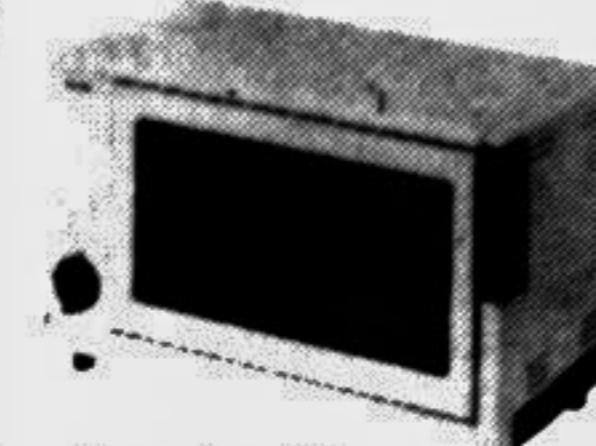


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Down to Earth

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 Borsur ghat under Keraniganj to Sadarhat, there are about 20 ghat 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 ghat are leased out to the highest bidders who are called Izadarads. For operating their boats from these ghat, the boatmen are required to pay fees at certain rates. Lately, it has been reported that the Izadarads 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 Zirjira and other neighbouring ferry ghat have come under one person who have 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 of misery.

It is reported that a certain quarter has been using the ferry pontoons as ghat 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 Izadarads 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 Izadarads. 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 Izadarads and their mastan cadres, 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 Izadarads and their mastan cadres.

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

PM: CHT accord

From Page 1

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 Bangladeshi 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 K Sadek, AL presidium member Amir Hossain Amu, Chief Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad Abul Hasnat 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 licensed," he said while speaking at a rally organised by Jatiya Rickshaw Sramik 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 Mosharaf 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 Mongolkandi 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 Mongolkandi 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.

BEA won't accept outsiders

From Page 1
CBAs," Rokia A Rahman, BEA president, says in an outright rejection.

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 induced 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 trouble-makers.

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.

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 Sramik 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.

Chhan 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 unit," 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 Nawabpur 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.

The injured persons were taken to local clinics.

The BEA chief says there was another move in 1985 to find places for the "former employees" on the CBAs. If it is allowed this time, she warns, it will send wrong signals.

CHT: Road links snapped

From Page 1
CHT to prevent outbreak of violence.

A UNB report from Rangamati said that activists opposing the CHT peace accord hosted 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 Sarbadiya Oikya Parishad leader and JCD district unit general secretary Salam Al 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 Ramgarh thanas, 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

tempers 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 alarm 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.

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Non-pharmacists

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