

Karnaphuli Paper Mill now a losing concern

High price of inputs, undue advantage by CBA leaders blamed

MONIRUL ALAM, back from Chandraghuna

RANGAMATI: Once profitable Karnaphuli Paper Mill (KMP), the country's largest and oldest paper mill, is now a loss-making unit. It incurred a loss of over Tk 80 lakh from July to December in the current financial year, allegedly due to hike in input cost and undue privilege enjoyed by a section of CBA (collective bargaining agent) leaders and employees.

The giant mill on 443 acres of land in remote Chandraghona in Kaptai had earned a gross profit of Tk three crore 90 lakh in the last financial year from sale of 28917 MT of different kinds of paper.

The profit margin was over Tk three crore in previous financial

years, sources at the mill told this correspondent during a visit to the mill last week.

The mill under Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) may face closure or privatisation if the trend continues, it was warned by top BCIC officials recently, the sources said.

But the situation has not improved following the warning, made by BCIC Chairman Brig Gen (rtd.) Imam Uz Zaman during his visit to the mill on December 28, they said.

The BCIC top official also urged the mill management and employees to turn the giant mill into profitable concern.

"Otherwise, the mill will be treated as an ailing industry and appropriate steps will follow", he

had said.

But several CBA leaders and employees this correspondent talked to however denied the alleged undue privilege enjoyed by them and a section of employees. They said the loss is solely due to hike in input cost.

Additional expenses are incurred on purchase of Chlorine and Caustic Soda, the two main chemicals, raw materials like bamboo and tropical wood from forests and gas-electricity bills, they claimed.

Increased maintenance cost on old machinery is also an added burden, they said.

They however admitted "misuse" of gas and electricity by a section of employees who reside on the mill area.

Some mill officials seeking anonymity alleged that they often have to succumb to pressure from CBA leaders for undue benefits, which increase the cost.

Its Managing Director (MD) Mir Mozaffar Ali declined to talk to this correspondent.

The officials and CBA leaders said they have to purchase Chlorine and Caustic Soda at higher prices since closure of Karnaphuli Rayon Complex (KRC) two years ago. Earlier, the KRC supplied Chlorine at Tk 18000 per MT.

Now the mill has to purchase Chlorine at Tk 42,000 per MT. The Global Heavy Chemicals Limited, a Bangladeshi company, supplies only two percent of the Chlorine needed.

The rest is imported from India through Benapole border, which increases the cost and takes more time.

Daily requirement of Chlorine is 10 MT.

It was gathered that a section of CBA leaders realise financial benefit



PHOTO: STAR

The giant Karnaphuli Paper Mill in Chandraghona is now ailing.

SNAPS

10 hurt in B'baria storm

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

At least 10 persons were injured, two of them critically, as a cyclonic storm lashed the district in the early hours of Friday. According to official sources, the storm damaged about 100 thatched houses. Electric wires were snapped in different places, two 11, 000 voltage electric poles of the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) were damaged and a 11,020 feet boundary wall of Bangladesh Gas Field Company Limited was completely damaged during the storm. The affected areas are Brahmanbaria Poursabha, Shuhibpur, Nononpur, Chandiara, and Bedbaria villages.

TENGRATILA BLOWOUT Relief well drilling now begins late March

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Drilling of the relief well in Tengratila Gas Field to seal the main well will be delayed further as 'few more weeks' will be needed to complete the preparatory work.

Drilling of the relief well was earlier scheduled to begin this month.

A severe blow-out and fire took place in the main well of the gas field at Tangratila on January 7.

The drilling is being done by Canadian company Nico Resources.

An official of the company told The Daily Star on Monday that it is not possible to start drilling of the relief well as the drilling rig is yet to be taken there from Chittagong. It will need few weeks more, he said.

"Besides, we are yet to finish preparation of the drilling pad due to non-availability of soil in the adjacent area", the official said.

from both dealers who purchase paper and from raw materials suppliers to the mill. There are 2049 dealers.

The CBA leaders prevail upon the mill management not to increase the prices of paper to match the production cost.

On the other hand, they have underhand deals with raw materials suppliers and ensure them higher rates, sources alleged.

At least 14 families, who are not dependents of KPM employees, now reside on the mill compound illegally under the protection of some CBA leaders, who realise rent.

When asked about this, the mill management said steps are being taken to evict them.

They also said it has been decided in principle that the KRM would be reopened to supply chemicals' at cheaper rates.

The KPM produces 22 varieties of paper under three categories -- writing, printing and wrapping papers. It meets a major portion of the country's requirement.

It was set up in 1953 at Chandraghona, 49 km from Chittagong port city on the north bank of the Karnaphuli river by the then Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation at a cost of USD 15 million. Its annual production capacity is 30000 MT.

The integrated pulp and paper mill was set up because of abundant supply of raw materials like bamboo and tropical wood from forests in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

It employs around 2980 people. About three lakh people are directly or indirectly involved with the mill for their livelihood.

Akhaura border calm after flag meeting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A peaceful situation prevails along Akhaura border after a successful BDR-BSF flag meeting held on the 'No Man's Land' on Friday.

The flag meeting was held to ease tension created along the Indo-Bangla border following construction of illegal barbed-wire fence by the Indian BSF on the 'No Man's Land.'

The Bangladesh team was led by the 7, Battalion Commander of the BDR while the Indian team was led by the 131, Battalion commander of the BSF.

It was decided that henceforth the BSF would not erect barbed-wire fence on the 'No Man's Land'.

Another flag meeting will be held on February 28, according to a decision of the flag meeting.

Toll: College principal threatened with death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilplamari

Extortionists, failing to realise toll, threatened a college principal with death in Jaldhaka upazila.

A group of extortionists allegedly led by Motaahr Hossen and Kobibar went to Koimar School and College at about 10 am and demanded Tk one lakh from its principal Koruna Kanto Roy.

As he declined, they became angry and threatened him with death.

The principal lodged a case at Jaldhaka thana accusing four persons, police said.

PCJSS man held, arms recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

An alleged cadre of Parbattya Chattagram Jono Sanghaty Samity (PCJSS) was arrested by the joint forces from Barbindu Ghat in Baghaichhari upazila on Saturday, according to army sources.

The arrested person is Nihar Bindu Chakma, 40.

Following his confessional statement, the joint forces recovered a foreign made revolver, a rifle and 25 live bullets from elsewhere.

Nihar Bindu, a former member of now-defunct Shantibahini, had long been involved in firearms trafficking. He had also been leading a group of armed cadres acting against the anti-peace elements in the United Peoples' Democratic Front (UPDF).

He had also been engaged in illegal extortion and attacking the troops.

EXPORT OF POTATO STARCH Swiss envoy visits Flat factory in Joypurhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Juerg Casserini, Head of Mission and Hans Peter Fitze,

Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Switzerland, visited the factory of Flamingo Agro-Tech Ltd (Flat) at Tilakpur in Joypurhat district on Sunday.

The company will produce starch from potato and export the whole output to Switzerland for five years. The factory will begin trial production in the first week of next month and commercial production on March 15.

AK Siddique, Managing Director (MD) of Flat, explained to the dignitaries the production system and its

future plan.

Talking to this correspondent during the visit, Ambassador Juerg Casserini said he is happy seeing the healthy production system at the factory.

The Flat will export 17,520 tonnes of potato starch annually to Switzerland. The production capacity can be increased in future, Siddique said.

The international market price of one MT of potato starch is about 700 US Dollars now, he said.

The plant, first of its kind in the country, will utilise over 60,000 tonnes of potato annually, which will directly benefit at least 6,000 farmers.

Attack on Shalika newsman condemned

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Journalists in Shalikhap upazila in Magura at a meeting at the local press club on Monday demanded arrest of miscreants involved in the attack on Dainik Bhorer Dak correspondent Abdur Rob on Friday night.

They condemned the incident and demanded security of journalists by the administration.

After the attack, Abdur Rob lodged a general diary (No. 74) with Shalikhap police station.

As per the GD, some youths allegedly led by Obayedur Rahman of Katoli village in Shalikhap upazila beat Rob on Friday night and threatened not to file any more report on activities of Thana Health Assistant Dr Nazrul Islam.

The Daily Bhorer Dak had earlier published a report headlined, "Wrong treatment by Dr. Nazrul, patient fights for life".



PHOTO: STAR

Learning to trace identity... A child placing wreaths at the Shaheed Minar in Chittagong city yesterday.

Teesta project dam breaches again

Farmers say the project is now a woe for them

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The embankment of Teesta Irrigation Project has breached again, inundating over 500 acres of IRRI-Boro fields and covering a vast area with sand.

About 20 feet embankment of the Dinajpur Canal gave in on the night of February 17 at Sona Roy village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

Over 500 farmers working day and night have partially repaired the breach.

When informed, Water Development Board (WDB) officials in Nilphamari stopped supply of water through the canal, which has deprived several thousand acres of IRRI-Boro lands of irrigation water.

Talking to this correspondent on Sunday, the affected farmers alleged that the embankment breached due to pressure of water as it was not constructed as per design. Sand was used in the construction work instead of soil, they also alleged.

Each breach either flooded crop lands or kept irrigation suspended for weeks, which affected IRRI-Boro.

But project officials alleged sabotage and also filed cases against farmers.

Earlier, on February 12, about 100 feet of the Dinajpur Canal breached, inundating about 15,000 acres of IRRI-Boro land in Jaldhaka upazila in Nilphamari district.

The canal also breached at Chichirbandar upazila in Dinajpur district on the same day and at Champatoli villager on February 1.

The Teesta project has 3,81,000 acres of land under its command area in 12 upazilas of Nilphamari, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts.

It was gathered that the embankment had breached at Dundibari in Jaldhaka on September 1, 1998, a few months after its commissioning.

Nepotism to recruit JU teacher?

JU CORRESPONDENT

Authorities at Jahangirnagar University (JU) and the Archaeology department there have allegedly initiated some illegal means to appoint teachers in three posts of Lecturer in the department.

Selection of the teachers will be finalised today, sources said yesterday.

The university authorities had circulated a notice on September 12 last year inviting applications for the posts, recommended by a committee formed by the Syndicate in 2003.

The three posts are among new posts which the Syndicate had recommended for 24 departments.

"The recommendation made by the committee to create new posts at the Archaeology department is out of its (Committee) authority and illegal. It was done to appoint a teacher selected on basis of nepotism," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman Lal of the department.

He also alleged that the department's chairman had suggested the university authorities to recruit some teachers in his department.

Md Masud Imran is one of the applicants for the post of Lecturer in the Archaeology department.

Earlier, five students of Archaeology who got first class in in 1999 had submitted a memorandum to the Vice Chancellor last year seeking re-examination of the thesis paper submitted by Md Masud Imran. It was titled 'Landscape Archaeology of War-Bateshwar: A critical understanding of past human land relationship using GIS and remote sensing'.

The thesis paper contains 'very few references, distorted and fake

quotations of archeologists and wrong information about War-Bateshwar", a teacher claimed seeking anonymity. The thesis scored 178 out of 200 marks.

When contacted, Prof Mozammel Huq, Chairman of the department, declined to comment.

When asked about re-examination of the thesis, VC Prof Khandaker Mustahidur Rahman said "All procedures have been done legally and the thesis paper was examined by examiners selected by the department. I have nothing to do".

Steps to contain smuggling by train

OUR CORRESPONDENT B'baria

A decision was taken at a meeting of the district law and order committee here on Saturday to take certain measures to contain smuggling by trains, stop traffic jam on roads in the district town and haltage of illegal activities of brokers on the premises of Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital.

Held at Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner (DC) Md Jahirul Haque's conference room under his chairmanship, the meeting was addressed by Superintendent of Police (SP), ATM Tareque, ADC (general) Mia Abdullah Mamun, advocate Md Safiqul Islam PP, Abdul Wahid Khan and Akhaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Mezbah Uddin Chowdhury. All district level officials were present in the meeting.

100 hurt in clash over land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

At least 100 people including a woman were injured in a clash between two groups of villagers at Madir Haor of Ashurail village under Buresheyar union in Nasirnagar upazila over cutting grass from a disputed land on Friday.

Aksir Mia of a group led by Md Karim member and Younus Mia of their rival group led by Farid Mia exchanged hot words following cutting of grass at the disputed land, according to eye-witnesses, hospital and police sources.

At one stage they began a wrestling. Being informed, at least 800 supporters of both the groups equipped with lethal weapons rushed to the spot and locked in a bloody clash that lasted for two hours.

Of the injured, Md Basir Mia, 24, Md Mizan Mia, 40, Md Malek Mia, 35, and Md Anu Mia, 42, were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital in a critical condition. Injured Masuda Begum along with 50 others were given first aid treatment at Nasirnagar Upazila Health Complex.

On information, Nasirnagar police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

'Outlaw' arrested

A CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

An 'outlaw' was arrested after a gunfight with the Sadar police on Sunday.

The arrested person is Rabbani, a regional leader of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party-ML.

A revolver and a pipe-gun were also recovered from him.

According to police, Rabbani and his accomplices opened fire on police when a contingent of the Sadar police raided their hideout at Krishnapur village of Baghail union in Sadar upazila. Police returned fire. About 30-35 rounds of gunshots were fired during the gunfight. At one stage, Rabbani was injured. He was rushed to Tangail General Hospital and later shifted to the Orthopaedic Hospital in Dhaka.

Rabbani was allegedly involved in criminal activities and several murder cases were lodged against him with different police stations in the district.

A case has been filed with Tangail Sadar police in this regard.



PHOTO: STAR

Ex-cadet of Foujdarhat Cadet College during a march past at a reunion at the institution recently.