

# Allow sugar mills in private sector

## Business leaders in Rangpur, Kurigram demand

RAFIQUE SAKER from Rangpur

Business leaders in Rangpur and Kurigram have urged the government to allow setting up of medium scale cane-based sugar mills in the private sector in northern districts.

Talking to this correspondent, a number of prospective entrepreneurs showed interest to set up medium scale cane-based sugar mills in the area, now barred by industrial law.

They said there is great prospect for private sector sugar mills in the region, known for growing high quality cane suitable for sugar production.

The districts are traditionally known for growing sugarcane because soil and climate in the region is suitable for this commercial crop.

Sugar mills in the region under the Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (SFIC) incur around Tk 50 crore losses every year due to alleged corruption, mismanagement, excess manpower and lower

rate of production.

These problems can be overcome easily by private sector, they said.

Rangpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) President Mostafa Azad Chowdhury said the government recently allowed the private sector to set up 'refinery sugar mills'. But cane-based sugar mills are not allowed.

To set up refinery sugar mills, entrepreneurs will have to import raw materials from Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, he added.

"Such a decision will not benefit the people and the country."

Senior Vice President of RCCI Jahangir Alam said recurring losses by mills under the SFIC might have prompted the government to take such a decision.

"Rangpur Sugar Mills at Mahimaganj has been closed down and Shympur Sugar Mills in Rangpur is facing lay-off in the wake of continuous loss."

According to records with the Department of Agriculture

Extension (DAE), about two lakh hectares of land in eight northern districts are suitable for sugar cane cultivation.

Farmers in the region cultivated sugar cane in large quantities some years back.

But the areas under cane cultivation shrank drastically as they could not get fair price of their product because of losses by sugar mills.

Many of the farmers gave up profitable sugarcane cultivation and switched over to other crops.

Citing example in Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, Azad said, alongside state owned mills, private sector sugar mills produce huge quantities of sugar in those countries and earn foreign exchange.

"We do not understand the logic for not allowing private sector sugar mills", he said.

Mostafa Ahmed, an Executive Committee member of RCCI, expressed the optimism that medium scale sugar mills in private sector will be profitable. This will also benefit thousands of farmers

and employ as many people, he said.

An official of Shympur Sugar Mills on condition of anonymity disclosed that the country's 14 sugar mills might produce around 1.80 tonnes of sugar this year, which would be about 50,000 tonnes less than the target.

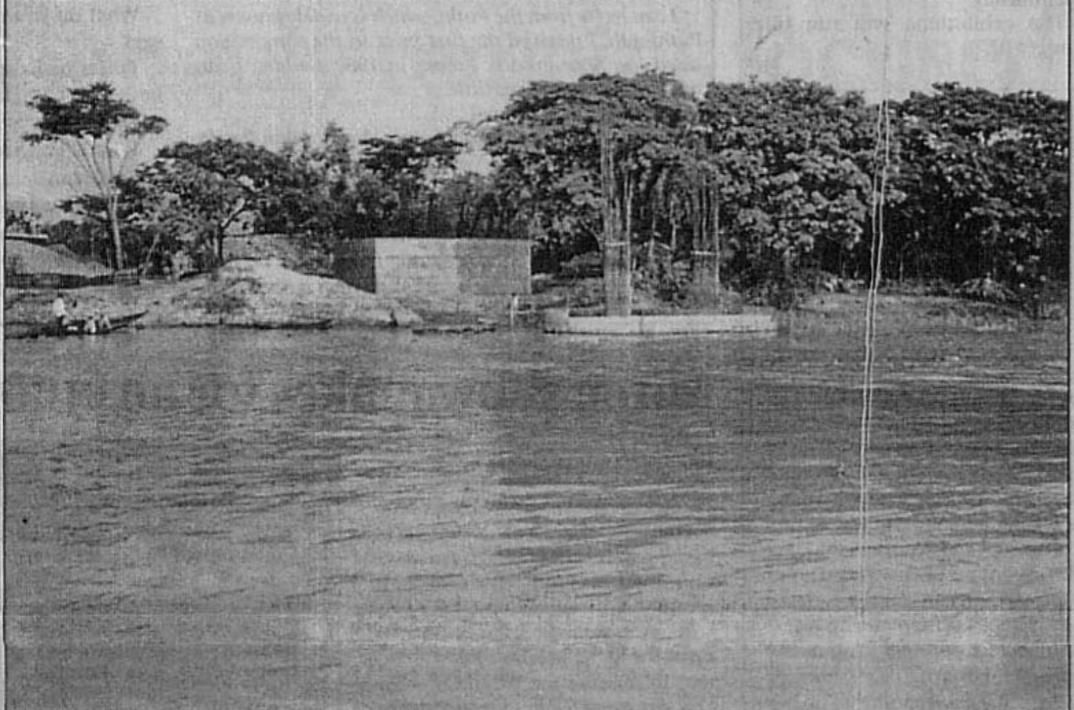
Huge quantities of sugar lies unsold in mills because of smuggling of cheaper Indian sugar. Production cost could be lesser in private mills, which would reduce the smuggling, he said.

Abdul Aziz, president of Kurigram Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said about six lakh tonnes of sugar are imported annually.

If government allows setting up of cane-based sugar mills in the private sector, import can be reduced, he said.

Nusrat said private sector sugar mills are operating profitably in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore where labour costs are higher than in Bangladesh.

PHOTO: STAR



Oblivious of people's suffering... Nobody knows when construction of the bridge at Sheikhpur on the Arial Kha river on Madaripur-Dhaka highway will resume. The work is stopped for about three years for lack of funds, officials say

## Killings in bomb attacks rise in Jhenidah

6 including police ASI and BNP leader killed in 6 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Killings in bomb attack by miscreants have increased in Jhenidah district.

At least six persons including a ruling party leader and an ASI (Assistant Sub-Inspector) of police were killed in the six months, according to police and newspaper reports.

The latest victim is Shafuddin Ahmed, member of Madhuhati Union Parishad (UP) and vice-president of local unit of BNP.

Shafuddin died on the spot on December 10 when a gang of 10 miscreants threw bombs on him when he was standing in front of his shop at Charol Bazaar in Jhenidah Sadar upazila.

On November 29, one person - Abdul Aziz -- was killed when a gang of alleged outlaws hurled bomb on him near Talsha police camp in the Sadar upazila.

On July 8, an ASI Harinaundu police station was killed when miscreants threw bombs on him while he was on duty near a cinema hall in the upazila headquarters.

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Alleged outlaw Jhantu was killed when his rivals threw bombs on him at Gopalpur Bazaar in the Sadar upazila on October 15.

On September 25, alleged outlaws hurled a bomb and killed Fazlur Rahman at Harinakundu upazila headquarters.

On July 8, an ASI Harinaundu police station was killed when miscreants threw bombs on him while he was on duty near a cinema hall in the upazila headquarters.

PHOTO: STAR

## 10 hurt in JCD clash over share of gambling money

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

At least 10 people were injured and a number of shops were damaged when two groups of Jubo Dal activists clashed over sharing gambling money in Kalmari Hat in Jaldhaka upazila on Sunday.

Sources said Liton, president of Kalmari union unit of Jubo Dal, raised a tent at the local market and ran gambling for long, attracting local youths. The money thus earned was also shared by some leaders of the party.

On Saturday in the evening, some rival activists of the party led by Nazrul opposed it, allegedly because they did not get the share.

At this, members of Liton group assaulted some people belonging to Nazrul group.

Next day, the groups clashed. The shops were damaged during the chase and counter-chase that continued till noon.

The four still held were produced before court. They are Majibar, Pir Ali, Kartik Mondal and Azibar.

PHOTO: STAR

The rest were given first aid. A case has been filed with Akhaura police.

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