

Striking teachers lock up school rooms of metally retarded

REAZ AHMAD

Striking teachers yesterday locked some rooms of the SWID School for 'intellectually disabled' students at Eskaton in the city demanding withdrawal of termination letters served on a teacher and two support staff.

There are about 235 students in the school run by the Society for the Welfare of Intellectually Disabled (SWID), a voluntary organisation, with assistance from the social welfare ministry.

The teachers are demanding withdrawal of the termination letters before the annual *milad mahfil* at the school today. State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan is scheduled to attend the *milad*.

The school authorities sought police help to break open the locks but uncertainty continued over immediate resumption of classes and peaceful holding of today's *milad*.

When contacted, SWID Vice President Sajeda H Kabir said she along with general secretary of the school committee Prof GWH Chowdhury filed a general diary with Ramna police and sought their help to break the locks.

She said the school authorities assured the teachers of reconsidering cases of the support staff but not of the teacher because he faces charge for misconduct. "We offered them an amicable solution of the problem after Friday's *milad* but they would not listen."

Sajeda Kabir said the teacher was terminated earlier but the termination order was reconsidered to give him some time for correction. "As he did not rectify himself and as our intellectually disabled students were being affected by his misconduct, the authorities took the decision of termination as per the rules of the institution."

Ramna police said a police team visited the school following a complaint and found some rooms under lock and key.

This correspondent tried to talk to the striking teachers over tele-

Manikganj JCD leader shot dead

BSS, Manikganj

A local leader of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) was killed by some unidentified miscreants in the early hours of yesterday.

The victim was identified as Shafulul Islam Titu, 28, son of Gias Uddin.

Police and witnesses said Titu was shot by some armed miscreants while returning home from a fair (Baishakh Mela) at Chandahar village at about 11 pm. He was rushed to Manikganj Sadar Hospital at around 4:40 am where he succumbed to his bullet injuries at about 5 am.

Titu was the former president of ward No. 1 of JCD Manikganj poura unit.

A case was filed with Manikganj sadar police station in this connection.

Rejoinder, our reply

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30 dredgers. PT Rukindo has much more experience, stronger fleet and better knowledge in channel dredging than the other bidders like Hyundai and China Harbour, but is second to Ham Voa as far as technical capabilities are concerned. Ham Voa's bid was Tk 22 crore higher than PT Rukindo's and 'technical capabilities' was never raised during the awarding process."

"The allegation that the joint venture company has a record of violating contract agreements is totally baseless as the present contract with Mongla Port Authority (MPA) is the first and so far the only contract of the joint venture company."

"The dredging activities are in due progress and have never been suspended. Sabur Beacon having 50 per cent of the cutter suction dredging job had been completed in August 2001. The cutter suction dredger is working in jetty front and the work there would be completed before July 2002."

The BDCL also mentioned that it was not aware of "heavy siltation in Passur river, which was never reflected in tender documents as well as in the pre-bid meeting."

Regarding the departure of the Indonesian origin trailing suction hopper dredger ARU-11 it said, "Indonesian ambassador in Dhaka, Bangladesh ambassador in Jakarta and even the Shipping Ministry had been trying to bring back the ARU-11 by taking up the matter with appropriate authorities in Indonesia at the diplomatic level. But the bid has so far been unsuccessful."

"BDCL must clear all the siltation

phone yesterday afternoon but none was available at the school. An accounts official said the teachers left the school.

Secretary General of the SWID National Executive Committee M A Baten, when contacted said the strike by teachers was unfortunate. "As father of an intellectually disabled child, I can say that we're trying hard to find an immediate and amicable solution to the crisis for the sake of the poor children," he said.

The social welfare ministry provides sixty percent of the teachers' salary of 40 such schools run by SWID, founded in 1977.

SWID authorities said, they provide education to only 6,000 'intellectually disabled' children whereas their number in the country is about 36 lakh.

Graft cases Hearing on Dr Alamgir's bail petition tomorrow

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, on Wednesday fixed May 18 (tomorrow) for hearing on bail petition of former state minister for planning Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir in connection with three graft cases.

Magistrate Mohammad Nurul Karim Majumder passed the order on three separate petitions, submitted by the defence lawyers on behalf of the accused.

The court also directed the jail authorities to produce Alamgir before it during the hearing.

The prosecution side opposed the petitions.

After hearing both the sides, the court fixed the date.

In the first case, filed with Tejoan thana, it has been alleged that during the Awami League rule, the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Alamgir and five other ministers embezzled Tk 21,57,050 by appointing consultants for the Bangabandhu Novo Theatre without inviting bids.

In the second case, filed with the same thana, it has been alleged that Alamgir and six others embezzled Tk 4,52,65,646 in purchasing equipment for the theatre from the second lowest bidder.

In the third case, filed with Tejoan thana, it has been alleged that Alamgir and others were involved in inviting bids without estimating the cost of the theatre. They misappropriated Tk 52,28,21,000 by doing this.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) filed the cases against Dr Alamgir and others with Tejoan thana on March 27.

Dr Khan was arrested from ZIA on March 15 on his return from Singapore under Section 54 of the CrPC.

Alamgir was arrested on charge of instigating the government officials and employees to join the anti-government movement led by the 'Janatar Mancha' (people's dais) in the city in 1996.

Later, a sedition case was filed with the CMM's Court, Dhaka, against Dr Alamgir and six others on April 8.

Earlier, Dr Khan was shown arrested in the graft cases.

CU meets Khosru today to discuss railway link

CU CORRESPONDENT

The Chittagong University (CU) Syndicate meets Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury today to resolve rail communications problems facing the students.

At the meeting at 10.30am, the syndicate members will inform the minister about the rundown condition of rail tracks and seek his help for a sanction of Tk 9 crore for their immediate repair, sources said. Classes of the university were not held yesterday on the authorities' order for a two-day suspension from Wednesday.

However, the administrative activities were held, although shuttle trains and university transports did not ply between the campus and the city.

Meantime, the syndicate meeting chaired by the pro-vice-chancellor, Mohammad Samsuddin, Tuesday night in the absence of the CU vice-chancellor has prompted teachers to question its legality. The meeting decided on suspension of classes.

On the other hand, a faction of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) protested the inclusion of Sujauddin Suja, the expelled president of the JCD CU unit into the five-member committee that will meet the government immediately to resolve the rail communications problems. The university shuttle trains will be plying from tomorrow, although a little has been done to renovate the rail tracks, the sources said.

Attempted rape case Kamal Majumder 2 others asked to appear before court Jan 1

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The First Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka yesterday directed former Awami League lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder and two others accused in an attempted rape case to appear before it on June 1.

Judge Mohammad Shah Alam Miah accepted the charge sheet and fixed the date for next hearing of the case.

The two others accused are Kamal's brother Anwar Hossain Majumder and Nazma Hossain.

The Investigation Officer (IO) of the case submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka on April 18.

In the case, filed with Pallabi Police Station, it has been alleged that on December 30 last year, eight men forcibly took a 35-year-old woman to Kamal's political office at Mohana in the city's Pallabi area where Kamal tried to rape her.

Later, the victim filed a rape case with Pallabi Thana under the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act 2000 against Kamal Majumder and two others.

Following the case, Kamal Majumder was arrested from his Banani residence in the city on January 1.

Later he was granted ad-interim bail by the High Court on January 31.

The court granted bail till submission of the police report.

The two other accused were granted bail by the Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka in February.

Meanwhile, the High Court on April 8, extended the ad-interim bail of Kamal Majumder for six months from the date of issuing the order.

ADP

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announced. The June 6 proposed budget will also beef up his effort to these sectors in the form of tariff breaks, sources said. This is a necessary step to spur the economy as well as to collect more tax, sources said.

On the expenditure side, the finance ministry is still holding on to its projected Tk 22,038 crore revenue outlay for the next fiscal. But the reported transfer of some 25,000 staff from different projects to revenue budget will work as a strain at the seams.

Now, the new ADP will have no growth if compared with the original one of this fiscal. However, this fiscal's ADP has already been scaled down to Tk 16,000 crore, meaning an 18 per cent growth for the next fiscal's.

Meantime, the Planning Commission had been 'very selective' in choosing projects for the new ADP. Unnecessary projects were chopped, and those with very low fund demand were put under harsh scrutiny to save money here and there to be channelled to more important areas.

In the next ADP, agriculture will get Tk 419 crore in local currency and Tk 413 crore in project aid (PA), rural development will get Tk 1250 crore in local currency and Tk 488 crore in PA, power sector Tk 1450 crore in local currency and Tk 849 crore in PA, transport sector Tk 1535 crore in local currency and Tk 1744 crore in PA, and education sector Tk 1800 crore in local currency and Tk 1107 crore in PA.

Some Tk 225 crore in local currency and Tk 63 crore in PA has been kept as unallocated block allocation.



PHOTO: STAR

A roundtable on 'Children in Jail' jointly organised by Save the Children, UK and The Daily Star in progress at the conference room of the daily yesterday.

Theft stalks Titas

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and that's an official figure.

Titas counts as much as some Tk 200 crore in revenue losses a year, sending the gas sector and the economy wobbling. Moreover, till March last the outstanding bill of Titas stood at a record Tk 1067 crores.

What is more appalling is that some 40 trade union activists occupying low-tier posts do these acts of thefts day in and day out. And, in the last fiscal of the AL government, Titas lost Tk 13.74 crore in revenue a month, while in the August-September period of the caretaker administration it came down to Tk 11.80 crore.

The far-reaching effect of the mindless pilferage is visible -- Titas' parent organisation Petrobangla, despite being a profit-making entity, is unable to pay international oil companies the monthly gas purchase tariff of Sangu and Jalalabad.

Petrobangla repeatedly tried to convince politicians that they should not patronise these union activists.

But the fact is that these unionists are enjoying supreme authority over the affairs of Titas.

The union (registration number 1940) literally took over the Titas head office in the night of October 1 and from then on they virtually control the administration and make all transfers and postings.

As per the union's 'recommendation' the Titas board has transferred about 400 employees, and re-designated around 100 employees to stations where unhindered thefts can be pursued mostly in collusion with industries.

Top union leaders are so privileged that they obtain loans from Titas to purchase land even few months before they are to retire.

They also forced the higher authorities to reinstate 64 employees who were suspended or terminated on charge of pursuing criminal activities and breaching discipline in December. These employees were given 'outstanding' salary worth Tk 2.5 crores.

About 77 per cent of Titas gas

goes to the state-owned power and fertiliser units where there is no scope for pilferage. Therefore, the whole pilferage of gas takes place within the remaining 23 per cent.

Of the 23 per cent gas, 8.48 per cent is consumed by domestic users, 11.4 per cent by industrial users and 1.68 per cent by commercial consumers.

The bulk of the pilferage is committed by industrial users with the help of meter readers and powerful union leaders.

"The industrial consumers tend to tamper with meters because of the high gas tariff, one of the highest in the world," said a Petrobangla source.

World wide, industrial consumers pay the lowest tariff compared to that of domestic consumers, but Bangladeshi industries pay the highest amounts. "This affects the financial dynamics of the industries and perhaps a reason why industrialists tend to evade tariff," the Petrobangla official said.

Congress demands answers

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the post-Sept. 11 period, has consistently described the hijack bombings as a "sneak attack" and U.S. officials were not moving off that description.

'All appropriate action'

Fleischer said the government took "all appropriate action" to respond to warnings of attacks on the United States, including hijackings, based on the information that it had.

"Throughout the summer, beginning in May, the government received heightened reporting on threats to United States' interests or territory, most of it focused on threats abroad," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

"As a result, several actions were taken to button down security," he said, citing security directions to U.S. embassies and military facilities, as well as sharing information about the threats with domestic agencies.

The disclosure of Bush's briefing came amid questions about whether U.S. authorities failed to recognise and respond to warnings about possible terrorist attacks before the hijackings of the four passenger planes on Sept. 11.

Members of Congress were asking some tough questions, pointing to three pre-Sept. 11 warning signs: the U.S. intelligence Bush received, the fact that an FBI agent had written a memo urging FBI headquarters to investigate Middle Eastern men enrolled in American flight schools, and the arrest in

Minnesota of Zacarias Moussaoui, who was believed to be training for a suicide hijacking.

"We've got terrorists connected to al Qaeda out in Arizona engaging in flight training, we've got Moussaoui arrested and being interrogated in Minnesota, we've got the president being briefed while he was on vacation in Texas about the possibility of these aeroplanes being hijacked. I mean, was anything done about any of those things?" Edwards said.

He called on the administration to help Congress investigate what happened, saying there has been some tension from the White House over starting a probe.

'A lot of questions'

"We still have a lot of questions to ask and there has been some resistance to starting the investigation. Certainly immediately after Sept. 11 that made sense but we're clearly at the place now, we need to get to the bottom of this," he said.

Shelby said: "Does the FBI know what's going on in its own shop? Obviously not."

"We're not looking to cast blame. We're looking at ways to improve our intelligence and the sharing of intelligence to provide security for the American public," he said.

Bush made no immediate comment on the situation.

He attended a National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast in Washington and said prayer has helped Americans of faith to get through the last eight months.

"The last eight months have showed the world the American character is incredibly strong and confident. Yet, prayer reminds us that a great people must be humble before God, searching for wisdom -- constantly searching for wisdom from the Almighty," he said.

Unocal declines

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Compensation for wrecking rail tracks and roads in the Magurhara accident during drilling a well has been made. Another claim for compensating ecological damage is now pending.

Sources in Petrobangla said it had recently approved the claim document seeking Tk 3,900 crore in damages for destroying 248 billion cubic feet gas in the Magurhara blowout.

They claimed the ministry had also approved the claim, which was later sent to Unocal after proper vetting by a lawyer.

The gas burnt in a disastrous fire in June 1997 in Magurhara gas field being developed at that time by Occidental. Later, Occidental in Bangladesh was taken over by Unocal.

An inquiry report, put under the scraps for long, blamed negligence of Occidental for the gas explosion. Occidental's local officials had agreed with the findings of the investigations.

Over 1,000 children behind bars

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arrest of children. There are many laws to protect children, but unfortunately many of those are not implemented."

Referring to lawyers' attitude towards children, he said, "We are insensitive to the rights of the children. We are least bothered about the state of the children in jail. Judges try children and send them to jails, instead of sending them to correction centres. There is no urgency of sending the children to jail. Only in cases of emergency, judges are empowered to send them to jail."

Hassan recommended creating awareness among the law enforcers, judges and prosecutors about the rights of children.

Inspector General of Prisons Brigadier General Md Zillur Rahman said, "Ages of children are not deliberately increased." In fact, he said, "Police lack knowledge about the age and this is a major reason why many children land in jails."

He said, "All the children now in jails would soon be shifted to correction centres or their homes once legal procedures are completed."

Mokshed Malek of Ain-O-Shalish Kendra said, "Children should be properly rehabilitated by providing

education and vocational training after their release from jails to ensure that they do not return to the crime world."

Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star Afsan Chowdhury said, "Children are victims of violence. Children in politics are similar to children in armed conflicts. They are used as bomb makers, carriers, stone throwers and slogan shouters."

All of the children now in jails are from the poor section of the society. As they don't have a voice, their rights are easily violated, he pointed out.

"The government has to move to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC. NGOs need to focus on children rather than on meeting donors' demands and media can play a vital role in shaping the issues," said Nasimur Rahman, Chief of Unicef's Information and Advocacy section.

Prof Bashira Mannan of the Institute of Social Welfare suggested an 'alternative jail' for children and meetings of judges, lawyers and police officials on a regular basis to review condition of the children in jails.

Nayeem Gohor of Save the Children, UK, said, "There are two

correction centres in the country, but both of them are under-utilised. Children could easily be shifted to these centres."

Among others, Deputy Attorney General Adilur Rahman also spoke.

Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam moderated the Roundtable.

He said The Daily Star is committing itself to a campaign to assist all agencies and activists to get all the children out of jail. "We shall support everyone who fights for this. We all, including the government, stand for the same cause. This is our moral obligation," he observed.

Anti-crime drive

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seven people arrested under the Motor Vehicle Act.

The ongoing crackdown sent a wave of mixed reactions among the city dwellers. "Police are arresting innocents at will in the name of raids," one of the victims of the raid told The Daily Star yesterday. But police failed to net the targeted criminals, he complained.

Only 12 listed criminals have been arrested over the last four days.

With yesterday's arrested people, the count of arrests rose to 2,025. The drive started on Monday.

Unionism capped

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the financial health of the company. Petrobangla, the parent company of Titas, is so desperate to bring the Titas unions under control that it has decided to take up the matter with the prime minister as a last ditch effort.

Theft of gas by some meter readers who are also trade union activists has put the Titas gas in the red, causing a headache for the Petrobangla.

Protected and sponsored allegedly by the ruling party, the union activists-- cum-meter readers are beyond any actions by the Titas gas authorities though their involvement in gas theft is a fact known widely.

Petrobangla management had been 'lobbying' extensively with some cabinet members who have direct and indirect influence over the trade unions in Titas to

hold them back. State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain also endorsed the effort.

Against this backdrop and following a report in The Daily Star on Wednesday which described how a petty meter reader and union activist of Titas has become a millionaire, the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal president and food minister summoned the Titas union leaders yesterday.

25 hurt as

police attack procession at Rajshahi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

At least 25 people were injured when police attacked a Rajshahi Nagorik Committee (RNC) procession in the city yesterday.

Nagorik Committee took out the procession from Alupatty area in the afternoon as part of its nine-day agitation programme demanding cancellation of Rajshahi City Corporation Election held on April 25.

Witnesses said police went into action when the procession reached the Zero Point. They (Police) charged batons and fired teargas shells and rubber bullets to disperse the RNC activists.

Of the injured, Nur Banu, 25, injured with bullet, was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) while others were given first aid at different clinics in the city.

Following police action RNC activists went on the rampage and damaged some vehicles in the Shahab Bazar area.

7,000 expelled

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ANH Ehsanul Hoque Milon has directed the district administration and the superintendent of police to take stern action against the culprits.

As many as 3,051 examinees were expelled under the Rajshahi Education Board. Two hundred and fifty students were expelled in Rajshahi, 71 in Pabna, 249 in Naogaon, 497 in Sirajganj, 191 in Bogra, 369 in Rangpur, 205 in Kurigram, 370 in Gaibandha, 156 in Nilphamari, 113 in Lalmonirhat, 69 in Joypurhat, 517 in Dinajpur, 36 in Chapainawabganj and 58 in Panchagarh.

Four teachers were expelled in Sirajganj.

Nine hundred and eleven examinees were expelled under the Dhaka Education Board, officials said.

Also expelled were three teachers from different centres, including two in Gazipur and one in Rupganj. Law enforcers arrested one outsider at Noria in Shariatpur for his alleged connivance in cheating.

Nineteen students were expelled in the Dhaka city, seven in Munshiganj, 17 in Narayanganj, 140 in Narsingdi, 172 in Mymensingh, 107 in Netrokona, 21 in Tangail, 23 in Sherpur, 16 in Faridpur, 95 in Madaripur, 26 in Shariatpur, 29 in Gopalganj and 33 in Rajbari.

Five hundred and twenty-seven students were expelled under the

The state minister for energy Hossain was also present at the meeting held at the food minister's office.

Titas has four unions-- three backed by BNP and one by the Awami League. The activists of the AL-backed union were ousted from Titas after the October 1 election.

At the meeting participated by the top brass of the Titas units of the three unions and other frontline leaders of the Sramik Dal, the two ministers blasted the unions for allowing criminal activities in Titas gas.

The ministers portrayed a grim picture of the company that is losing Tk 200 crores a year due to theft.

Jatiyatabadi Sramik Karmachari Union President Habibur Rahman proposed that the three trade unions be suspended in the greater interest of Titas.

However, Noman said apart from carrying out their usual activities no meeting between the trade unions and Titas management or interference by the unions in the affairs of the Titas should be allowed. The meeting also decided that no union activists can enter the room of any Titas officers.

Titas is the country's first and biggest commercial gas field that launched operation in 1968.

Coaches

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way through every 90 minutes.

"It's FIFA's regulation on the pitch so I can't confirm that, but in the public spaces