

ANNUAL GOVT GRANT

Leaders pocketing lakhs from tea workers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A section of tea worker leaders in 19 tea gardens under Kulaura upazila have allegedly pocketed lakhs of taka from several thousand unsuspecting poor tea workers.

The leaders have been collecting more or less Tk 500 from the workers on the pretence of enlisting the workers' names in a list of 3,735 impoverished tea workers, each of whom are eligible to receive Tk 5,000 financial grant from the government's social services department for 2019-20 fiscal year.

Workers of Clevedon Tea Garden, under Joychondi union, where the grant has been allocated for 575 workers this fiscal year, alleged that their leaders told them that they would only enlist names of those who pay up.

Moreover, the workers also accused the leaders of practicing favouritism and nepotism in preparing the grant recipients' list every year. Same person has received the annual grant for more than two times, while names of many deserving workers had been left out of the list due to this unethical practice.

When asked why they were collecting money (ranging from Tk 200 to Tk 1,000) for enlisting, the leaders said it was to cover for various expenses including transportation to and from the government offices, making duplicates of workers' photographs and photocopies of their ID cards, said a number of tea workers.

Ajit Urang, a tea worker at Clevedon Tea Garden, said the

leaders do not have to incur any extra expenses during the enlistment process as all tea workers made their own photographs as well as photocopies of their ID cards before providing those to the leaders.

According to many tea workers, they became upset after finding out, from a Facebook post on Upazila Proshashan Kulaura, that payment of money, in any form, was not required of them to be able to receive the annual grant from the government.

Ashu Urang, a tea worker at the same tea garden, said Tea Garden Workers' Panchayat Committee President Mohan Lal Goala, its Treasurer Rambachan Goala, and committee members Bikash Mudi, Susan Urang and Mukul Chandra Bunarji have been collecting at least Tk 500 from each worker, with the assurance that the payment would ensure their receiving the grant.

Another tea worker, Subas Goala, said the president of the committee always shows different excuses every year to collect money from the workers and if anyone refuses to comply, he threatens them with removal of their names from some list.

Demanding exemplary punishment for those involved in the irregularities, Shankar Urang, a member of Ward 5 (Clevedon) for Joychondi Union Parishad, said the collection of money in exchange for the grant by the committee members is a clear violation of Cha Sramikder Jibanman Unnayan Karmasuchi Bastobayan Nitimala-2013.

Asked whether the allegation

brought against him and the other members of the committee were true, President Mohan Lal Goala admitted to have collected the money for various expenses such as making duplicates of photos and ID cards of the workers, travelling to government offices and preparing the "master role".

He, however, claimed of collecting an insignificant amount, between Tk 100 to 120, from each worker.

Similar allegations are surfacing at all tea gardens in Kulaura upazila and the upazilas that surround it.

Contacted, Kulaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer ATM Farhad Chowdhury said the grant is in fact a gift from the prime minister and it has to be disbursed free of charge among the poor workers.

After receiving complaints of anomalies in the process of preparing lists of recipients, he held a meeting this Sunday (July 5) with Panchayat committee leaders of 19 tea gardens in the upazila, managers of the tea gardens and chairmen and members of union parishads in the upazila.

The social services officer in the upazila has been instructed to investigate the allegations at Clevedon and other tea gardens and take stern lawful action against anyone found involved in financial transactions during the process of enlistment for disbursement of the grant.

He also said that at the meeting he has warned all concerned to return all the money that was collected illegally from the workers. Otherwise, the person responsible will face strict action from the administration.

Coastal fishermen face triple blow

Covid-19 pandemic, onslaught of super cyclone Amphan, and ongoing 65-day ban on fishing compound their misery

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Coastal fishermen, especially those fishing at sea, are passing days amid much hardship, facing the coronavirus pandemic, super cyclone Amphan and lastly the ongoing 65-day-long ban on fishing while the compensation provided by the government is too small to meet their requirement.

After the report of first coronavirus infection in the country in mid-March this year, fishermen could not catch fish in the sea due to strict health regulations under the government directives.

They have also been badly affected by the onslaught of super cyclone Amphan that hit the coastal region on May 20 while the ongoing 65-day ban on all types of deep-sea fishing, aimed at ensuring a safe breeding season for marine fish, began the same day.

The ban will end on July 23.

The longtime unemployment left the fishermen in dire straits.

Many of them are depending on loan and help for running their families while some are trying to do other work.

Abu Bakar, 45, a fisherman of Gangamati area adjacent to Kuakata beach under Kalapara upazila, said he is somehow managing to survive by borrowing from relatives.

"Often we have to pass the days half-fed. I started fishing in the sea in childhood. Other than the ancestral occupation, I don't know any work to earn a living," he said. Hanif Mia, 40, another



Trawlers lie anchored at Mohipur fish landing station in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali during the ongoing 65-day ban on fishing in the sea.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

fisherman in the same area, said he had never seen such a disaster in his life.

"As the fishing has remains banned for long, I occasionally sell vegetables in Kuakata to survive with a family of six. But I don't have the capital to run the trade regularly," he said.

Basir Uddin, a fisherman from Latachali area, said, "I could not catch fish during the lockdown due to coronavirus. Then cyclone Amphan disrupted our life. Afterwards came the 65-day ban. We are in great distress. So far, my family has got 46 kg of rice as support from the government, which is too little to meet our requirement."

The fisheries department has arranged providing 92 kg of rice as aid in two installments to each of the fishermen who have become

unemployed during the ban period. The first installment of 46 kg was distributed in late June, while the second installment is yet to arrive.

Md Ansar Uddin Mollah, chairman of Latachali Union Parishad, also a leader of Alipur trawler owners' association, said, "The fishermen families are now in great distress. The compensation given by the government do not cover everyone. It is important to bring all registered fishermen under the programme."

Kalapara Upazila Fisheries Officer Manoj Kumar Saha said there are 18,305 registered fishermen in the upazila, about 90 percent of whom fish in the sea. Fishermen are living a miserable life due to the coronavirus outbreak, the onslaught of super cyclone Amphan and the 65-day ban.



A section of tea workers in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Ministry of Water Resources Water Resources Planning Organization 72 Green Road, Dhaka-1215 Request for Expression of Interest (EOI) Table with 15 rows of details including agency, selection process, and contact information.

Boat capsized: Two bodies recovered Two others still missing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Bodies of two people out of four, who went missing following a boat capsizing in the Padma river in Kumarkhali upazila on Tuesday, were recovered yesterday.

Divers found the bodies of Shariful Islam, son of Jalil Mistri, and Jubayer, son of Ranjit Ali, of Jamalpur village, in Bheramara upazila, floating in Ghoshpur area, about two kilometers from the incident spot around 3:00pm yesterday.

Meanwhile, two passengers of the sunken boat-- Jewel Hossain, 30, son of Haran Sheikh, and Zakir, 25, son of Naju, of the same area -- still remain missing till filing of this report yesterday evening.

Deputy Assistant Director of Pabna Fire Station Saifuzzaman said divers were continuing the search operation to trace the missing two.

A small boat carrying nine passenger from Bheramara upazila capsized in the river while they were going to Ghoshpur in Kumarkhali upazila on Tuesday.

Although, others managed to swim ashore, the four went missing, Officer in Charge (OC) of Kumarkhali Police Station Mojibur Rahman said.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর সেকফোম, টোপাখোলা ফরিদপুর দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

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