as special guest.

DBC Television's senior reporter Muhammad Arafatul Momen, News Time BD's senior reporter Masud Mostahid, and Ekattor TV's reporter Parvez Nahid Reza won the award in the electronic media category.

In the online category, Jagonews24's Yeasir Arafat Ripon, and Touhiduzzaman Tonmoy from same news outlet, and Dhaka Post's Md Jubayer Hossain received the award. Abu Saleh Rony, senior reporter of Daily Samakal, received best reporting award in the Liberation War category.

## Unite to build

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The army chief made these remarks as the chief guest at the National Buddhist Religious Conference 2024 and the auspicious Kathina Robe Offering Ceremony, held at the International Buddhist Monastery in Merul Badda.

The event was organised by the Bangladesh Buddhist Federation, said the release.

In his speech, the army chief urged the residents of the hill tracts, including both indigenous and Bangalee communities, to work together towards peace and harmony in the region.

He extended his heartfelt congratulations to everyone present for the Kathina Robe Offering Ceremony and thanked the attendees who traveled from different parts of Bangladesh, including the hill tracts.

He highlighted the importance of developing the tourism industry in the hill tracts, while preserving local languages, culture, and diversity.

He voiced optimism that the establishment of more schools, colleges, and universities in these areas would empower local students to showcase their talents both domestically and internationally.

Concluding his address, he expressed sincere appreciation to the Buddhist Federation and law enforcement agencies for supporting the peaceful observance of Buddhist ceremonies.

On October 10, a delegation from the Buddhist Federation paid a courtesy call on him at the Army Headquarters, during which he pledged financial and security support for the Prabarana Purnima and Kathina Robe Offering Ceremony in the three hill districts.

Following through on this commitment, he recently presented a Tk 1 crore donation cheque on behalf of the Bangladesh Army to the Buddhist Federation, the release said.

## Jamaat ameer

FROM PAGE 3

homes. They are abducted and falsely accused of sedition," he said. "Top Jamaat leaders were killed in the name of justice on false and fabricated charges of war crimes."

Referring to Hasina, he said, "She said she wouldn't run away, but she fled to her beloved country."

While refraining from directly naming India, he emphasised, "We respect our neighbours and do not believe in creating hostility. But we also expect reciprocal respect and good neighbourly behaviour."

"Sheikh Hasina faces over 150 charges in Bangladesh. If requested by our courts, we urge our neighbours to hand her over," he said.

Outlining Jamaat's vision for governance, he promised a corruption-free administration.

"We will not take bribes. We will not let anyone do so," he asserted.

## Childhood lost in rolling biris

FROM PAGE 3

when pressed about the young faces working around him. "The parents might sometimes bring their children, but they're not our responsibility," he said.

Authorities also play a complicit role by rarely inspecting the facilities or enforcing regulations that could protect these children.

Prolonged exposure to tobacco dust can cause lung disease, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and severe impediments to both physical and mental growth, said a report of Child Labor Unit of the Ministry of Labor and Employment in 2013.

### BIRI FACTORIES IN BARISHAL

In the Karikor Biri factory -- the oldest among Barishal's seven biri factories -- nearly 80 children could be seen hunched over, working long hours to keep up with production quotas.

They sit for hours on end, their backs hunched and fingers stained from handling raw tobacco.

Many of them suffer from persistent coughing. Mostly, parents were seen working side-by-side with their children.

With no childcare options, many women are left with little choice but to bring their children along. Infants and toddlers often sit on dirty factory floors, exposed to the same risks as their mothers.

Toddlers crawl through layers of tobacco dust, inhaling it, with health consequences that may only manifest years down the line.

Bangladesh ratified the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention back in 1999, a commitment to eliminate child labour from dangerous industries.

### CHILDREN AT RISK

Eleven-year-old Nurul Islam, a student of class six, one of the youngest workers at the Karikor Biri factory, took a shallow, rattling breath as he sat on a mat of discarded tobacco

leaves, coughing every few minutes. "It hurts when I breathe," he said, pausing to catch his breath. "But if we don't work, my family won't have enough to eat. My mother also works here."

"I can package 2,000 biris a day," said Nurul.

In another corner of the factory, nine-year-old Mithila, her face streaked with sweat and her fingers stained dark brown, echoed Nurul's words. "Sometimes, it feels like there's something stuck in my chest," she said.

"I see other kids cough and struggle to breathe, but we don't really talk about it. This is just how things are here."

Then there's 10-year-old Jahangir, who was seen rolling cigarettes with machine-like precision.

"My head hurts almost every day from the smell here," he said, squinting as he looked around the smoky room.

"When it's very bad, I go outside for some time, but I have to come back to help my parents, or I'll be behind on my work. I know it's not good for me, but I don't have a choice," he added.

Siddiqur Rahman, a former professor at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College, highlighted the significant link between tobacco use and the rising rates of tuberculosis (TB) in the region.

Rahman treats around 2,000 TB patients annually, with more than 60 percent of those cases linked to tobacco use. He said tobacco not only affects adults but also leads to serious health problems and even fatalities in children.

### AN INHERITED CURSE

Meanwhile, 19-year-old Fatema Akther was seen sitting cross-legged, rolling biris. Her 13-month-old son

lays cradled on her lap. "I started coming to the factory with my mother, Minara Begum, when I was just a child," she said. "Now, I'm married and have a son."

Her mother, Minara, aged 40, sat beside her, doing the same work.

She reminisced about her own beginnings in the factory. She used to come here each day with her own mother, Hajera Begum.

In another section, 28-year-old Shila Halder was working at her station. Shila's husband is employed by an NGO in Mehendiganj, but she continues to work here due to financial constraints.

Her four-year-old daughter sits beside her, eating her meal in silence, blending into the factory's routine.

Like Shila and Fatema, many mothers in these factories bring their toddlers and young children along because they have no other choice.

"The dust here makes my son cough all the time," says Shila, glancing anxiously at her daughter. "I worry about her health, but I have no place else to leave her."

### WAGE DISCREPANCIES

Permanent employees at the factory are paid Tk 90 for manufacturing and packaging 1,000 biris sticks. These workers hold permanent ID cards and receive direct payments from the factory owner. Orders are assigned based on these ID cards, with more experienced workers receiving larger orders. Senior workers are given a maximum order of 32,000 biris sticks per week, while newer employees are assigned only 16,000.

The factory owner provides the necessary paper and tobacco for production. However, due to the low wages, permanent workers subcontract the labour to local women and children for just Tk 35 to manufacture and package 1,000 biris.

The subcontracting process involves paying Tk 16 for crafting the paper stick, Tk 3 for filling it with tobacco, and Tk 16 for sealing and packaging the 1,000 biris.

As a result, permanent

employees make a profit of Tk 55 per 1,000 sticks. In the meantime, they often take on alternate jobs, such as driving auto-rickshaws or running tea stalls, while outsourcing the labour.

### WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

Hossain Niraji, inspector for the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments in Barishal, said, "Children above 14 years can work by fulfilling certain terms and conditions. If we receive information about children below this age threshold, we file cases."

According to the 2020-2021 database of the Divisional Child Labour Elimination Welfare Council, 129 children were removed from hazardous jobs, including around 40 from biri factories.

Bijoy Krishna Dey, managing director of Karikor Biri Company Limited, told The Daily Star, "We do not employ children in biri-making; it is strictly prohibited. We provide equipment to permanent workers and pay them wages. I'm unaware of any children working in the factory, but action will be taken if complaints arise."

During an inspection by the Department of Factories and a meeting of the Divisional Child Labour Elimination Welfare Council, it was acknowledged that children were involved in hazardous occupations such as biri making.

However, when discussing the elimination of child labour in biri factories, committee members argued that many children were brought to the factory by their parents for security reasons and were not technically considered child labourers.

Despite this, both the committee members and the parents admitted that the presence of children in the factory, and in some cases their involvement in work, contributed to significant harm and loss.

## Eggs thrown

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During the event, a group of unidentified individuals threw eggs at the demonstrators, including prominent theatre personality Mamunur Rashid.

Eyewitnesses said the incident occurred around 5:00pm, just as Mamunur was delivering his speech.

While speaking about the play's themes, he was interrupted by a commotion as unidentified individuals shouted, "Catch him, catch him!"

Protesters responded by chanting, "Natok Moder Odhikar Rukhbe Natok Shaddhyo Kar," demanding the right to perform freely.

Federation Secretary General Kamal Bayezid said, "As Mamunur bhai was nearing the end of his address, a group suddenly started throwing eggs and small stones."

Some in the group accused the theatre

workers of supporting the previous Awami League government and opposing the Anti-discrimination Student Movement.

Bayezid said around 25 individuals attempted to block the protest but refused to identify themselves. Police and army personnel on-site quickly intervened, diffusing the tension without any injuries or arrests.

In response, the Federation announced a nationwide demonstration set for November 15, during which a play will be staged at Shilpakala Academy.

Bayezid said a press conference will be held today at 11:00am in the BSA seminar hall to address the incident and ongoing challenges faced by theatre workers.

Inspector of Ramna Thana, Payel Hossain, confirmed the commotion but said no injuries or arrests were reported.

## A village of two

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Over time, the isolation has invited threats. Seeing the land's value, vested groups have made repeated attempts to pressure Sirajul to leave.

Despite filing a general diary with Ishwarganj Police Station to report these threats, Sirajul lives with the unsettling sense that his legacy here could come to an end.

Monwara shares her husband's worries, especially when she thinks of their grandson. Now living with his mother, he may never return to this land that his family has called home for generations.

"If he doesn't come back, the house will be empty after us," she said.

The thought of their home standing silent and abandoned is one of her deepest pains.

Their story has caught the attention of local authorities.

Razibpur Union Parishad chairman, Md Abdul Ali Fakir, said, "A two-member family in an entire village is rare in our country," he said.

Sarmina Sattar, the upazila nirbahi officer in Ishwarganj, has assured the couple that any threats from vested groups will be properly investigated, with steps taken to ensure their safety.

For now, Sirajul and Monwara remain, living in their cherished solitude and holding on to a place they consider sacred.

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1	1033426	GR-04 FY 2024-25	27.11.0000.304.25.307.24 dated: 07/11/2024	Procurement of Hydrazine Hydrate (N2H4), Tri-Sodium Phosphate (Na3PO4), Ammonium Hydroxide (N114011), Poly Aluminum Chloride (PAC), Sodium Hypochlorite, Anion Resin and Cation Resin for HRSG Dosing and Water Treatment Plant of Chandpur 150 MW CCPP, BPDB, Chandpur, Bangladesh.	28-11-2024 13.30	28-11-2024 14.00	28-11-2024 14.00

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For more details please contact to the PE's Support Desk (01755591658).

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29/11/2024  
(Md. Nannu Miah)  
ID No. 1-01304  
Director  
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