

BASUG-Bangladesh Support Group

(A mouthpiece of Bangladeshi Diaspora in the Netherlands)

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Child Marriage in Bangladesh - poverty, illiteracy key reasons



A depressed girl of Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria had been sitting alone on a veranda of a shabby bamboo-made hut just to spend her idle time. The ill-fated girl, Hazera, 10, holds her strong desire for attending the gathering of her playmates, who are playing at a nearby house. But, her parents do not allow her to do so. Her playmates do not also show any interest in her joining with them. Hazera got married just 10 days back. She always fears that anybody of her father-in-law's house may come to visit her anytime. If he/she sees the bride playing with her fellows, he/she would take it seriously. The child marriage has killed her aspirations.

The child marriage is a regular event in various parts of Bangladesh like Nasirnagar. It becomes 'kismet' (luck) for children, particularly the girls of Nasirnagar. Hazera's father Monju Mia, a hawker, feels proud of his early marriage. "I got married when I was 15. My wife was only nine year old girl then. It did not make any problem in my life," he told to his companions and neighbours very often. Poverty-stricken Monju Mia has got four daughters and two sons. Hazera is the youngest one. All of them fell prey to the child marriage.

Another dowry victim- housewife burnt to death by husband

Pabna: A housewife, who had sustained burn injuries for two weeks, died on 7 January at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in Bangladesh. The victim was Sadia Khatun, 22, daughter of Abdus Sattar of village Jagtola at Chatmohar upazila in Pabna. According to the police, husband Wahidul Islam alias Roni of Atghoria upazila in Pabna on December 24 poured kerosene on Sadia and set her on fire as her father failed to pay him Tk 15,000 (€ 150) as dowry. She was admitted to the hospital in a critical condition. The victim's father filed a case with the police station while the husband was absconding.

According to the law, the child marriage is an offence in Bangladesh. But, Monju Mia was not aware of that. He thinks when a female child becomes 10/12-year old, she should be married as soon as possible. "The right place for the girl is husband's home. It ensures social protection and security for them too," he opined. Not only Monju Mia, there are many parents in Burirchar in Nasirnagar, who want early marriage for their kids. Shajahan Mia, a rickshawpuller of the same village, married Libas Begum four years ago, when she (Libas Begum) was only 11. The couple has got a two-and-half year old kid, Salahuddin. Libas Begum, however, became pregnant again. Israt Ara, younger sister of Shajahan Mia, got married two years ago, when she was only 12. She has also got a kid, Farida. The curse of child marriage is not only prevalent in Burirchar, but also in every village in Nasirnagar including Monahorpur, Tekanagar, Goalnagar, Masuma, Rampur, Noagaon and Kadamtali. This picture of the rest villages in Bangladesh is no different. (New Age)

BASUG's Campaign on stop "Violence Against Women" & "Child Marriage"

BASUG-Bangladesh Support Group plans to start a vigorous campaign on stop "Violence Against Women" and "Child Marriage" in Bangladesh, the Netherlands, the UK and Belgium where most Bangladeshi migrants live in order to bring attention of the society, community leaders, policy makers, donor agencies,



professionals, individuals, men and women to the problems and create awareness on this issue. To make a concrete plan on the campaign, BASUG has already carried out a three months long Pilot Project with support of Oxfam Novib in order to know more about the problems and the solutions. As BASUG plans to bring four locations (the Netherlands, Belgium, United Kingdom and Bangladesh) under this campaign, it held separate brainstorming meetings in all the above mentioned

places during the month of September, October and November last year. At the end of all these meetings, BASUG organised an Experts meeting in the Hague on 24th November 2007 where experts from Bangladesh, Belgium, the UK and the Netherlands participated. BASUG also carried out a Research on Domestic Violence among the Bangladeshi Women in UK during this short period. Three professional Researchers from the Social Vision of London School of Economics, UK carried out this task for BASUG. BASUG President, Bikash Chowdhury Barua also visited Bangladesh and held similar brainstorming meeting in Dhaka on 24th October which was participated among others by Ms. Sultana Kamala, Chief of Ain O Salishi Kendro and former Adviser to the Caretaker government, Mr Muhammad Jahangir, Media Specialist and Coordinator of Basug in Dhaka, Barrister Ms. Tania Amir, Ms Fouwzia Khondkar Eva, Consultant, Police Reform Project, UNDP, Ms. Annana Ruma, Producer, TV Channel I, Ms. Nasimun Ara Huq, Chairman, Women Journalist Centre, Ms. Asha Mehreen Amin, Editor, Daily Star Weekly Magazineomen Page and Mr Atiqun Nabi, Executive Director of INAFI-Asia.

The experts meeting in the Hague was participated by representatives from Bangladesh, Belgium, the UK and the Netherlands. Apart from the Bangladeshi migrant leaders and professionals, leaders of other migrant organisations and nationals including the Dutch, India, Pakistan, Suriname and Argentina took active part in the discussion. Presided over by BASUG President Bikash Chowdhury Barua the meeting was addressed by Barrister Tania Amir from Bangladesh, Ms. Sukrit Sen, Ms. Fouzia Khan of UK Foreign Ministry, Ms. Sharmin Chowdhury, Mr. Zakir Khan, Mr. Gautam Barua, Mr Ansar Ahmed Ullah – all from UK, Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, Ms. Miet Bleyen both from Belgium, Dr. P. Custers, Ms. Jin Roy, Ms. Ozden Yalim, Mr. M.M. R. Monwar, Sudhier Nannan, Ms. Tuky Santillan, Mr Koos Palmboom, Ms Sheela Khoesial and Ms. Suchandan Sen.

5 child marriages stopped in a week in Jhenidah

Kaliganj upazila administration stopped five child marriages in a week recently. The latest incident took place when marriage of a 13 year-old girl was stopped at Arpara village.

Rupa, a student of class eight at Salimunnesa Girls School, was going to be married at around 11 am. She is the daughter of Prasanto Kumar Shil. The bridegroom was Shamol Kumar Biswas, son of Mukundo Kumar Biswas of Azmari Pur village in Bagher Para upazila in Jessore district. On information, Kaligonj Upazila Nirbhai Officer (UNO) Shashanko Shekhor Bhaumik sent a police team led by upazila election officer Rokonuzzaman Khan, women affair officer Anis Afroz and education officer Abdul Bari.



Kaliganj upazila administration officials accompanied by some NGO men talking to Rupa and her parents after stopping her marriage.

They reached Prasanto's house a short while before the scheduled time and stopped the marriage. The officials also took an undertaking from Rupa's parents that they would allow their daughter to continue studies and not arrange her marriage before she attains marriageable age. Earlier, on August 13, marriage of 12 year-old Razia Sultana, a student of class seven at Mobarakgonj Suger Mill Secondary High School, with Masud Rana was stopped by the upazila administration, the officials said. Razia is daughter of Salim Prodhan of Mouchak Colony. Masud Rana is son of Atiar Rahman of the same area.

On the same day, marriage of Aduri Khatun, 12, a student of class six at Bethuli Secondary High School, with Moni Mian was stopped in the same way. Aduri is daughter of Mongol Biswas of Kharika Danga village. Moni Mia is son of Rawsan Ali of Vikshar village in the same upazila. Earlier in the week, marriages of Reshma Khatun, 13 and Latifa Khatun, 13 were stopped at Dadpur and Ful Bari villages in the upazila, the officials said. Both the girls were students, they said. Contacted, UNO Shashanko Shekhor Bhaumik said conscious people in the society should come forward to stop marriage of underage girls.

More than 80 cyclones in 125 years ravaged Bangladesh

The Bangladesh coastal areas have been hit by over 80 cyclones in the past 125 years, which killed about two million people and rendered many more millions homeless, said meteorologists. On November 1, 1876, the 'Great Bakerganj Storm' hit Barisal region at a speed of 220 kmh, killing about 200,000 people. It was considered 'a great human disaster' as the country's population was scanty compared to today's population. Some witnesses claimed the tidal wave had risen to 16 metres or over 50 ft in height. According to Bangladesh Meteorological Department cyclones brewed in the Bay of Bengal usually hit Bangladesh in April-May and October-December period. A terrible cyclone packing a hurricane speed of 222

kmh ravaged the coastal districts of Barisal, Patuakhali, Noakhali and Bhola, washing away about a million people by 10 metre-high tidal waves on November 12, 1970. It has since been remembered as the 'Fearful November 12'. In 1985, a cyclone blowing over Urir Char at 154 kmh killed about 11,000 people. The tidal waves were 15 ft high. On April 29, 1991, the 225 kmh cyclone sweeping over Chittagong coasts and whipping up 25 ft high waves killed 150,000 people. The November 29, 1997 cyclone also swept over Chittagong at a speed of 224 kmh, generating 6.1 metre-high tidal waves and killed about 1.5 lakh people. Other cyclones hit Bangladesh in 1960, 1961, 1963, 1965, 1994, 1995, 1998 and 2003.



The oldest account of a similar disaster occurring in 1582, as chronicled in



সিডর দুর্গত এলাকায় এক কিশোরীকে শান্তনা দিচ্ছেন শাকিরা

the historical volumes titled 'Ain-i-Akbari' and 'Riaz-us-Salatin' speak of a most violent cyclone. It razed Barisal and Patuakhali areas to the ground during its five-hour onslaught at hurricane speed; only a few strongly founded temples survived. (*Singer Sakira is consoling a Sidr affected girl during her recent visit to Bangladesh*) An NGO publication titled 'Nirapad Barta' said up to 2001, at least 83 cyclones of 'the most violent' to 'moderate' magnitudes slammed the coasts of Bangladesh. No cyclones have ever occurred in this part during the months of January, February, March and July, it said.

Microfinance conference in Benin, Africa

Cotonou, the capital city of Benin in Africa hosted the second Global Conference on "Microfinance, Remittances and Development" on 7-9 November 07. Organised by INAFI Africa (International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions) with collaboration of Oxfam Novib the conference was participated by more than 120 participants from around the globe including Bangladesh and the Netherlands . The first INAFI international conference was held in Zagatacas, Mexico in 2005 which brought many microfinance institutions, professionals, diaspora organisations and other stakeholders together to discuss the huge



(*Photo right- Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel of Oxfam Novib addressing the Benin conference. Photo-Basug*).

possibilities and future of remittance, microfinance and migration in the overall development process round the globe. The overwhelm success of the Zagatecas conference prompted the organisers to go for holding the second conference in the Philippines and the third conference in Benin. A group of the Netherlands-based migrant leaders also took part in the Benin conference. The Dutch group was led by Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel of Oxfam Novib. The migrant leaders who participated in the conference among others were: Mohamed Mohmoud, Liberat N (Ropabu), Bikash Chowdhury Barua (BASUG), Wilson Obomanu, Doris Alfafara (Damayan), drs. Ozden Yalim, Sylvia Van Den Berg, Mekka Abdel Gabar, Millicent Odongo, M.M. Mindanda, and Hossam Aziz of Oxfam Novib. There were five participants from Bangladesh. Among them were: Atiq un Nabi of INAFI Asia, Emran uddin Chowdhury of Uddipan.

Man Sentenced to death for killing woman

Mymensingh, Nov 12: A young man was sentenced to death in absentia for burning to death newly married woman in a remote village of Phulbaria upazila eight years ago, reports UNB. Judge Narendra Chandra Das pronounced the verdict after lengthy trial awarding death penalty to Abdul Majid, 35, who remained fugitive since the incident. According to the prosecution, Majid of Chowdar Madyapara village had fancy on Farida Khatun, daughter of Ismail Hossain of the same village. He sent proposal to marry her. But her parents declined the proposal. Farida was soon married to another man. This frustrated and angered Majid who determined to take revenge. When Farida came on a visit to her parents, he set fire to the house Farida was asleep at dead of night on May 9, 1999. Badly burnt Farida was rushed to Mymensingh Medical College where she died after three days. Her father filed the case accusing Majid of setting fire to the house and killing Farida.

Oxfam Novib's Project Cycle Management training

Participants at the 3-day long "Project Cycle Management" training organised by Oxfam Novib on 16-18 November 07. Oxfam Novib official, Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel (3rd from right front row) and BASUG Secretary, Sudhier Nannan (6th standing behind) are seen with the participants during the training.



Fortis Foundation handed over computer to BASUG



Fortis Foundation Nederlands has recently handed over a computer and three flat screens to BASUG- Bangladesh Support Group. Engineer Anil Naipal, Test Manager of Atos Origin handed over the gifts to BASUG Secretary, Sudhier Nannan at a simple ceremony in the Hague. In the meantime, BASUG also received a few office furniture from Canadian Oil Company on December 8. The Company will also hand over a couple of used computers to BASUG which BASUG plans to sell. The sale proceeds will be spent for its development projects in Bangladesh.

Picture shows: BASUG Secretary S. Nannan receiving the computer from Engineer Anil Naipal of Atos Origin.

BASUG post-flood relief operation in Bangladesh



As part of BASUG's post-flood relief and rehabilitation programme, the Deputy Commissioner of Hobiganj district, Mr. Ataur Rahman is seen distributing cash money to the flood victims of the area on 13th December 2008. With support from Oxfam Novib, BASUG sent a total of €28,000,- for the flood victims in Bangladesh to its partner Endeavour. Chairman of Endeavour Prof Fakruddin Chowdhury and its Chief Executive Mr Khalilur Rahman Chowdhury among others are also seen in the photo. On the day Endeavour distributed cash money for house repair, siblings and latrine materials. One hundred affected people received the relief and donation on the day. Relief distribution programme of Endeavour is on in other parts of the district.

Bangladesh migrant workers claim abuse in Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur : More than 200 Bangladeshi migrant workers who claim their employers underpaid and abused them have sought refuge outside their country's embassy in Malaysia, an envoy said.

The Bangladesh high commission has turned a section of its mission into a temporary shelter for some of the 225 workers but most of them have been sheltering on the pavement since early December due to a lack of space inside. Out of sympathy we have provided them a place to stay but we can only accommodate so much, a senior Bangladeshi envoy told the news agency. We are trying our best to get the workers and employers to reach consensus but it's difficult because both sides have different views on the matter, he added.

The envoy said there were about 350,000 Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia, mainly engaged in the plantation and manufacturing sectors. As Christians celebrated Christmas, a charity group provided some chicken curry with rice for the hungry and pale-looking Muslim migrant workers. Many of the poor migrants paid thousands of dollars to agents to find them work in Malaysia where they hoped to make their fortunes.

One 28-year-old Bangladeshi who gave his name as Hossain said he came to Malaysia in September. I paid the agent 12,000 ringgit and I sold my father's land and cows to gather the money. My agent got me a job with a company that manufactured computer hard discs. According to the contract, I should be paid 800 ringgit a month but they only gave me 380 ringgit. When I questioned them, they threatened me and refused to give me back my passport. All I want now is my passport and to find another job. Fearing my safety, I came to the embassy with 300 ringgit and now I don't have anything left, he said. Another worker, Nazir Hossain, 32, said he had been in Malaysia for the past six months and was being underpaid. I paid the agent in Bangladesh 12,000 ringgit to arrange a job for me, and he promised me a job in a factory but when I came here they refused to hire me on health grounds, he said. My mother, wife and children barely have enough to eat without my salary. I want my agent to return my passport so that I can go home, he said.

BASUG's micro credit programme for poor women in Satkania



BASUG's development partner in Bangladesh, Everbright Foundation (EBF) launched a small scale micro credit programme in North Purangar, Satkania in Chittagong district. The credit programme funded by Basug will benefit the local poor women. Basug President Bikash Chowdhury Barua visited the project area during his visit to Bangladesh in October 2007 and talked to the women beneficiaries. He talked to them at the Sona Development Centre, also made with financial support of Basug in that area. The centre is now being used as meeting place of the village youths and the group members. The Centre also runs a sewing training for the village women and girls. Chairman of EBF, Mr Nasirul Huq and Chief Executive of EBF Mr Mahfuzur Rahman were also present at the centre when Basug President visited the site.



ZZV & Seva's support for BASUG's Women uplift project in Bangladesh

Zwarte Zaken Vrouwen Nederland (Black Business Women), an organisation of the black women in the Netherlands in a fund raising programme for Bangladesh last year raised €13.000 Euro and approached Seva Network Foundation to use the fund for a project in Bangladesh.



Seva selected BASUG to get the project implemented in Bangladesh and eventually the project titled "Ensure Development Activities for Vulnerable and Underprivileged Rural People in Bangladesh" started. Seva Network Foundation doubled the amount raised by Black Business Women with a contribution of another €13,000 for the two years (July 2007-June 2009) project.

The project which is now being implemented in Hobiganj district of Bangladesh is aimed at improving the financial condition of the poor women and make them aware of their rights and restore self-confidence among themselves. Under the programme Basug's local partner has already provided credit to the women so that they can start small business in their own vicinity. The beneficiaries have also been raising their own savings every month. Earlier, 220 women beneficiaries were given training on goat rearing, cow featuring and poultry by Basug's local partner. They were also given training on food, nutrition and hygiene. *(Photo shows: women beneficiaries of the credit programme receiving training on food, nutrition and hygiene.)*

Children Development Project in North Bengal

BASUG will start another project titled "Children Development Programme" in North Bengal of Bangladesh from mid January this year. The one year programme is aimed at providing non-formal education and other necessary support to the very poor and orphans of the area. The project is being supported by Seva Network Foundation.

BASUG's donation for Cancer stricken children in Bangladesh



Mr Shafiqul Alam Khan, Director of CLASS (Children Leukaemia Assistance & Support Service), a child cancer parents organisation in Bangladesh is seen receiving donation from BASUG President, Mr Bikash Chowdhury Barua (left in photo) for the ill-fated children during his visit to Bangladesh in October 2007. CLASS is an affiliated member of the "International Confederation of Childhood Cancer Parent Organisations (ICCCPO)". Rafi, the 12 year son of CLASS Chairman, Mr Osman Gani Mansur, Editor of an English daily newspaper and

Correspondent of AFP, died in 1995 after fighting with cancer for couple of months. For more information on CLASS <http://www.classbd.org/>



(After the London meeting on Violence Against Women the London-based Bangla TV Channel S interviewed BASUG President Bikash Chowdhury Barua (photo right) at the studio. Photo left seen- from left are Sudhier Nannan, Secretary BASUG, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, President, BASUG, S. M. Tanvir Ahmad, News Editor, Channel S, Towhidul Alam Sakeel, News Editor & Newscaster, Channel S & Drs. Ahmed Ziauddin, Belgium Coordinator, BASUG)