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The Daily Star BUSINESS



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Political turmoil claims jobs of over one million workers

By Govinda Shil

Over one million garments and transport workers have become unemployed because of political unrest in the country.

Trade union leaders, transport owners and garments manufacturers of the city told The Daily Star that another one million workers would lose jobs within 15 days if the political situation does not improve.

"We are not declaring our factories 'lay off' to avert legal problems and labour unrest but informally our units are closed and labourers have already returned jobs," said owner of an export-oriented garments.

"The problem of labour cut started since the election of February 15 and it became more acute since the opposition parties' non-cooperation began," said Samir Sen Gupta, General Secretary of Bangladesh Local Garments Manufacturers Association (BLGMA).

He said the city has some 10,000 local garment units along the North-South road, Lalbagh, Kaliganj and Urdu road. Including the hostery industry in Narayanganj and other local garment factories adjacent to the city, the number of factories would exceed 20,000.

The President of the BLGMA, Shahidullah Mia, said that these 20,000 units employed at least 10 lakh people, of whom 6 lakh are without jobs.

Both the president and the general secretary of the organisation estimated that the sector incurred an economic loss of about Taka 100 crore during the past two months.

"If we can not sell our products before Eid-ul-Azha, we will lose another Taka 100 crore," the leaders said.

The BLGMA leaders said the country has some 50,000 wholesalers of locally produced garments who have not repaid money to the owners of the city's ready-made apparels factories. As a result, BLGMA

units could not pay their workers.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mirul Haq Amin, General Secretary of the National Garments Workers Federation said Dhaka has some 1200 export-oriented garments factories of which 600 units have already been closed.

Huq said among the jobsless, some 100,000 workers have left the Capital city by this time while others are passing days in agony.

However, a leader of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said, some 2.5

lakh workers have become unemployed and another 2.5 lakh might lose their jobs within 15 days if the crisis is not over by that time.

Christopher Gomes, President of Bangladesh Truck Owners Association (BTOA) told The Daily Star that some 15,000 trucks were plying between the city and the inter-city regions.

"Each truck has 7 workers including driver and helpers," said Gomes adding the entire sector has collapsed making 75,000 people jobless.

"Our income is related to garments traders," said Ja-

hangir Alam of the Zahid Paribahan Sangstha. Alam, an owner of 1.5 ton-capacity truck, said the city has some 20,000 small trucks which employ at least 80,000 people.

"It is unfortunate that these 80,000 workers have lost their jobs," Alam said adding most of the jobless have shifted to their villages.

The truck owners told this correspondent that November-April period was a peak season for transport business when work in construction, road building and garments continues in fullswing.

Tk 2.36 cr BRDB loan disbursed in Bhola

BHOLA, Mar 29: Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) distributed Taka 2.36 crore among 5,211 destitute people in seven thanas of the district during the current fiscal, reports UNB.

According to BRDB officials, these short term loans were disbursed among the low income and destitute society members of remote areas to support various projects under its income generating and poverty alleviation programme.

The projects included pisciculture, animal husbandry, dairy and poultry farming, nursery, growing vegetables and rice husking.

Of the loans, about Taka 40.19 lakh were distributed among 810 members in Sadar, Taka 35.32 lakh among 906 members in Borhanuddin thana, Taka 32.30 lakh among 742 members in Daulatkhan, Taka 30.38 lakh among 712 members in Lalmoan, Taka 36.87 lakh among 699 members in Charfasson, Taka 32.15 lakh among 741 members in Tajumuddin and Taka 29.42 lakh among 601 members in Monpara thana.

HK, Taiwan ban beef imports \$129m UK action plan to rescue farmers

LONDON, Mar 29: The British government has launched an 85 million pound (£129 million dollar) action plan to rescue farmers facing ruin and reassure consumers who have deserted beef in droves because of mad cow disease fears, reports Reuter.

Prime Minister John Major flew to a European Union summit in Turin to appeal for an end to the worldwide ban on British beef while Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg is heading to Brussels to seek compensation for the food scare that turned into a catastrophe.

We look to the European Union to play their part in resolving this crisis, Hogg told parliament on Thursday night as he announced a raft of measures to help the four billion pound (£6 billion dollar) beef industry.

He slapped a temporary ban on the sale of beef from newly slaughtered cattle over the age of 30 months. They are thought to be at the greatest risk of carrying infection.

Hogg confirmed that the

government planned a partial slaughter of older cattle in Britain's 11-million-strong herd.

Another report says Hong Kong, a British colony, banned imports of all frozen and chilled British beef yesterday but emphasised the decision was aimed at protecting confidence, not health.

The government said it had stopped issuing import licences covering all frozen and chilled beef from the United Kingdom following the European Commission's decision to prohibit the export of British beef.

AFP adds: Taiwan's health department on Thursday ordered a ban on some beef products from Britain amid spreading global fears of 'mad cow disease.'

The banned items include canned beef, sausage and ham," said Chen Shu-Kong, Director of the Health Department's Food Sanitation Bureau.

But the ban would have little impact as Taiwan has not imported canned beef from Britain since 1995, he said.



The Japanese Ambassador in Bangladesh Yoshikazu Kaneko (sitting 2nd-R) seen along with representatives of six NGOs after handing over cheques yesterday.

China urges quick action on UN-Iraq food deal

BEIJING, Mar 29: China voiced moral support on Thursday for Iraq in its stalled oil-for-food talks in the United Nations and the hope that a deal could be struck quickly, says Reuter.

The Chinese government supports Iraq in its safeguarding of its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen told visiting Iraqi counterpart, Mohammed Saied al-Sahaf, state television reported.

"We appreciate Iraq's flexibility and down-to-earth stand in negotiations with the United Nations on the exchange of oil for grain and hope for an early positive result," Qian said.

Talks resume in New York on April 8 on a security Council offer under which Iraq would be permitted to sell two billion dollars in oil over six months to raise funds for grain and other food, medicine and other necessities.

Qian, who met the Iraqi Minister on Thursday, expressed China's view that the UN Security Council's Resolution 986 outlining the oil-for-grain deal was "intended mainly to ease Iraq's difficulties."

China may produce 14 m tons of oil this year

BEIJING, Mar 29: China is expected to produce 14 million tons of offshore oil and 3.15 billion cubic meters of natural gas this year, a 66 per cent and 700 per cent rise over the 1995 figure, respectively, official sources said here yesterday, reports Xinhua.

And by the end of the century, the country's oil and gas industry will be a billion-dollar earner for the country.

This year's production targets represent a major breakthrough in the 14 years of the country's offshore oil development, said Wang Yan, President of the China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC), in an interview with Xinhua.

The CNOOC President said China is enjoying a sustainable and effective development in offshore oil production, with all 19 offshore oil-gas fields operational in the waters of the Bohai Sea, Yingge Sea and Beibu Gulf.

Wang expects the ratio of offshore oil output in the country's annual total oil output to rise sharply from 6 per cent in 1995 to 10 per cent this year.

The country's offshore oil production is entering a harvest phase, and bigger

achievements are expected for the next five years, in which, another 10 offshore oil and gas fields will be put into operation in the waters of Bohai Sea and the South China Sea.

Predictions are that 54 million tons of crude and 26 billion cum of gas will be produced during that period.

To boost oil production, the CNOOC said, the decision makers of China's offshore oil industry are planning to invest 26 billion yuan in the next five years in 23 offshore oil derricks, 500-km-long submerged pipelines, five onshore oil terminals, and 240 offshore oil wells.

In addition, utilisation of offshore oil and gas resources will also be stimulated in the same period. As part of the drive, a huge ethylene petrochemical project, with a total investment of 6.5 billion US dollars and a large fertiliser project with a total investment of 2.5 billion US dollars, will be launched this year, he said.

The CNOOC has gained huge economic returns, the official said, adding that the total output valued this year is forecast to hit 10 billion yuan, twice the figure of the previous year, he added.

Business briefs

China's move to tighten control of movie market
LOS ANGELES, Mar 29: China is reshuffling its movie industry executives to tighten control over its film industry, a move which could also impede US distribution there, Daily Variety reported yesterday.

Tian Congming, the top government official in charge of film, has been replaced by Wu Mengchen, who heads the country's sole film importer, China Film, has submitted his resignation. Variety said, reports AFP.

Russia, Libya to embark on \$11b jt projects

MOSCOW, Mar 29: Russia and Libya plan to embark on major joint projects worth up to 11 billion dollars to develop Libya's power installations and infrastructure, Interfax news agency reported yesterday.

Russian Minister for Foreign Economic Relations Oleg Davydov, quoted by Interfax, said the two countries would soon start building railway lines, thermal power plants and electric power lines and upgrade existing gas pipelines and industrial installations in Libya, reports AFP.

\$109 b stop-gap budget in Japan

TOKYO, Mar 29: Japan's parliament enacted Friday an 11.62-trillion-yen (109-billion-dollar) stop-gap budget for the fiscal year starting next week. The upper house endorsed the interim budget bills for the financial year commencing Monday, which passed through the lower house on Wednesday, reports AFP.

NZ economy grows slightly

WELLINGTON, Mar 29: New Zealand's economy, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 0.6 per cent in the December 1995 quarter. Statistics New Zealand (SNZ) said in a statement today in the September 1995 quarter. GDP increased 0.8 per cent, reports AFP.

Sharp rise in all sorts of crimes in Sylhet, Rajshahi and Gaibandha

RAJSHAHI
From Our Correspondent
RAJSHAHI, Mar 29: Law and order has alarmingly deteriorated in the city during last two weeks.

The anti-social elements have become active and they are committing all sorts of crimes. Incidents of theft, hijacking, robbery and clashes have markedly increased in Rajshahi.

According to the police sources, at least 50 non-political clashes have occurred in the city areas in last two weeks. About one hundred people have been injured in these incidents. The terrorists are using hand-made bombs and pistols along with lathis and sharp weapons. People allege that police are not playing active role to prevent the clashes or to arrest the terrorists. All police officer of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, on condition of anonymity, acknowledged the allegation and explained that all their forces are engaged in managing present political crisis. So they are not able to give much attention to the social crimes.

Whatever, the city dwellers are passing day and night in panic. The situation of the city has already turned into ghost-like environment due to continued non-cooperation movement of the opposition political parties. In addition to it, increasing rate of incidence of social crimes, have made the city dwellers panic-stricken.

Due to the stoppage of vehicular traffic between the town and rural areas, prices of different items especially the essential commodities marked a sharp rise.

Meanwhile, the overall law and order situation has marked a deterioration in different areas of the division, since the non-cooperation programme began. Thefts, dacoities, hijacking, robbery, extortion of money and other crimes have been reported from almost all the four districts of the division during the last few weeks. The law enforcing agencies were reportedly reluctant over taking any effective step against these incidents. They are allegedly avoiding the incidents on the plea of their being involved with political situation, it is alleged. A good number of major crimes took place in and around the town areas during the last few weeks. Armed gangs of miscreants have also become active in extorting money at different points.

Even in many places they are doing so putting barricade on the roads and highways from the trucks and other vehicles which ply for different purposes, it is alleged. The snatch all the belongings from the drivers and as well as from the passengers of different vehicles at places.

A gang of dacoits looted money in cash, ornaments and

other valuables worth about a total of Taka two lakh from the house of a businessman named Fazlur Rahman at Islampur area in the night following 23 February last. All the members of the gang were masked and armed with deadly weapons. Though a case was registered with the Kotwali thana in this connection, no arrest has yet been reported.

A gang of miscreants put barricade on the Sylhet-Tamabil Road near the MC College in the night following February 20 last and snatched away money in cash and other valuables from the passengers of

Besides, a number of businessmen of different shops in a number of markets and malls in the town, alleged that some organised gangs of extortionists were realising tolls illegally from different shops, some others demanded money tolls from the big markets in the town, failing in which they (shopkeepers) would have to face many difficulties, they threatened, the businessmen alleged. Some leading businessmen while talking to the newsmen said that they would have to keep their business establishments shut down if the situation goes unabated. Immediate steps should be taken to ensure law and order, they asserted.

Toll collectors rule highways, robbers, terrorists become active

GAIBANDHA
From Our Correspondent
GAIBANDHA, Mar 29: Activities of anti-social elements multiplied due to break down of law and order during the non-cooperation movement in Gaibandha. Miscreants have been cutting down road side trees as per their will. There is none of the law enforcing agencies to look after the matter.

Moreover toll collection along different roads and highways increased alarmingly. Fertilizer and fuel carrying trucks and tankers, rickshaw passengers and motor cycle riders are the prey to the toll collectors. Sometimes in lonely place, toll collectors snatched away cash and valuables from the passenger and took away fertilizer bags from trucks.

The alleged killer, Azimuddin hit his son, Harun-Rashid with a wooden rule at about 10 AM on the day of incident. The boy died instantaneously. Police later caught Azimuddin and lodged a case. They sent the body to Sunamganj district sadar hospital for post-mortem.

The father, Azimuddin was mentally ill, it is learnt.

Father kills son

HOUSEWIFE BEATEN TO DEATH
From Our Correspondent
FARIDPUR, Mar 29: A housewife was allegedly beaten to death by her husband at village Gabaria in Bhanga thana of the district recently.

It is reported that on the day of occurrence the husband pushed on his wife Monwara Begum, 22, to bring dowry money from her father's house but the victim refused to bring the money as her father was reportedly too poor to make the payment.

Double murder

Double murder
From Our Correspondent
PABNA, Mar 29: Bodies of two cousin brothers, named Shafiqul Islam, 20, son of Mohammad Shafiqul Islam and Rafiqul Islam, 12, son of Mohammad Tafizuddin, both of village Jayeshari under Bhuraria Union of Santhia thana were recovered Thursday morning from within a Boro paddy field in Takigari Beel.

According to police sources, the two cousin brothers were called out by several youths and asked to accompany them for witnessing a drama show in nearby Tebaria High School. Both of them accompanied them Wednesday evening but never returned.



Sylhet Zilia Byaboshayee Oikya Parishad brought out a procession on Wednesday last in the town demanding immediate solution to the prevailing political impasse. — Star photo

BRIEFS

One prisoned for life

From Our Correspondent
SATKHIRA, Mar 29: Md Rafiqur Rahman, Additional Sessions Judge Satkhira convicted one Habibur Rahman of village South Kuskhal under sadar thana on charge of killing his wife and sentenced him to suffer rigorous imprisonment for life.

The prosecution story in brief is that Habibur Rahman murdered his wife Rizza Begum, 17, on June 18, 1987 last. A case was lodged.

2 commit suicide

From Our Correspondent
SATKHIRA, Mar 29: One Sukumar Sarkar, 35, of village Jalapur under Tala thana committed suicide by hanging himself on a crossbeam made of bamboo early this month.

It is reported that his wife had been in love with one Rabindranath Sarkar, an employee of Tala Health Complex, for a long time and as such, he committed suicide.

In another incident, one Raju Khan, 38, of Shahapur village under Tala thana committed suicide by taking liquid pesticide in the first week of this month following family trouble. He took poison and died on the spot.

Father kills son

From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Mar 29: A ten-year boy was killed in the hands of his father at village Lakshampur under Tahpur thana of Sunamganj district Thursday last.

The alleged killer, Azimuddin hit his son, Harun-Rashid with a wooden rule at about 10 AM on the day of incident. The boy died instantaneously. Police later caught Azimuddin and lodged a case. They sent the body to Sunamganj district sadar hospital for post-mortem.

The father, Azimuddin was mentally ill, it is learnt.

Housewife beaten to death

From Our Correspondent
FARIDPUR, Mar 29: A housewife was allegedly beaten to death by her husband at village Gabaria in Bhanga thana of the district recently.

It is reported that on the day of occurrence the husband pushed on his wife Monwara Begum, 22, to bring dowry money from her father's house but the victim refused to bring the money as her father was reportedly too poor to make the payment.

Fertiliser price hike hampers IRRI-boro cultivation

From Shirin Akhter

CHANDPUR, Mar 29: Unprecedented price hike of fertilisers has seriously hampered IRRI boro cultivation in Chandpur district during the current season.

It is reported non-availability of fertiliser at normal price has deepened the crisis, adversely affecting the poor and marginal farmers particularly. Artificial crisis of fertiliser has been prevailing in all seven thanas of the district causing serious bottleneck to IRRI boro production in the peak hours of the season.

Crisis is mainly artificial as there is no shortage of fertiliser. But a section of fertiliser dealers allegedly created artificial crisis to earn more profit, farmers said. Angry farmers have been demonstrating in different thanas of the district in protest against price hike and shortage of fertiliser.

Farmers said, at the peak time of the season area and other fertilisers are being sold at about two times higher than the actual price. If the price of fertiliser is not controlled immediately peasants will not be able to cultivate crops in their

land which will inevitably decrease the production enormously. Farmers alleged that the wholesale dealers lift urea at Tk 186.25 from the mill gate but sell the same between Tk 250 and Tk 300 per bag of 50 kilogram in the local markets. Some dealers are selling their allotted fertilisers to the dealers of other districts at much higher rates creating artificial crisis in the district. It is learnt that a total of about 50 dealers have been appointed in the district for distribution of fertilisers.

Agriculture Extension Department sources here said some dealers did not withdraw their allotted fertiliser from the mill. Some dealers withdrew fertilisers from the mill and sell the fertilisers at the mill gate at higher price. Farmers alleged, the authorities have no control over the fertiliser distribution and price hike for which dealers are taking advantage of the situation and creating artificial scarcity to earn profit. Farmers also said, supply of urea to dealers is sufficient and their godowns are reportedly full with the fertilizer bags. But they are selling it at higher

prices to the retailers.

Chandpur is one of the largest area where IRRI boro crops are cultivated. There are two big irrigation projects of Bangladesh Water Development Board at Chandpur. The projects are Chandpur Irrigation Project and Matlab Meghna-Dhanagoda Projects.

According to Agriculture Office sources, about 2 lakh 50 thousand acres of land have been brought under IRRI boro cultivation during the current season in the district.

Farmers have become worried for not being able to cultivate crops for want of fertiliser particularly urea. One of the farmers Md Hannan Patwari of village Shekdi under Faridganj thana explained that after a few days urea will not come in any use in the crop fields. When the seedling becomes matured urea fertilizer is no longer required.

Md Hamidur Rahman, Deputy Director, Agriculture Extension Department who is monitoring the urea distribution in the district told this correspondent urea supply in the district is satisfactory and crisis is definitely artificial.

Financial hardship hits farmers in Sunamganj

From Iqbal Siddique

SYLHET, Mar 29: The farmers of different thanas in the vast haor areas in Sunamganj and Habiganj districts of Sylhet Division have been facing hardship in cultivating boro crop during the current season due to different reasons like financial crisis, shortage of inputs and lack of irrigation facilities. The low lying region known as Bhati area would face a serious setback in producing its only cash crop, boro, this year.

At this peak time for boro farming, thousands of farmers in Dharamnagar, Talurpur, Madhyanganj, Dourabazar, Biswambharpur, Derai, Shulla, Sunamganj sadar, Jamalganj and Jagannathpur in the district of Sunamganj, and Lakhat, Nabiniganj, Amuriganj, Baniachang and Habiganj sadar of Habiganj district have been suffering extremely for want of money. Worried, they are approaching the money lenders for loans. Taking advantage of the situation, the big shots money lenders are making brisk business by lending

money to the poor and marginal farmers in general. But, many can not afford the hard terms imposed by the money lenders. Most of the farmers are compelled to take the money in compliance with the terms.

I took Taka one thousand from a money lender on condition of returning ten maunds of paddy after the harvest, said Nuruddin, a farmer of village Haskhuri in Sunamganj sadar thana. It means he has to return the paddy worth Taka 2500, after only two months. The money lenders keep the documents of the landed property as security from the borrowing farmers. They also take a surety bond on a car/tridge paper about the transaction, said a number of farmers.

The farmers, almost all seek the mercy of the money lenders locally called, Moharans.

Same is the story in almost all the villages in the Bhati area of these districts. The situation takes serious turn due to the large scale irregularities and corruptions in the na-

tionalised commercial banks including the Bangladesh Krishi Bank, it is alleged by a good number of farmers.

A section of mediators have emerged in the banks, especially those located in the remote areas and thana headquarters, who get involved with the disbursement of agricultural loans. The farmers are being misled by these people in compliance with a section of bank officials and employees, do realise even Taka 300 as commission for a loan of Taka one thousand from the bank. Otherwise they are refused the loan showing different technical reasons like faults in the documents of landed properties etc.

Natural calamities, like storm, hailstorm, floods have badly hit the poverty stricken farmers in general in the Bhati areas during the last few years. Many poor and marginal farmers have become landless in these areas, recently the acute shortage of bullocks and poverty of birds have also attributed to the situation.