

Teachers in clutch of moneylenders

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

At least 200 teachers of non-government high school and 100 of government primary schools took voluntary retirement in last two years in Nilphamari district and left the poorly-paid profession.

Tobarak Ali, teacher of Nitai Government Primary School in Kishoreganj upazila, committed suicide two years ago as he could not meet the demand of a moneylender with his total retirement benefit.

Abu Jar Gaffari, teacher of Darul Huda Government Primary school in Nilphamari Sadar upazila, died of heart attack a few months back as a moneylender pressed him to repay an amount which was not covered by his retirement benefits. The amount demanded was much

more than the amount the teacher had taken.

These and many other startling information came out during investigation by this correspondent on the plight of schoolteachers, now on an indefinite strike to realise their 21-point demand including enhancement of salary and benefits.

Schoolteachers easily fall into the clutches of moneylenders because of the system of payment of their salary, sources in teachers associations in the district said.

Salary of government schoolteachers is paid through banks and the payment is irregular. Teachers are given cheques in advance, which they cash in banks when payments are disbursed, often at intervals of three to four months, said Abdur Rashid Sarkar, general

secretary of Nilphamari Sadar upazila unit of Bangladesh Teachers Association.

To meet family expenditure or emergencies, many of the teachers take loan from moneylenders against cheques. Often, teachers sign their cheques in advance and hand over those to moneylenders, who cash them at banks.

The moneylenders realise at least 30 per cent interest per month on the loan. At times, they compel teachers to put their signatures on blank non-judicial stamps and put amounts.

While talking to this correspondent, president of Nilphamari Primary Teachers Association Mejjuddin said around 80 per cent of primary teachers become victims of moneylenders and bow down to their harmful conditions.

There are 80 to 90 moneylenders in the district involved with the dishonest business with teachers. It is now a good business.

Last year, a big businessman in Kishoreganj, who is also a moneylender, filed a case against some primary school teachers and realised amounts what he demanded as the teachers refuse to pay so high interest.

Abdul Goni, a former teacher of Dolua Government Primary School in the Sadar upazila, said he took Tk 80,000 loan from a moneylender for treatment of his wife. He surrendered cheques for his monthly salary for two years. But this was not enough. The moneylender claimed Tk 1.5 lakh and threatened to file case. To avoid case, Abdul Goni took voluntary retirement and gave the money to

the moneylender.

Bimol Kumar Roy of Sonaroy Government Primary School in the Sadar upazila, Anwar Hossain of Naotara Government Primary School in Dimla and many others in the district did the same thing, Mejjuddin said.

Habibur Rahman, president of Sadar upazila unit of the association alleged that a section of bank employees are involved in the practice. Banks allow moneylenders to cash as many salary cheques of teachers as they like in a day, which is illegal, he said.

He said headmaster of a government primary school having completed masters degree gets a basic salary of only Tk 2850, whereas a SSC pass block supervisor of agriculture department gets a basic salary of Tk 5100.



Traders in Gaibandha brought out a procession in the town during their half-day shutdown yesterday demanding arrest a trial of killers of Sajedur Rahman Sajid.

PHOTO: STAR

Interns at RMCH continue strike

Sufferings of patients mount

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Intern doctors continued their strike at Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH), causing sufferings to patients.

They began the strike on Tuesday in protest against attack on some of their leaders and demanding demolition of all illegal shops and structures on the campus.

Earlier, they had observed strike last week on the same demands. They resumed the strike as the authorities did not fulfil their demands by Monday, promised by it.

Ali Reza, a leader of the Intern Doctors Association, said, "The RMCH authorities had promised to us to demolish illegal shops on the hospital campus and take action against miscreants who beat our leaders."

"We resumed our strike as they

did not keep their promise", he said.

Ali Reza said they will continue the strike till the demands are met.

Meanwhile, sources at RMCH said that third and fourth employees of the hospital threatened the RMCH authorities to go on indefinite strike if shops on the campus are demolished.

The third and fourth class employees have taken a stand against the intern doctors, the sources claimed.

They also submitted a memorandum to the director requesting him not to demolish the shops.

RMCH Director Shahajahan Bishwas later said he has called a meeting of intern doctors with BMA and RMCH trade union leaders today (Thursday).

"I hope the crisis will be over tomorrow (Thursday)," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Mother of a pneumonia-attacked child trying to set the mask on the patient's mouth yesterday as interns continued their strike.

Outsiders gang up to work as patients' aides

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Asma Begum of Dhap Hazipara is working at Rangpur Medical College Hospital for about three years without any authorisation. She earns about Tk 200 a day by working as a "helper".

"Shamsul Islam, (a third class employee at the RMCH) engaged me here. He is my uncle. He can not work because of illness. I work on his

behalf", Asam said when asked by this correspondent.

There are about 50 male and female outsiders working at RMCH illegally.

This correspondent talked to some others like Asma. All of them said they were engaged by some hospital staff, mainly third and fourth class employees. They have actually formed a gang.

Abdur Rahman, another man working at RMCH illegally said he is working at RMCH with the permission of RMCH trade union leaders.

"As the hospital lacks sufficient manpower, we give services to patients. In return we money from patients," Nurul Islam, another unauthorised person working at the hospital said.

Allegations have it that the patients and medics are virtually hostage to the gangs of unauthorised people at the hospital sheltered by trade union leaders and a small section of vested quarters. Patients have to give them money for service. Medicines are often stolen. Attendants of patient keep mum and even doctors do not dare to speak against them.

"Patients coming from rural areas are the worst victim of exploitation by these unauthorised people at the hospital," said a registrar at the medicine ward.

At the female ward, Amina Begum, 60, who from Chilmari in

Kurigram, said she does not get her meal regularly.

"A man demanded Tk10 per meal but I could not pay him". She could not name him.

Seeking anonymity, a doctor said a number of third and fourth class employees of the hospital have engaged the outsiders at the hospital. They have neither training nor education, he added.

In every ward, there are five to six such outsiders, engaged by the 'ward sarder' (a fourth class employee), who earn Tk200 to Tk 250 a day on an average. Each unauthorised worker pays the sarder Tk 50 a day, he added.

Asked, RMCH Director Shahajahan Bishwas said, "I noticed this when I joined the hospital."

He said, he had imposed restrictions for outsiders at the hospital.

"After my order, all employees now have ID cards hung from their neck so that patients can differentiate outsiders and hospital employees," he said.

Abdur Rouf, president of RMCH trade union, however denied the allegation that outsiders work at the hospital.

"Fourteen outsiders were engaged last year on the basis of understanding with some employees. Their contract period is over. Some of them might be visiting wards now for work," he said.

Protests on at RU for VC's resignation

RU CORRESPONDENT

Chhatra Sangram Parishad, an alliance of four student organisations and Samajtantrik Chhtrara Front (SCF), a left student body, yesterday held separate rallies and brought out processions on Rajshahi University campus demanding resignation of the Vice-chancellor for appointing "controversial" persons as teachers and allowing Shibir cadre Salehi to appear at examination.

Salehi is the prime accused in the case filed in connection with the murder of Prof Taher Ahmed on the campus.

The student bodies also demanded arrest and punishment to killers of Prof Taher.

A founding teacher of the department of Mining and Geology, Prof S Taher Ahmed was killed on the night of February 1 at his flat on the campus.

At a rally held in front of central library, Parishad leaders expressed grave concern over recent appointments 'two controversial' teachers in law and justice department, ignoring the selection board.

They leaders blamed the BNP-Jammat aligned RU administration for appointing pro-Jamaat men as teachers.

Parishad leaders also criticised RU authorities for initiating a process for appointment of more than 350 employees, allegedly on political consideration.

This has tarnished the image of the university and turned it into a

"rehabilitation center" for Jamaat and BNP cadres.

They threatened of launching tougher agitation if the university authorities do not stop such "illegal" appointment of teachers and employees and allow Shibir cadre Salehi to appear at examination.

BCL RU unit president Ibrahim Hossain Moon, general secretary Ayen Uddin, its leaders Zahid Ali and Rashidul Islam and JSD RU unit president Taimur Rahman addressed the rally.

Earlier, they brought out a procession on the campus.

At the rally held in front of the business administration building, SCF leaders criticised university authorities and police administration for not submitting charge sheet of Prof Taher murder case in five months after the incident.

They said teachers, students and officials feel insecure on the campus as cadres of Islami Chhatra Shibir are in 'control' of the university. They regretted that there has not been any meaningful progress in investigation into the murders of Prof Taher and Prof Yunus and arrest of the killers despite demonstrations by teachers, students and employees for long.

They demanded submission of charge sheets in the cases soon and arrest of the killers.

SCF leaders also demanded resignation of RU Vice-chancellor for "illegal" appointments in many departments, violating university rules, and allowing Shibir leader Salehi to appear at masters examination.

'Gangraped' AL leader Chhabi Rani gives deposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Chhabi Rani Mondol described in a court here yesterday how she was gangraped and physically tortured by BNP cadres at their party office in Rampal upazila in Bagerhat on the night of January 21, 2002.

Trial of the sensational Chhabi Rani Mondol rape case began yesterday in Khulna Women and Children Repression Control Tribunal. Judge Md Belayet Hossain fixed July 23 as the next date for hearing.

Bagerhat Awami League leader Chhabi Rani Mondol, who is the complainant and at the same time number one prosecution witness in the case, gave deposition in the court amid pin drop silence.

She told the court that party cadres led by BNP leader Kazi Abul Bashar abducted her on the night of January 21 in 2002 from Rampal bus stand. They took her to Rampal BNP office and raped and tortured me, she said.

Chhabi Rani told the court that proprietor of Rampal Palash Studio Bazlur Rahman took photograph.

The Awami League leader at one stage of her deposition broke into tears. The court, however, adjourned hearing of her statement, which will resume on July 23.

Chhabi Rani lodged an FIR with Rampal Police Station accusing 15 persons.

The incident created sensation in the country, forcing Awami League to go on movement demanding arrest of the FIR-named accused.

SAJID 'MURDER' IN CUSTODY

Traders observe half-day strike in Gaibandha

Procession, rally held demanding trial of accused cops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Businessmen in Gaibandha town yesterday observed a half-day shutdown demanding fair trial alleged murder of Sajedur Rahman Sajid in custody and exemplary punishment to the accused persons.

Gaibandha Traders' Coordination Council called the shutdown from 6 am to 12 noon demanding arrest of the Sadar thana Officer-in-Charge.

During shutdown, traders, joined by people, brought out a procession in the town and held a meeting at local Shaheed Miner premise.

Presided over by Shajada Anowerul Kadir, the rally was addressed by, among others former chairman of Gaibandha Pourashava Wahiduzzaman Khan Titu, Sajid's father Abdur Rouf Sarker and elder brother Majedur Rahman Majed.

The speakers expressed their concern and indignation at the silence of the administration regarding arrest of the culprits. Non of the accused persons ahas been arrested 52 days after the alleged murder in custody, they said.

They alleged that police torture in custody has become a common

practice to realise toll. Such incidents are increasing because the culprits go unpunished, they said.

There should be a code of conduct for policemen to interrogate arrested persons to check custodial death, they said.

Sajedur Rahman Sajid, 26, a medical representative from Munshipara area in the town was arrested on the night of May 18. On May 21, his body was found at the police station.

Police said Sajid committed suicide but the autopsy report said he was strangled and the body was hung.

His death in custody sparked protests in the town. People joined by activists of different socio-culture organisations held rallies, brought out processions, formed human chains, hoisted black flags atop houses and submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner for arrest of the culprits and their trial.

A case was filed with Sadar police station accusing 22 people, which was transferred to Criminal Investigation Department for investigation. But there has not been any progress in the investigation, sources said.

4x2

Imams to campaign against early marriage, dowry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

It was a unique day for over five hundred people including match makers, marriage registrars, imams of mosques and school girls. At a seminar, they vowed to eliminate early marriage and dowry.

The seminar on 'Ways to Prevent Early Marriage and Dowry' was organised by Amar Sonar Paribar (my golden family), a newly floated organisation comprising local people. It was held at the Rishilipi auditorium here with assistance from an Italian NGORishilipi-working against early marriage and dowry. Rishilipi Director Enzo Falcone attended the seminar.

Speakers there said lack of knowledge about bad effects of early marriage, religious superstitions, ignorance and absence of

social awareness were the main reasons behind early marriage, marriage without registration and dowry.

District Registrar Wahidunnabi was the chief guest while Laura Milano and school teacher Shahjahan ali were special guests.

It was addressed by Italian national Jack Eccles, president of district marriage registrars' association Maulana ATM Samsul Alam, Imam and marriage registrar Maulana Sirajul Islam, Maulana Ashrafuzzaman Khokon, Khorshed Alam, Shafiul Haque, Safi Siddique, Sagar Roy, teacher Laila Parvin Sejuti, lawyer Nurul Islam, Dr. Sadhan Chandra Das, Nazmul Kabir, priest Bishnu Pada Chakraborty, Manira Parvin and Jyotsa Khatun.

The audience vowed that they

would neither accept nor give dowry and that they would launch a campaign against.

The speakers said dowry is opposed to Islam. This is destroying families and claiming lives, they said.

Laura Milano, Rector of Rishilipi, said women repression because of early marriage and dowry is a common incident in Bangladesh.

She urged villagers to form early marriage resistance committees to eliminate the social curse. Lack of women's education and self reliance are the reasons for early marriage and dowry, she said.

Enzo Falcone, director Rishilipi, thanked the participants including imams, marriage registrars and matchmakers for their positive response to the noble ideas.

8x3