

Ship breakers seek better life in forlorn hope

SHAHADAT HOSSAIN RIAD

Lack of adequate safety regulations, shortage of tools and equipment, absence of healthcare facilities, pure drinking water and sanitation facilities as well as poor payment have pushed thousands of workers of the Sitakunda ship breaking yard into a forlorn state.

The Sitakunda ship breaking yard is a highly polluted coastal belt.

A number of children are also involved in the job which largely requires arduous muscle work and a strong physical build.

According to a Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) survey, around 11 per cent of the workers in the ship breaking industry are under 18 and risking their lives. And most of them have come from northern districts.

Of them, about 24.15 per cent workers are from Bogra, 17.36 per cent from Jamalpur and 7.55 per cent from Sirajganj, sources said.

"They are to work on an average 10 hours a day in the yards and hardly enjoy any break," a YPSA official said.

He said the wages are not satisfactory at all. Of the five

categories of workers, the cutter group gets the lowest of Tk 85.56 a day while the hammer group the highest Tk 150.

The workers can hardly think of any relief or recreation whatsoever. Several young workers go to the sex workers in search of pastime with the risk of transmitting the fatal diseases into their bodies.

Of the 68.30 per cent unmarried labourers, 7.55 per cent used to go to the sex workers, sources said.

Besides, 43.77 per cent watch television and 22.64 per cent go to cinema at leisure.

Moreover, 54.72 per cent of the labourers said that the sanitation facility at the yard was very bad.

Some 90.19 per cent of the labourers said that they don't have any medical facilities in the yard. The authorities do not offer any medical facility except in case of serious accident, they added.

The NGO official said that the labourers have no any appointment letter or contract for their job and they don't get any leave even on the occasion of holy Eid-ul-Fitr or Eid-ul-Azha.

Haroon, a middle-aged labourer of the cutter group, said that he had been working at the

ship breaking yard for the last two years without any holiday.

"I could not meet my family members in Bogra since I came here in early 2003. But I shall meet them very soon if I get money," he said.

YPSA Programme Officer, Abdullah Al Mamun told The Daily Star that a national policy on the ship breaking industry is essential to mitigate the sufferings of the workers.

"We have been working with the owner of the yards, labourers and the other stakeholders for the last two years. And a policy can boost the ship breaking industry which currently earns Tk 7000 million revenue a year," he said.

He said the government should take necessary steps in this regard for the betterment of the industry.

Mentionable, the ship breaking industry started its journey on the seashore area of Sitakunda Upazila (Fouzderhat to Bar Awlia) after a severe cyclonic storm in 1960.

It expanded to a wider extent in the early 1980's and now over 20,000 people work in the industry.



The huge piece of land recovered at Bahodderhat intersection in the city has turned into an illegal parking lot. The Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) recovered the land last year demolishing illegal structures after facing strong resistance and a lengthy legal fight. The aim was to ease unbearable congestion and expedite movement of traffic through the expansion of roads and the intersection there. The south Chittagong-bound microbuses have captured the roadside land due to slow progress in CDA's road expansion work.



PHOTO: ZOBAYER HOSSAIN SHIDER



Winners of Dutch-Bangla Bank-Prothom Alo Ganit Utsab (Maths Olympiad) pose for a photograph with the guests and organisers at Nasirabad Govt Girls School on Friday.

Meter tampering mounts suffering to consumers

PDB officials, readers blamed

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

Tampering of meters by a section of the Power Development Board readers has long been taking place unabated in Chittagong, mounting sufferings to the consumers in spite of repeated complaints.

The readers tamper with the meters of both industrial or HT (hypertension) and residential or LT (low-tension) connections in connivance with a section of officials and consumers.

The government is incurring a huge financial loss in terms of revenue earnings following this. On the other hand, common consumers as a whole are losing faith in this utility service.

"I do check my meter regularly and keep reading in my notebook everyday but I often get embarrassed when the official bill comes to me. Because the official bill was much higher than mine," moaned Sirajul Islam, a retired person, at Kapashgola in the port city.

He said "the most surprising is that I haven't seen the reader concerned at my courtyard yet. I couldn't even guess how he prepares the reading without having a glance of the meter," he added.

The PDB centre at Reazuddin Bazar in the city is crowded with complaints of excessive or unrealistic bills without any care by the officials concerned.

"I use only two fans and four fluorescent bulbs at my small shop at Chawk Bazar but with bills

beyond my imagination and belief," said Jasimuddin in this correspondent at the PDB complaint centre on Saturday.

He said "my shop was closed for about six months two years ago but I had received a bill of Tk 1,500 for the period."

The PDB authorities, denying the allegations, said "we generally get a small number of genuine complaints."

"We always try to solve those problems as quickly as possible," said acting Chief Engineer Saiful Haque.

Sources, however, reckon that PDB sometimes fails to deliver remedial services to the consumers due to lack of adequate manpower and meter readers.

They said the PDB in Chittagong has only 250 to 260

meter readers against more than 2.5 lakh consumers and it is really a hard task for one reader against 1,200 consumers to provide proper services.

The shortage of readers sometimes compels them to make an average bill depending on guesswork, the sources added.

The officials suggested appointment of sufficient and competent readers, supply of flawless meter, regular supervision and removal of flawed meters. They also suggested proper consideration of the consumers' complaints and solving them as quickly as possible to ensure better services and thus earn people's trust.

the week that was

Publicity a must for eye, blood donation

A massive publicity is required for inspiring people in blood and posthumous eye donation.

The Chittagong unit leaders of Sandhani at a press conference held on the eve of its 28th founding anniversary here on Friday.

They urged the media people as well as cinema hall owners to come forward in this respect.

Chittagong Medical College unit leaders said that lack of suitable transports is one of the major obstacles to collecting blood and corneas.

Md. Moshir Rahman Sagor read out the written statement at the conference where Monoj Chowdhury, Indrani Soor, Azizul Haq Himel, Touhidul Islam Nayan and Minhazul Haq were present.

Directive to railway

Bangladesh Railway Director General (DG) directed operation of additional trains to increase transportation of Inland Container Depot (ICD) bound containers.

AFM Mostafizur Rahman gave this directive while presiding over a meeting with the high officials of eastern zone at the railway officers' rest house here on Thursday.

The meeting discussed ways and measures for easing the congestion of ICD-bound containers at Chittagong port.

Railway General Manager (East) Sultan Ahmed Talukder, Additional DG (RS - Dhaka) KMA Rob, Additional DG (M&CP - Dhaka) Sajjadur Rahman were present.

The meeting was told that railway transported 6793 TEUs containers in January earning around Tk 3.51 crore while it carried 6132 TEUs containers earning Tk 3.47 crore in the previous month (December 2004).

Liberalise timber transportation rules

Timber merchants of Chittagong division on Tuesday demanded liberalisation of rules transportation of timber.

They threatened to refrain from participating in the government tenders for sale of seized timbers on auction and begin agitation if their demands were not met immediately.

The leaders of Chittagong Divisional Timber Merchants Association made this demand at a press conference at Chittagong Press Club.

They demanded that a consignment of timbers collected from the CHT be measured, checked or inspected and be taxed accordingly instead of being held up or confiscated.

The leaders resented reports on timber smuggling, particularly that of teak, without naming the smugglers and branding all the legitimate timber merchants as smugglers that causes suffering to them immensely.

Association General Secretary Md. Anwar Hossain read out the written statement on behalf of President Jahangir Alam at the conference.

Railway annual sports held

Lalmanirhat and Dhaka clinched the champions and runners-up title respectively in the 28th annual sports competition of Bangladesh Railway that ended at Polo Ground here on Wednesday.

Inaugurating the daylong

competition as the chief guest State Minister for Communication Salahuddin Ahmad MP said that sincerity of railway officials and employees could help the organisation win the faith of passengers and restore its glory in the sports arena.

Lalmanirhat team bagged 17 medals (seven gold, six silver and four bronze) while Dhaka team bagged 11 medals (four gold, three silver and four bronze). Railway (West) Head Quarter team got ten medals and was placed third.

In the 100-M sprint Md. Ali Azam Mia of Dhaka and Narayani of Lalmanirhat won

their respective races to become the fastest man and woman of the competition.

Railway Director General AFM Mostafizur Rahman was the special guest at the ceremony where Md. Mokhlesur Rahman and M. Eknobler Habib Ahmad also spoke.

Awareness campaign against HIV/Aids

Theatre Arts for Less

Fortunate under its advocacy on HIV/Aids organised a cultural programme here on Friday to create awareness against the fatal diseases.

The programme held at Bhulua Colony of Agrabad Chhotapole area included songs on prevention of HIV/Aids and a film titled "Nirab Ghatak (silent killer)."

Taif Chief Coordinator Noor Nabi Dulal inaugurated the programme. Views on this issue were exchanged among some 400 local people of different ages and sexes.

Taif Programme Coordinator (HIV/Aids and Anti-drugs) Md. Hafizur

Sand collection protested

Several hundred villagers of Tailerdwip under Anwara upazila staged a demonstration here on Sunday protesting massive collection of sand from the Shankha river in the district.

The speakers at the rally said massive erosion due to strong current of the river have already engulfed 4,000 homesteads and 4,00 acres of land of the village.

Recently, sand was being collected from the river by bulldozers for the construction of a connecting road linking Tailerdwip Bridge, they said. It posed another erosion threat to the villagers, they added.

The villagers demanded an end to the sand collection immediately. Otherwise, they warned of tougher agitation.

Shafiul Karim Chowdhury, Master Abdul Jalil Chowdhury, Master Monsoor Ali, Md. Monirul Islam, Jamal Hossain, Md. Yeakub and Jahangir Alam also spoke at the rally with Fazlul Kader Master in the chair.



A day-long cake festival was held at DC Hill Park on Friday. Popular folk singer Shefali Ghosh, right, sings at the festival.

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