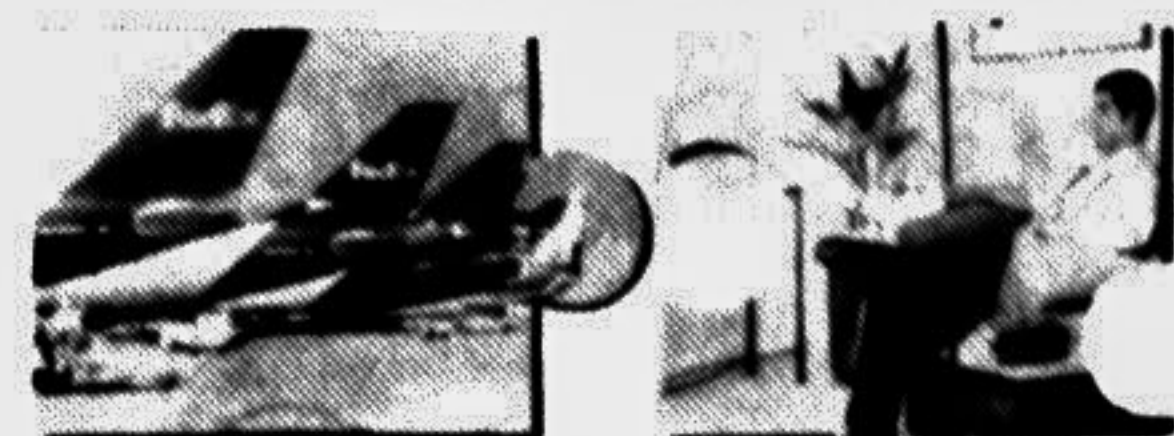


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Down to Earth

Plight of Boatmen

By A S M Nurunnabi

Buriganga suffers from many ills. Foremost among them are the filth and dirt of the city, the industrial wastes, the pollution from heavy river traffic, wall afflicting the river with a magnitude compounded by the hazard of solid and liquid wastes passing into the river water through various sources.

Besides, there is a humane side of the story which is equally poignant in its distressful impact on a smaller section of people who eke out their existence through an unconventional occupation. This refers to the few hundreds of boatmen who play their boats on the river.

It is learnt that in the two kilometre-length of the river, extending from Borish ghat under Keraniganj to Sadarghat, there are about 20 ghats from which about 500 ferry boats operate. The boatmen who have been engaged in the occupation for a long time are now faced with serious financial impediments.

As per normal practice, these ghats are leased out to the highest bidders who are called Izardars. For operating their boats from these ghats, the boatmen are required to pay fees at certain rates. Lately, it has been reported that the Izardars have increased their rates of fees. As a result, the income of the boatmen is said to

have halved. It is understood that currently the leases of Zinjira and other neighbouring ferry ghats have come under one person who has recently enhanced the fees for each boat from Tk nine to Tk 18. This increase has hit the boatmen hard. Normally, a boatman works nine to ten hours a day to earn Tk 100-120. From this income, an amount of Tk 18 is given to their helpers and an amount of Tk 15 to 20 is given to the owner of the boat daily. With the small balance of the income remaining with him, the boatman lives a life with his family in great misery.

It is reported that a certain quarter has been using the ferry pontoons as ghats for engine-propelled boats at higher rates of fees. This goes against the rules of the Roads and Highways Department. This also tends to interfere with the safety of the ferry boats operating in the area.

There are allegations that Izardars of Waiseghat and Aganagar ghat realise fees or taxes at higher rate — Tk 50 per day. From the total picture as emerging from the prevailing practices, it is felt by observers that the boatmen on the Buriganga river have become hostages to the Izardars. Their hired mastans make exactions to the extent of fifty per cent of the hard-earned income of the

boatmen. The affected boatmen, some of whom are already suffering for want of regular employment, express their grievances, saying that they find no way of getting relief from their distress.

There are many boatmen above sixty years of age who spent 35 to 40 years of their life in this profession. There was a time when ferry business used to run well. From this business, some of them could have surplus income with which they could acquire homestead and agricultural land. At that time, the spectre of oppression was not there.

But the picture has reversed today. Now most of the boatmen live in slums at Kamrangir char, Kamalbagh and Keraniganj areas. With the paltry sums that are left with them after meeting the demands of Izardars and their mastans, they eke out a miserable existence. Many of them have left their families in the villages. Their meals during the day and night are served by cheap hotels. At nightfall, they sleep on their boats. Whatever little saving they can manage is carefully stored away for spending when they visit their village homes. In this manner, they pass their life without any protest or co-ordinated action for relief, against the Izardars and their mastans.

PM: CHT accord

From Page 1

The summit, Hasina said, called for not harbouring terrorists and upholding Islamic values that strictly prohibit killing of innocent people.

Replying to a query, she said, "Self-proclaimed killers of Bangladesh are in hiding in various countries using pseudonym. On the sideline of the summit, we had talks on this problem also."

Turning to the CHT accord, Hasina blamed the opposition BNP and a section of the press for creating misgivings among the people. About a planned special session of the Jatiya Sangsad to discuss the accord, she said, "BNP has already declared that they would not come to the House. But we always want to discuss all issues of national importance on the floor of the House."

The Prime Minister, however, firmly stated that her government was always ready to face any situation, that certain quarters were trying to create, and evaded a direct reply to a question whether or not Pakistan was backing the forces in Bangladesh opposing the CHT accord.

Hasina said that the BNP chief was committing a mistake by pursuing the same strategy of movement that Awami League had done. "She (BNP chief) should know that we are not committing the mistakes she had made during her rule."

The Prime Minister also said that in the past when the army had almost brought the insurgency in the CHT under control, a ceasefire was reached "to keep the problem alive."

Asked about Jatiya Party chief Ershad's reaction on the CHT accord, Hasina said, "He should read the Constitution first." She also mentioned that

JP Secretary General Anwar Hossain Manju was present at the accord signing ceremony.

Earlier, the Prime Minister referred to her activities during the OIC Summit. She mentioned the names of world leaders with whom she had meetings, and said that they all had praised Bangladesh's role in upholding the spirit of Muslim brotherhood and her performance as regards empowerment of women.

Sheikh Hasina said that she had raised the issue of 13-million-dollar dues from various countries for the Islamic Institute of Technology in Bangladesh.

Referring to her meeting with the Emir of Kuwait, the Prime Minister said, "I conveyed to him our readiness to send more army personnel from Bangladesh, if needed, for peace keeping programme in Kuwait."

During her meetings with leaders of various other countries, Hasina said, she had called for more export from Bangladesh and recruitment of more Bangladesh workers.

Those present at the press conference included Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman, Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed, Education Minister A S H Kadek, AL president member Amir Hossain Amu, Chief Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad Abul Hasanat Abdullah and Minister of State for Information Prof Abu Sayeed.



A children's painting competition was held on the National Museum premises yesterday as part of the Victory Day celebration programme. — Star photo

New rickshaw licences to be given

Dhaka city Mayor Mohammad Hanif yesterday categorically said the number of rickshaw licences would be gradually raised from 80,000 to 150,000, but warned that no unregistered rickshaws would be allowed in the city, reports BSS.

"I agreed to issue new licences responding to your demand and upon your commitment not to ply rickshaws with fake licenses," he said while speaking at a rally organised by Jatiya Rickshaw Samik League at Paltan Maidan to mark its founding anniversary.

Awami League Presidium member Amir Hossain Amu was present on the occasion as the chief guest.

Hanif said Dhaka city is now going to be a megacity, but the civic facilities here are yet to be ensured. Traffic congestion has become a serious concern of the city dwellers, he added.

However, rickshaw is not the only cause of traffic jam, but it becomes a major cause as 75 per cent of the total rickshaws are unauthorised, he added.

The mayor said the city corporation is committed to stopping plying of unauthorised rickshaws, but it needs the co-operation of rickshaw-pullers and the owners.

State Minister for Land Rashed Mosharraf and Hajee Selim MP also addressed the rally.

AL reviews its programmes for Dec 14, 16

By Staff Correspondent

A joint meeting of the Awami League and its front organisations was held at the party's central office in the city yesterday.

Presided over by AL acting president Amir Hossain Amu, the meeting discussed the programmes to be held in observance of the Martyred Intellectuals' Day and Victory Day.

Meanwhile, triennial council sessions of the city's Demra and Mirpur thana units of AL were also held yesterday.

One shot dead at Ctg Port

CHITTAGONG, Dec 12: A young man was shot dead by port security guards while allegedly stealing valuables at a Jetty in the port today, reports UNB.

Abul Kashem, 25, hailed from Sherpur district, died on the spot as security guards opened fire at about 12:35 pm when a gang of 12 youths including Kashem were stealing valuables at jetty Number 4. Others managed to escape.

Polls violence

From Page 1

tered the residence of the newly-elected chairman of Mongolka-nadi union around midnight and started firing indiscriminately. Chairman-elect Enamul Haq, his mother, wife, elder brother, younger sister and sister-in-law received bullet injuries during the attack.

Enamul Haq, who was also stabbed by the attackers, was sent to Dhaka Pangu Hospital in critical condition.

Rest of the injured family members were admitted to Sonagazi hospital.

The election at Mongolka-nadi union parishad was held on Tuesday.

In Sirajganj, post-election clashes in two unions of Shahjadpur thana yesterday left some 17 people injured.

Nine people were injured when the supporters of the winner and defeated UP chairman candidates locked in a clash at Habibullah Nagar around noon.

In another clash between the supporters of two member candidates in Narina union left eight people injured at 10 am yesterday.

Non-pharmacists

From Page 1

practices it during his academic life."

Referring to the demand for 'competent, technical staff' for supervising manufacture and quality control of pharmaceutical products, he said, "They have misinterpreted the WHO Expert Committee recommendations on 'specification for pharmaceutical preparation.' The recommendations for 'key personnel' clearly mentions 'an appropriate combination of fields of sciences. Pharmacy is the only discipline which offers an appropriate combination of the relevant areas of sciences in this country.'"

Meanwhile, the Student Council for Preventing Job-discrimination in Pharmaceutical Industries has also joined the call for amendment to the clause. It has been agitating since February this year and held several rallies on the issue.

In October, the council had organised a grand rally of students from non-pharmaceutical disciplines in different universities. A three month-long agitation programme was announced at the rally.

JU students

From Page 1

tion (JUTA) also demanded immediate arrest of the culprits and urged the Home Minister to take measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

The Home Minister was informed of the matter, official sources said.

The minister, however, could not be contacted.

Vice Chancellor of JU Prof Amirul Islam Chowdhury also could not be contacted despite repeated attempts.

Khaleda

From Page 1

Chowdhury and Ehsanul Kabir briefed the waiting newsmen about the deliberations of the meeting that mainly dealt with the peace accord on Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Those who took part in the discussion included, Barrister Nazmul Huda and advocates Fazlur Rahman Khan, Sigma Huda, Masud Alam Talukder, Khorsheed Alam, Habibur Rahman Mandal, Ruhul Quddus Kaja and Khaleda Panna.

Leaders of Supreme Court Bar Association, Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum and Mohila Ainjibi Samity, and some members of the Dhaka Bar Association attended the meeting.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, opposition chief whip Khondaker Delwar Hossain, Barrister Jamir Uddin Sircar, Barrister Aminul Hoque, Justice Habibul Islam Bhuiyan, Haris Chowdhury and Ehsanul Kabir were present.

Our Staff Correspondent adds, Khaleda Zia in a statement yesterday demanded unconditional release of the party's national executive committee member Jamal Sharif Hira and DCC Commissioner Ismail Hossain Benu.

She also demanded withdrawal of 'false cases' against them and stoppage of 'repression' on BNP leaders and workers.

HC judges

From Page 1

staff at the lower level, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the government has already set up four new court rooms in the rear portion of the old High Court building in addition to the four vacant court rooms in the main Supreme Court building.

Nari Samaj

From Page 1

crimes against women during the war be tried in special tribunals. Nari Samaj demanded that the women who were raped and killed during the war be declared martyrs.

It also demanded that the contribution of women in the Liberation War be given due recognition and incorporated in the history of the war.

The Pakistan government will have to apologise for the brutalities committed in 1971 in Bangladesh, they demanded.

The 'public hearing' was conducted by Shara Zaker and reports on the incidents were collected by Suraia Akter, Rafiqul Islam and Tarek Masud. The declaration was read out by Naila Khan and Sultana Akter Rubi.



Seven trucks were set afire near the Jahangirnagar University campus yesterday as a sequel to attack on a university bus by truck workers at Aminbazar on Thursday night. — Star photo

Civil servants unhappy

From Page 1

tary Muhammad Ali also given a two-year contract after his retirement in September last year, and IRD Secretary and NBR Chairman Shah Abdul Hannan received a one-year extension from last April.

The above five secretaries, who got extension, have exhausted the 10 per cent quota of the President as there are 46 regular posts of secretary.

Besides, Secretary of the Parliament Secretariat Kazi Monjur-e-Mowla got extension for three years and Dr Ekram Hossain, Rector of Public Administration Training Academy (PATC), also managed a one-year extension on contract basis.

Even in the sector corporations, extension of senior officials found its way. Abdul Kader Munshi, Chairman of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC), has been given a one-year extension on recommendation of the minister concerned.

The government has no guideline on giving extension of services to the senior officials — often personal liking or dislike seems to play a deciding factor, said the aggrieved joint secretary.

"If the contractual appointment means the real necessity of an officer for his proven ability and specialised nature of job for the government, then the government should fix a criteria for such appointments," he suggested.

No previous government had even exhausted all the posts of the contractual appointment (the 10 per cent Presidential quota), but the present government has not only exhausted it, but now seems to go by the rule that more retired secretaries will be absorbed in other statutory bodies.

Concern is being expressed by the lower and middle-ranking civil servants over a move by the top bureaucrats to increase the 10 per cent Presidential quota. If this is done, it may prove to be a blunder, giving rise to increasing discontent among the junior officers.

Moreover, the much-talked reforms of Bangladesh bureau-

cracy is being hampered by following such mass-scale extension of the top civil bureaucrats.

The donor countries are putting pressure on the government to open up the bureaucracy and side by side, the World Bank also suggested to trim the bureaucracy that they termed as most inefficient.

Establishment Secretary Mahe Alam, who will go on LPR from January next, is likely to get an extension, a source said but he has no knowledge where Alam will be absorbed as all the five quota posts have been filled up.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's Office, after agreeing on principle to establishing an economic pool for the mid and senior level officers, has instructed the Establishment Division to take necessary steps in this regard.

Details about the proposed pool cannot be gathered, but a source said, deputy secretaries and above would be in the pool. The Finance Minister is learnt to have informed the PM's office that the donors wanted early implementation of the pool.

Clinton's visit

From Page 1

A top official of the Foreign Ministry said that a flurry of diplomatic communications is now taking place between Dhaka and Washington regarding inclusion of Bangladesh in the proposed South Asian tour of the US President. The trip of Bill Clinton to Bangladesh, which should also bring First Lady Hillary Clinton, will be officially announced after it is 'firmed up.'

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, during her recent communication with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is also learnt to have expressed the hope that President Clinton would be able to undertake a trip to Bangladesh next year.

Meanwhile, Andrew Samet, Acting US Under Secretary of State and head of the Bureau of Labour is due to visit Dhaka for two days from December 14.

Giasuddin

From Page 1

officer and Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as envoy to Canada.

The post remained vacant after M R Osmany was recalled. Initially, Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain was named ambassador. The agreement was however not forwarded to Ottawa following Hossain's refusal to accept the position 'on personal grounds'. Later A M Anisuzzaman, a retired CSP of 1956 Batch was tipped for the post. However due to objection from other retired ex-CSPs, and several persons vying for an ambassadorial position, the government had to reconsider his nomination.

Sources said it is now almost certain that Aminul Islam who was promoted to the level of Secretary few months back will be given the position.

Bijoy Mela

From Page 1

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Dr Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain, K M Obaidur Rahman, Mir Shawkat Ali, Col (ret'd) Akbar Hossain and other leaders of the party were present.

A discussion meeting was also held at the Bijoy Mela. It was presided by JASAS President Rezabuddin Chowdhury.

Mir Shawkat Ali, Col (ret'd) Akbar Hossain, Saadeq Hossain Khoka, Maj (ret'd) Akhtaruzzaman, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Amanullah Aman and Redwan Ahmed took part in the discussion.

A cultural function followed the discussion.

Bijoy Utsav

From Page 1

the Shaheed Minar to hold various cultural functions.

Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs Minister Obaidul Quader, poet Shamsur Rahman and artist Hassan Imam will attend the opening function.

Joint president Ramendu Majumdar will preside the function while principal coordinator of the festival Golam Quddus will present the welcome address.

Artists of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra will participate in the inaugural function.

Bangla Academy will organise a musical soiree on its premises at 4 pm on the Victory Day.

Chhayanaaut, a cultural organisation, arranged a musical session at the hall of the Fine Arts Institute of the Dhaka University yesterday evening in observance of the Victory Day.

Meanwhile, a discussion on 'Rangane Muktijuddha O Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra' was held yesterday at Ramna Batamul, organised by Joy-bangla Sanskritik Oikya Jote.

The function was presided by Salahuddin Badal while chairman of Atomic Energy Commission Dr M A Wazed Miah was present as the chief guest.

Prof Fazul Huq, Shamsuzzaman Khan and MR Akhtar Mukul were present as the special guests.

The discussion was followed by a cultural function. In Chittagong, the 10-day 'Bijoy Mela', which began at the Outer Stadium and its adjacent areas on Dec 7 to uphold the ideals and spirit of the Liberation War, is drawing hundreds of people of all ages every day.

BEA won't accept outsiders

From Page 1

CBA's. Rokia A Rahman, BEA president, says in an outright rejection.

A leader of the Samik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) has, however, claimed that the state minister for labour endorsed the plea at a meeting with SKOP functionaries late last month.

The draft Code went to the Cabinet in 1995 but was sent back when trade union representatives on the Commission protested and pointed out that it contained elements they had not approved of. The ministry began reviewing the draft, but could not finish the task before the departure of BNP government in 1996.

According to sources, even the Commission's head, Justice Abdul Quddus Chowdhury, had expressed his ignorance about some of the points omitted or included in the draft sent to the Cabinet.

Nazrul Islam Khan of Jatiyatabadi Samik Dal who sat on the Commission said he and his fellow members from trade unions "only signed the forwarding but not the text of the draft" which even dropped the provisions for national federations.

Khan said the Commission recommended allowing outsiders as CBAs in case of small establishments. "There are some establishments where it is difficult to operate as one single union," he said.

The draft said workers of such establishments as garment units and shops would be allowed to form unions jointly with others. For instance, workers of garment factories in Rampura area or all shops on Nazim Road would be free to form one single unit of a union.

The labour leaders were asking for more relaxed provisions. They sought restoration of the Industrial Relations Ordinance 1969, which until amendment in 1979 allowed a person to act as a CBA in an establishment which did not employ him.

Their argument is that "musclemen" are calling the shots in most factories or establishments because of the absence of an "enlightened leadership" which has not grown for many years now since the abolition of the clause.

A section of the workers put up barricade at the bus terminal on the Dhaka-Aricha highway for about an hour following the incident.

Police said the clash ensued when a bus with about 60 policemen hit a BRTC bus at about 7:30 am. The policemen were going to Savar from Razbaragh Police lines.

A section of the transport workers became angry as the policemen took the side of the driver and tried to resolve the conflict.

The injured persons were taken to local clinics.

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CHT to prevent outbreak of violence.

A UNB report from Rangamati said that activists opposing the CHT peace accord hoisted black flags in the three hill districts.

In Khagrachhari, police and BDR personnel were still deployed at different key points of the town while the local administration held talks with transport workers to resume plying of vehicles.

In a statement, Parbatya Chattagram Sarbadaliya Oikya Parishad leader and JCD district unit general secretary Salam Talukder said the barricade programme will continue till their demands were met.

Some 13 bailey bridges, which were displaced by the Parishad activists at Matiranga, Manikchhari and Rangamati thanas during the hartals, have been made operative by the Roads and Highways department Thursday night.

Additional police and BDR forces were also deployed near the bridge areas for protection. Meanwhile, Prime Minister's

The trade unions kept the pressure on with the Awami League administration and had a new committee formed to review the Commission draft and make recommendations to the Cabinet.

A seven-member committee, formed late August, got down to business early October in the wake of several incidents in major industrial hubs, notably in Narayanganj and Tongi.

The committee, chaired by the labour secretary, later inducted 12 more members — six trade union leaders and six employers' representatives — but hasn't met since then.

The incidents which involved ruling party activists in some cases embarrassed the government and it vowed to deal sternly with the troublemakers.

The employers, worried by the damaging incidents and then the bid to restore the 1969 provision, recently met senior ministers to thwart the move. They say such a law will adversely affect industrial relations.

Government officials are, meanwhile, talking of tough measures. Wherever possible, banning strikes or lock-outs has been an option, and attempts are also being made to draw a bold line between the legal and illegal.

To make a strike legal, there's a lengthy procedure for the trade unions. The workers have to petition to the Labour Directorate, which will call them for negotiation. If the conciliation failed, a 21-day notice has to be served on the management. Both parties may still settle the scores during this time. If they cannot, the workers can go for the strike, which is again subject to approval in a secret vote of the union.

These rules are there, and so, in most cases, strikes have been illegal.

Only in EPZs, certain labour laws are not applicable, which free these special zones from trade union activity.

In fact, there are hardly any ways for the government machinery to handle trade unions, especially in larger companies, when they defy laws. "You cannot do anything when the workers of Adamjee Jute Mills go on strike, legal or illegal," says a labour ministry official.

Even if the government wants to prohibit strikes, it is immediately referred to a labour court, the decision of which is binding on both parties.

Labour officials can only intervene when there are incidents of unfair labour practices. Explains a senior labour ministry official: "For instance, appointment letters are not issued to workers, and wages are not paid properly, unions are calling illegal strikes or coercing the management into signing something etc."

But the incidents which had sent alarming signals for the country's business environment had not called for any formal dispute settlement initiative.

The state of industrial relations has often been blamed for poor rating of Bangladesh as an investment destination. Rokia Rahman refuses to agree with the observation. "Trade union is not a problem. If outsiders are allowed, it would be a problem," she said.

She termed the accord "an honourable agreement". Obaidul Kader told the meeting that the government's objective was to establish peace which, he said, was achieved politically.

The government leaders later sat with the civil and police administration and took note of the overall law and order in the hill districts.

Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation, Mohiuddin Chowdhury also held a meeting with local leaders at Rangamati to drum up support for the peace accord and withdrawal of the agitation programme against it, sources said.

Begum Motia Chowdhury stayed back at Khagrachhari, officials said. She will stay there till Sunday, they added.

Five other ministers are likely to visit Khagrachhari on Monday.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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