

From ridicule

FROM PAGE 3
based products from her production line named MA Jute Products, including jute yarn bags, office bags, tissue bags, pen holders and various decorative items. Currently, 22 women work regularly at her production unit, including eight working from their homes.

At present, products worth around Tk 1 lakh are sold from her production unit monthly. After all expenses, she earns around Tk 60,000 in profit.

During this time, she also provided training to around 8,000 individuals, including around 6,000 women, free of charge. For her selfless contribution to help women achieve self-reliance, she was recognised as the district's best 'Joyita' in 2022. In the same year, she received the Best Youth Award from the then prime minister.

Meanwhile, Asma completed her graduation from Damudya Government College in Shariatpur in 2020.

Recently, she began exporting her jute products to Oman, and discussions are currently underway to export her products to Italy and the UAE as well. The Department of Environment in Shariatpur has also collected jute yarn bags in an effort to discourage the use of polythene.

"Among my seven siblings, I am the only one with a physical disability. I wanted to become self-reliant; I did not want anyone to consider me a burden on society. That is why I became an entrepreneur," Asma said. "I also wanted to uplift other women. So far, I have provided free training to at least 6,000 women at my workshop. Some of them were later employed in my production unit," she also said.

Asma added that she receives a large number of orders from across the country and abroad. However, due to a lack

of capital, she often has to cancel some of those orders.

So far, I have reinvested around Tk 10 lakh in my ventures from my revenues. If the government provided any financial incentives, or if any government or private organisation came forward with financial assistance, I could enhance my production capacity and export more goods abroad. At present, I do not have the kind of capital required to produce in larger quantities for international markets," she said.

"There are many women like me who aspire to become entrepreneurs despite their limitations. If the government arranged easy access to low-interest or interest-free loans for them, it would help them to become successful entrepreneurs," Asma added.

Subarna Akter, 18, a second-year student of Shariatpur Government College, has been working at Asma Akter's workshop for the past year while continuing her studies.

"I work here alongside my studies, earning around Tk 10,000-15,000 monthly. I use this income to cover my educational expenses and contribute to my family," she said.

Antika Mostari Hima, 28, a housewife, has also been working at Asma's workshop for the past two years. She earns around Tk 12,000-15,000 per month, which has brought financial stability to her family.

Md Russel Noman, DoE assistant director in Shariatpur, said, "As an alternative to polythene, we placed an order for 300 jute yarn bags from her. These bags are completely environmentally friendly. As a woman entrepreneur, she is also contributing to environmental protection. Her achievements deserve widespread recognition."

He called upon others to come forward and support such women entrepreneurs.

also said the government has introduced the "Family Card" programme to support women's economic empowerment and remains committed to ensuring women's effective participation in all sectors, including education, the economy, health and politics.

"Our goal is to implement our election pledges by introducing free education up to the postgraduate level, increasing women's participation in higher education, providing free school uniforms for girls and expanding digital learning facilities and modern education systems," he said.

The Prime Minister said the government is also giving top priority to ensuring women's safety and has taken a strong stance against cyberbullying and online harassment targeting women.

The activists reiterated their demand for filling reserved seats in parliament through direct elections instead of nominations by political parties.

They also called for greater participation of women in parliamentary activities and leadership roles, transparent guidelines for nominating candidates to reserved seats, and stronger action against violence against women.

The programme was supported by Women with Disabilities Development Foundation, Karmojibi Nari, Shakti Foundation, ActionAid Bangladesh, Brotee, Breaking the Silence, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, BRAC, CARE Bangladesh, Save the Children, BLAST, Disable Child Foundation, Naripokkho and several others.

From workplaces to Himalayas

FROM PAGE 3
The programme also celebrated a unique Himalayan expedition inspired by Begum Rokeya's "Sultana's Dream," which was inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World register in 2024.

A team of five women trekked through the Himalayas to mark the achievement. Representing the team, Yasmin Lisa spoke about the social stigma surrounding female autonomy.

"We are still asked how five women can travel to the Himalayas 'alone'," she said. "Because we do not have a male companion with us, society assumes we are alone."

She also described the physical hardships of the trek, recalling that the team once went 12 hours without water after failing to melt ice in the extreme cold.

Sharmin Farhana Chowdhury, former athlete and founder of Sports for Hope and Independence (SHI), spoke about

administrative challenges faced by young athletes.

Although her team recently won three gold medals and one bronze in an international competition, she said obtaining travel documents remains a major obstacle.

"Obtaining travel documents for underprivileged and differently abled children is an ordeal. It sometimes feels as if the authorities are reluctant to issue them," she said, urging the government to prioritise such cases so athletes can represent Bangladesh internationally.

The political segment, moderated by Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matiur Rahman, featured women who contested the 13th National Parliamentary Election.

Matiur Rahman praised their courage in navigating unequal power structures and said the newspaper would continue to highlight their experiences.

Dr Manisha Chakraborty, a candidate

8, including DU student, held over March 7

FROM PAGE 4
Begum, 65; Akchari Kahn Urmí, 18; and Shohel Miji, 48.

Confirming the development, Md Fazle Ashik, officer-in-charge of Kalabagan Police Station, told The Daily Star that the four were produced before a court after being shown arrested in a case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Asked about their political identity, the OC said they were not frontline leaders but had links to activities associated with the Awami League.

Meanwhile, two

others -- Mohammad Moniruzzaman, 36, and Mohammad Jasim Uddin, 40 -- were arrested near Russell Square by Dhanmondi Police when a group of around 10-12 people attempted to march towards Dhanmondi 32 early yesterday to pay tribute.

Dhanmondi Police Station OC Saiful Islam said the two were later produced before a court after being shown as arrested in a political case.

In another incident, police detained two individuals from the Chankharpul intersection

from the Democratic Left Alliance, said the 22,486 votes she received represent a "new political current".

"Sometimes losing can mark the beginning of a new journey towards victory. We are striving to build a society based on equality rather than power-centric politics," she said.

Nabila Tasnid, an engineer who contested the Dhamrai constituency, described the intimidation she faced at polling stations.

Comparing her determination to the "violinist on the Titanic" who played until the end, she said, "I may have lost the count, but when people in Dhamrai told me, 'You are the MP of our hearts,' I knew I had won the battle that truly matters."

Mahia Juned, additional managing director of City Bank, spoke about the bank's efforts to promote financial literacy and economic opportunities for women.

She said City Bank is the first institution in

for playing Bangabandhu's historic March 7 speech on a sound box.

One of them, Asif Ahmed, is a student of DU's physics department and a resident of Shaheedullah Hall. The identity of the other person, who was operating the sound box, could not be confirmed immediately.

Police also seized the sound box from the spot.

Masud Alam, deputy commissioner of the Ramna Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said the two were taken to a police station for their

Bangladesh to receive EDGE Certification, an international standard for gender equality.

Juned also mentioned a pilot project with UNFPA in which 120 underprivileged girls were trained in pharmacy and later recruited.

"True change is possible through empathy and by creating opportunities for one another in the workplace," she said.

The event was attended by several prominent figures, including Tamara Hasan Abed, chairperson of the board of trustees of BRAC University, and Rupali Haque Chowdhury, chairperson of the Prothom Alo Trust.

Political leaders who shared their experiences included Barrister Rumeen Farhana, newly elected MP for Brahmanbaria-2; Taslima Akhter, candidate for Dhaka-12 and president of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati; and former upazila chairman Sabira Sultana, candidate for Jashore-2.

safety.

"They were taken to the police station to protect them from possible mob action. We are now contacting their guardians and will hand them over after verification," he said.

During the AL's tenure in power, March 7 -- the day Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered his historic speech in 1971 -- was observed annually with elaborate programmes. However, the practice changed after a student-led mass uprising toppled the AL government in August 2024.

Misuse of religion

FROM PAGE 3
resources and justice," he said, adding that ignoring these principles led to the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 and continuing unrest in Balochistan.

Altaf also traced the roots of religiously divided politics in the subcontinent to British colonial rule. After the failed uprising of 1857, colonial authorities realised that dividing Hindus and Muslims politically would help them maintain control, he said.

"They gradually took steps to divide the two communities and place them in opposition to one another," he added.

Jagannath University Islamic Studies Associate Professor Md Ebrahim Khalil said Abul Mansur Ahmad's essay, written more than two decades after the creation of Pakistan, remains relevant today.

"The same contradictions, the same misuse of religion, the same collapse of thought are still present in our society," Khalil said.

He said religion is often used not to establish justice but to consolidate political power.

Khalil said political leaders frequently invoke religion to gain public support. He cited the example of election campaigns beginning with visits to the shrine of Shahjalal, even though many politicians otherwise show little commitment to religious practice.

Khalil also referred to historical examples in Islamic history where rulers attempted to use religion to legitimise their authority.

Stepfather admits

FROM PAGE 3
Suman. On the way, he killed her by strangling her with her scarf.

Terming her involvement with Nur "socially inappropriate activities", Ashraf said it caused him frustration as he faced repeated social humiliation because of it, which ultimately led him to commit the murder.

Earlier, on February 10 at midnight, the girl was allegedly gang-raped at the house of Hazrat Ali. Police investigations found involvement of Hazrat Ali, Ebadul, Jaman, and Gaffar in the incident.

On February 26, locals found Amina's body lying in a mustard field in Darikandi, Kotowalir Char, and informed police.

Opposition role

FROM PAGE 4
Addressing the gathering of diplomats and guests, he expressed appreciation for the support and cooperation extended to Bangladesh by different countries and international organisations.

He added that his party would extend cooperation to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, his cabinet members and other relevant stakeholders, assuring that Jamaat's role both inside and outside the parliament would remain constructive and responsible.

Shafiqur Rahman said Jamaat envisions a policy framework that is both principled and pragmatic, aimed at protecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity while promoting global peace, economic development and citizens' welfare.

"Ethical pragmatism will remain at the core of our foundational principles," he told the gathering.

According to him, Islamic values would shape the broader framework of Jamaat's engagement with the global community. However, the party firmly opposes extremism and terrorism and seeks to demonstrate through policy and action that Islam is compatible with democracy, inclusivity and peaceful international relations.

He said Jamaat is committed to protecting the rights and dignity of all

"Religion teaches honesty, truthfulness, justice and inner purification. If those values shaped those in power, governance would be very different," he said.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, who researched Abul Mansur Ahmad's works, said the late politician had repeatedly criticised the hypocrisy of those who invoked religion while ignoring social realities.

Referring to Mansur Ahmad's writings, he said the author once compared the political misuse of religion to a beggar exposing his sores to attract sympathy.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam said the phrase "religion-governed state or state-governed religion" carries important meaning.

He said religion holds the highest place in people's lives, while the state is a political institution with its own history and characteristics.

Earlier, a day-long creative workshop was also held at the centre, organised for the second time by the Abul Mansur Ahmad Memorial Council.

The workshop featured four sessions on institutional research, new media and AI-machine learning, creative writing, and law in everyday and creative life.

Sessions were conducted by Jahangirnagar University Professor Suman Sajjad, Dhaka University Associate Professor Ahmedul Kabir, constitutional expert Arif Khan, and poet Zakir Abu Zafar.

The Daily Star journalist Enran Mahfuz coordinated the workshop.

On the same day, the victim's mother, Fahima Begum, filed a case with Madhabdi Police Station naming nine people as accused.

Police later arrested seven of the named suspects, including Nur.

Meanwhile, former Mahishashura Union Parishad member and union BNP unit vice-president Ahammad Ali Dewan has been expelled from his party position following allegations of his involvement in the incident.

According to the case statement, a few of the accused allegedly tried to cover up the rape incident and later threatened the victim's family as they failed to do so.

ethnic and religious groups in the country.

The party also aims to promote good governance, judicial independence and a relentless fight against corruption, he added.

Shafiqur Rahman emphasised greater inclusivity for women in all spheres of society so they can play a larger role in political, economic and social spaces.

He said Jamaat's public messaging would focus on development, trade, investment, climate issues and connectivity to ensure tangible benefits for the people of Bangladesh through cooperation with the international community.

Jamaat-e-Islami said ambassadors from the US, China, Russia, the UK, Palestine, the European Union, Canada, India, Türkiye, France, Germany, Italy, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vatican City, Iran, Brunei, Maldives, Algeria, Kosovo, Egypt, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, Australia, Norway, Nepal, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Switzerland and South Korea, as well as representatives from various international organisations including UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, Democracy International and IOM, attended the iftar programme.