

BASUG-Bangladesh Support Group

(A mouthpiece of Bangladeshi Diaspora in the Netherlands)

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Violence against Women in Bangladesh still high



While international Women's Day was observed recently across the world with pledge to uphold women's rights and with the theme 'Investing in women and girls', the incidence of violence against women in Bangladesh remains significantly high despite a downward trend in the past few years.

Dowry continues to be the major reason for violence against women.

According to a report published in New Age internet edition on the International Women Day, 138 women were killed and 47 tortured while 13 committed suicide in dowry-related incidents in 2007. The dowry-related violent incidents in 2006 was 230 with 243 being killed and 64 tortured. The report quoting Odhikar, a human rights organisation in Bangladesh, put the number women and children raped in 2007 at 456. Fifty-six women and 23 children were killed after rape. In 2006 the number of rape victims was 639 – 412 women and 227 children.

Acid violence against women has also shown a downward trend. According to the Acid Survivor's

Foundation, 2,627 men, women and children were victims in 2,060 incidents of acid violence between 1999 and 2004. The annual casualty of acid violence has continued to come down ever since – 272 in 2005, 221 in 2006 and 187 in 2007. Women continued to be the major targets of acid attacks, with the reasons ranging from dowry to property. The status of many hundreds of thousands of women in Bangladesh, especially in the

north, is worse. Dowry, divorce, polygamy, early marriage, hillah [proxy] marriage, repression of women in family, and even rape are not uncommon in many backward villages. Radha Rani, a mother of four at village Telipara in Thakurgaon Sadar, was gang raped and the rapists gauged out her eyes when she recognised

them. Two culprits – Rafiqul and Yusuf – have been sentenced to 27 years' imprisonment. A Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies survey found out that 563 women were sexually abused at workplace between from 1998 and 2007. In 2007 alone 28 women workers



were sexually abused and eight of them were killed after rape at workplace. Of the victims, 19 were garment workers, 6 domestic helps and 3 workers in other sectors. The survey founds domestic helps, mostly girls, faced violence at their place of employment. In 2007 63 such occurrences took place, in which 34 domestic helps were killed and 28 tortured. (Photo: Women procession in Bangladesh)

Bangladesh Expat Remittance up 35% in February

Bangladesh received \$676.06 million in remittances from expatriate workers in February 08, up 35% from a year ago but down from a record high of \$710.74 m. in January, Bangladesh central bank said recently. In July--Feb, the first 8 months of 2007-08 financial year, remittances from more than 5 million Bangladeshis working abroad totalled \$4.83 billion, 26% higher than the same period of 2006-07. Booming economies in the Middle East and the Gulf region, as well as an ageing population in European countries and rising skills of Bangladeshi workers were driving demand for Bangladeshi labour, officials said. Remittances hit a record \$5.98 billion in 2006-07 that ended in June, 24.52 percent higher than the previous fiscal year. The bank expects the inflow of remittance to touch an annual \$10 billion over the next 2 years, boosting a key source of foreign exchange for the country. The majority of the expats work in the Middle East, the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan and Singapore. Remittances from Bangladeshis are the country's second biggest source of foreign income after ready-made garments, which earned more than \$9 billion in the 2006-07 fiscal year.

Fostering links between MFI's and Diaspora organisations for development

DFD (Diaspora Forum for Development), Vital Aid Foundation and Oxfam Novib jointly organised a focus group discussion on “Fostering links between Microfinance institutions and Diaspora organisations” on 20 February 2008 at Vital Aid Foundation office in the Hague. Countries represented in the meeting were: Uganda, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Burundi, Congo, Bolivia, Argentina, Turkey and the Philippines.



Mr Atsumasa Tochisako, President and Mr Daniel A. Weiss, Senior Vice President of Micro Finance International Corporation (MFIC) of the United States were the main speakers. Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel of Oxfam Novib was the moderator. Mr. Atsumasa, a Japanese-American is the founder of MFIC. He assembled an international team of experts in microfinance, remittance technology, and international finance to develop an innovative and sustainable business model. While providing retail financial services to unbanked immigrants in the US,

the MFIC also works to boost microfinance in Latin America capitalising on huge remittance flow. Mr Atsumasa advised the participants to acquire adequate knowledge before stepping into ‘untapped’ financial investment markets. Ms. Leila said, Oxfam Novib was committed to foster links between MFIs and migrant organisations to leverage remittances for development. *(Photo shows Atsumasa Tochisako speaking at the meeting while Leila Rispens-Noel, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Vincent Rapisura & Doris Alfafara look on.)*

Child Marriage foiled in Bangladesh

Police and NGO workers with the help local Union council chairman foiled a marriage ceremony of an underaged girl at Krishnopur village under Alamdanga Upazila in Bangladesh recently. According to police, one Anwar Hossain of the village arranged marriage of his 13-year old daughter, Afria Ferdous China, a student of class eight of a local school with one Khokon of Daulatdiar village under Chuadanga Sadar Upazila of the district. On getting information about the marriage, police and local NGO activists rushed to the spot and managed to stop the wedding by convincing both the parties.

Domestic Violence in the Netherlands

Domestic violence was the most prevalent form of violence in the Dutch society, according to the Country Report on Human Rights practices 2007 published recently by the U.S. States department. Quoting the Dutch Justice ministry the report says, 45% of the population has experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives. Of this 10% reportedly experienced some form of physical, sexual, or mental abuse on at least a weekly basis, and 4% were raped. According to police, approximately 80% of victims were women. Police estimated that approximately 12% of these cases were reported to police.

There were no statistics on honour killing during the year, but 279 cases of honour-related violence were reported in the Hague region in 2006, the US report says. It may be mentioned that in this region the majority of the migrated Muslim community live.

Child Abuse

Quoting Leiden University study report, the US report says that more than 100,000 children were victims of abuse. The study estimated that 4,700 children have been sexually abused; and 19,000 had suffered from physical abuse. Experts estimated that 50 to 80 children died each year from some form of abuse.

“Together we can make this a beautiful place to live in.”

Oxfam Novib's Linking & learning Day

Call for inclusion of migrant organisations in policy making

With an objective to bring Oxfam Novib officials and the representatives of the migrant organisations together to link and share experiences in the field of development co-operation and to explore ways where these two parties can strengthen each other's efforts to build a world minus poverty, the first ever 'Linking and Learning Day' was held on March 16 in Utrecht. Organised by Oxfam Novib the day witnessed a lively discussion on different issues relating to development work.

Speakers both from the migrant organisations as well as from Oxfam Novib raised plus and



negative points in carrying out the work in the developing countries. More than 110 leaders and representatives of the migrant organisations and a sizeable number of officials from Oxfam Novib attend the day long programme.

The key themes of the day were "achievements, challenges and lessons learned of diaspora organisations engaged in development work", "Gaining insights on the work of Oxfam Novib and finding converging of interests, priorities and collaboration" and "the speed of change in migration and development nexus: the role of diasporas in development".

The opening session was addressed by Oxfam Novib senior official, Mr. Wim Wouters while Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel of the same organisation presided. The day long programme was also addressed by Peyman Jafari, Popular Campaigning, Sasja Nokkerink, Programme Coordinator, Essential Services, Hossam Aziz, Policy Advisor, Remittances (R&D), Tedd van Hees, Lobbyist, Migration, Development and Poverty (tbc), George Duncan, Chair, Sankofa, Doris Alfafara, Multicultural Women Peacemakers, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, President, BASUG-Bangladesh Support Group and Fatumo Farah, Director, Hirda. Dr. Awil Mohamoud, Chair, African



Diaspora Centre summed the discussion.

Earlier, in his opening speech Wim Stoffers said,

from the record it was found that small scale projects were more efficient and more people can be reached through such projects. He said, till today 700 projects have been financed from Linkis, 35% of them were bigger project. Wim said, Linkis provides opportunities to flourish the small innovative projects. With the 800 million euro budget Oxfam Novib supports 200 projects a year, he added.

While stories the underscored the migrants making for said, side by



presenting their success migrant leaders the need for inclusion of organisations in policy development work. They side capacity building the

migrant organisations should also be given support so that they could improve their infra-structure facilities. To be professional the migrant organisations need the support of development agencies like Oxfam Novib. They expressed their gratitude to Oxfam Novib for its support to the migrant organisations in the Netherlands and called upon other agencies to follow the example of Oxfam Novib. (Photos show: from top: Wim Stoffers, Fatumo Farah, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Leila Rispens-Noel, Doris Alfafara, George Duncan; 2nd Photo: Leila Rispens-Noel, Tedd van Hees, Sasja Nokkerink, Hossam Aziz, Dr. Awil Mohamoud; 3rd Photo: Nivedia M.C.Monga among the participants)



First election of DFD held **Vow to work for the interest of the migrants**

The annual general meeting of DFD-Diaspora Forum for Development was held on 29th March in Utrecht. DFD which is a platform of 31 members Diaspora organisations elected an 5-members Executive Board and 6 Board members. The Executive board members are: President - Santo Deng lewis (Sudan Civil Society Forum), Vice President – Bikash Chowdhury Barua (BASUG), Secretary- Doris Alfafara (Multicultural Women Peacemakers Network), Assistant Secretary- Wilson Obomann (ASDA) and Treasurer- Fatumo Farah (HIRDA). The elected Board members are: Rateb Faquiri (FAVON), Abi Ashenafi (ENNOS), Tuky Santillan (Ayni Bolivia), Drs. Mekka Abdelgabar(VOND) and Grace Cabactulan (Habagat) and Sandra Megenes Santos (Network Ecuador).

The annual general meeting presided over by DFD Steering Committee member, Bikash Chowdhury Barua was addressed by Leila Rispens-Noel, Programme Officer of Oxfam Novib, Doris Alfafar, Santo Deng Lewis, Tuky Santillan and Dide Sorman. The meeting heard the opinions of the members present in the meeting on issues including constitution, membership process, goals and objectives, mission and vision of the organisation. The meeting discussed at length the proposed Constitution of the organisation and was passed unanimously after making some changes as per consent of the majority members present in the meeting. A total of 35 members representing 23 diaspora organisations attended the first annual general meeting of DFD. DFD which came into being in March 2007 and was run so long by a 7-member Steering Committee. In her speech Leila Rispens-Noel congratulated the newly elected EC members of the organisation and hoped that it would succeed in reaching its goals.



Photo: The newly elected EC members of DFD after the election. From left: Drs. Mekka Abdelgabar, member, Fatumo Farah, Treasurer, Doris Alfafara, Secretary, Wilson Obomann, Asstt Secretary, Abi Ashenafi, member, Sandra Megenes Santo, member, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Vice President, Santo Deng Lewis, President, Tuky Santillan, member, Grace Cabactulan, member and Rateb Faquiri, member.

BASUG's project for women-Poultry firm

With financial support from BASUG under it's women development programme this poor woman in the photo, Saleka Khatun, wife of A. been able to set up a poultry farm. She is where she has now 500 (June 2009) titled, 'Ensure vulnerable under privileged being supported by Zwarte Business Women) and Seva



Quddus in Hobiganj district has farm. Salekha Khatun received a (€1,000.00) from BASUG's local seen in front of her poultry firm chickens. This project (July 2007- development activities for rural women in Bangladesh' is Zaken Vrouwen Nederland (Black Network Foundation).

37th Independence Day of Bangladesh in Netherlands

The 37th Independence day of Bangladesh was observed in Bangladesh and elsewhere among the Bangladeshi community abroad with due respect and grandeur. The Bangladesh embassy in the Netherlands organised a reception followed by a cultural programme in the Hague. The new Ambassador of Bangladesh in the Netherlands, Mr Mizanur Rahman received the guests. They included among others diplomats, senior government officials, businessmen and few Bangladeshis living in the Netherlands. Later, addressing the guest the Bangladeshi envoy lauded the role of the Dutch government and its people for their support to the liberation war of Bangladesh and said, the Netherlands was one of the few countries to recognise Bangladesh immediate after its independence. These two countries have a long bondage of friendship which he added, would be further cemented in the days ahead. In the cultural part of the programme, the tabla presentation by Nitin and songs by the Counsellor Mr Zokey Ahad and Rahit were appreciated by the audience. It may be mentioned here that this is for the first time that Bangladesh embassy in the Netherlands has organised such a programme which deserve appreciation. *(Below left photo shows: the ambassador and the guests paying respect while the national anthem of Bangladesh was being played; right Bangladeshi diplomat Zokey Ahad presenting song.)*



European Commission seminar on EU-Bangladesh relations 8 April

A seminar on EU-Bangladesh Relations: The Role of civil society will be held on 8 April at European Commission in Brussels. Organised by the European Commission in co-operation with Bangladesh Forum Germany the seminar will be addressed by Sultana Kamal, Executive Director of Ain O Salishi Kendra and Adviser of BASUG. Mahfuz Anam, Editor, the Daily Star, Jo Leinen, South Asian delegation, European Parliament, James Moran, Director, Relex H, Prof Meghna Guhathakurata, Executive Director, Research Institute Bangladesh, Aroma Datta, Executive Director, PRIP trust, Prof. Anu Mohammed, Jahangirnagar University, Shapan Adnan, South Asia Studies Programme, Singapore University, Sanjeeb Drong, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum, Veronique Arnault, Director, Relex B, Binota Moy Dhamai, Bangladesh Indigenous Forum and Stefan Frowein, Head, European Commission to Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Forum Germany will also hold a conference on "Extreme poor and minorities- access to rights and development" in Berlin on 10-11 April 2007. The visiting experts from Bangladesh are scheduled to address the Berlin conference, says a press released sent by NETZ senior official Dirk Saam..

Meeting with Euro Parliamentarians on Bangladesh held

As a part of its lobbying programme, Bangladesh Platform for Development Co-operation and Human Rights (BOOM) organised a meeting on 29 January 2007 at the European Parliament in order to bring the attention of the Euro parliamentarians to the prevailing political and human rights situation in Bangladesh. Sultana Kamal,



Executive Director of Ain O Salishi Kendra and former Adviser to the Caretaker Government and Shahriar Kabir, President of Forum for Secular Bangladesh addressed the parliament session. The session was chaired by Robert Evans, Chair of the South Asi delegation and member of the European Parliament for London. Bangladesh Ambassador to Belgium and Peter Custers, Chair of ICDB

also addressed the session. Addressing the session Sultana Kamal was critical of the present caretaker government in tackling the law and order situation, market price and said, with 'life support machine' how long can a government survive? Shahriar Kabir expressed deep concern at the rise of Islamic



militancy in Bangladesh and said, God fathers of these groups still remain untouched and at large. He requested the European governments not to give visa to ten listed criminals who are behind such crimes and went against the liberation movement in 1971. After the parliamentary session there was an exclusive and informal meeting with Robert Evans at his office chamber at the European Parliament building. The meeting lasted for around one hour and a half. In the afternoon Helen Campbell, External Relations Directorate- General of European Commission hosted a lunch for the delegates from Bangladesh which also included BASUG President Bikash Chowdhury, ICDB Secretary M M Monwar, Chair Peter Custers and Amir Hossain, BASUG Joint Coordinator in Belgium. *(Photos show-above: at EP session M M R Monwar, Shahriar Kabir, Sultana Kamal, Peter Custers, Sharaf Ahmed; below: meeting with Robert Evans at his Parliament office. From Left Shahriar Kabir, Robert Evans, Sultana Kamal, Peter Custers and Bikash Chowdhury Barua).*

Oxfam Novib training on Project Cycle management

The second phase of the Oxfam Novib training on “Project Cycle Management” was held on 9-10 February at Ede. BASUG Secretary, Sudhier Nannan attended the training. Different migrant leaders and representatives of migrant organisations also took part in the training. The second part of the training put emphasis on how to monitor and intervene effectively a pending project. The training was in fact was arranged mainly to refresh the knowledge of part 1 training and to see how the trainees had implemented this knowledge into there day to day activities. During the training examples of successful projects and also the failed projects were examined. It gave a flow of tools which can be used to create the needed environment for a succesful, effective and efficient project. *(Photo shows a scene of the training)*



Seva training programmes begins

Seva Network Foundation organised a training programme on “introduction to development cooperation” on 1 March at its conference room in the Hague. This was the part of its such four training programmes for the migrant organisations active in development co-operation work. Seva has been organising these programmes in



collaboration with the Dutch Foreign Ministry. The rest programmes scheduled to be held this year are: 1) training project formulation; 2) training project budgeting; and 3) training project accountability. Mr Nityendu Barua, Treasurer of BASUG took part in

the training programme held on 1 March. Director of

Seva Network Foundation, Drs. Radj Bhondoe inaugurated the training course. *(Photo below left: Participants at the training. BASUG Treasurer Nityendu Barua is seen among others; right Seva Directo, Drs Rad Bhondoeer addressing the participants on the opening day.)*

Sultana Kamal Adviser of BASUG

Ms. Sultana Kamal, Executive Director of Ain O Salishi Kendra (ASK), one of the leading human rights groups in Bangladesh has agreed to be the Adviser of BASUG. Former Adviser of the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh, Sultana Kamal, a courageous voice in human rights arena is working to eliminate social, legal and political discrimination in Bangladesh. She is the daughter of country’s most respected and celebrated personality late Poet Sufia Kamal, who till her death fought for democracy, for a secular Bangladesh. BASUG EC in a meeting expressed happiness at her consent to become its Adviser.



BASUG relief aid programme in Bangladesh



BASUG activities under relief rehabilitation programme in the flood affected areas of Hobiganj and Baniachung upazilla in Sylhet district. Endeavour, the local partner of BASUG implemented the programme supported by Oxfam Novib. Photos show the Deputy commission of Hobiganj is seen distributing the relief materials among the affected people (2nd photo from left). The extreme right photo is seen another relief distribution programme in Banicung upazilla.