

Ban religion based politics

RU Anti Imperialism Teachers' Forum demands

RU CORRESPONDENT

Anti Imperialism Teachers Forum at Rajshahi University in a statement yesterday expressed its concerns over the rise of fanatics and recurring bomb blasts in the country.

Fanatics have raised their heads again under the protection of the BNP-led alliance government, the statement said.

Fundamentalist forces are growing in number in educational institutions also, which is alarming.

They demanded a ban religion-based politics in all educational institutions in the country and called upon all progressive and pro-liberation forces to unite to resist them.

The statement was signed by Forum's coordinator Golam Kabir and Prof Moly Kumar.

Many intellectuals including journalists have been murdered in the last three years but none of the cases has been tried despite public demand. This proves the killers are being sheltered by ruling parties, they alleged.

Cultural bodies and personalities are being threatened in the name of Islam.

These fundamentalist forces are misinterpreting Islam only to go to power. Islam is a religion of peace and never supports violence, it added.

Bangladesh, a land religious and peace loving people but these forces are tarnishing its image abroad as a country of fundamentalists, the statement said.

Lifting food subsidy will affect tea production

Garden owners, labour union say

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

A government decision to withdraw the subsidy on wheat for tea garden labourers has caused a commotion in the sector.

About one lakh labourers with their 3.5 lakh dependents will face hardship, which will create unrest and affect production in the foreign exchange earning sector, sources said.

Government gives a subsidy of Tk 9.50 per kg wheat and the garden owners supply it to labourers at Tk 1.30 per kg. Food subsidy in the sector was introduced in 1956.

The food ministry in a letter to Bangladeshiy Cha Sangsad (BCS), an association of tea garden owners, in mid-February said the subsidy will be withdrawn after the current six-monthly wheat allotment is exhausted in June.

The BCS and Cha Sramik Union (tea garden labourers union) have expressed grave concern over the

decision and demanded its reversion.

Earlier, subsidised wheat allotments to gardens were made on monthly basis. In 2003, the government stopped the monthly allotment. Following a representation from BCS, the food ministry in July 2003 introduced six-monthly allotment. The allotments made in January will be exhausted in June.

An official of Cha Sramik Union said each labourer gets a weekly allotment of 3.5 kg wheat, which somehow meets the demand of a family.

The sudden suspension will put the labourers in hardship.

Most of the tea garden owners will not be able to continue the subsidised supply and this will brew unrest in the labour sector, he said.

A BCS official yesterday said tea is a foreign exchange earner, which is mainly dependent on labour. Tea gardens are located in remote and hilly

areas in Sylhet and Chittagong. There are two gardens in Brahmanbaria.

The sector is facing a lot of problems and is surviving anyhow in the competitive world market. There is no alternative to increasing production, which is mainly dependent on labour management.

It will not be possible for most of garden owners to supply wheat to labourers at subsidised rate if the government subsidy is withdrawn, he said and urged the government to revise the decision.

"We have already sent letters to the food ministry expressing grave concern", the BCS official said.

Bangladesh earns around Tk 150 crore annually in foreign exchange from tea export. Besides, the government earns Tk 18 crore in VAT on tea sale and Tk 3 crore in land development tax.

Gas supply in Bogra by June

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Pipeline laying work in Bogra town will be completed next month and gas will be supplied by June this year.

A domestic subscriber will have to pay Tk 400 for a double burner cooker and a one-time payment of Tk 1200 as other charges.

Commercial connections will have metres, Petrobangla's Project Manager Ferdoues Ali told this correspondent yesterday.

Over 60 per cent of the 250 kilometre pipeline laying work has been completed, he said.

Work on the Bogra Town Gas Supply Project involving Tk 184 crore was started on January 5.

Md Abdur Razzaque, one of the contractors laying the pipeline, also said he will complete his portion of the work by this month.

He married 16 women in 2 yrs for trafficking

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A man married 16 women with an ulterior motive to hand over them to Indian traffickers in last two years, according to police.

The notorious woman trafficker, Moazzem Hossain Shaju, 40, was arrested from Agrovolut village in Sharsa upazila, Jessore on Wednesday.

During arrest, he was getting prepared to go to India with a woman named Hajera Khatoun, 30, of the same village.

Join 'war' against cheating in exams

Milon tells teachers' meet in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

State Minister for Education Ehasnul Haq Milon has said the government has launched a 'war' against cheating in public examinations and urged all teachers and education department officials to join the efforts to completely eradicate the vice to build an educated nation.

Any teacher found involved in helping cheating or negligent in duty will be punished, he told a big gathering of high school teachers and education officials from Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur districts, held at the Lalon Academy here on Friday.

The meeting discussed possible steps to eliminate cheating in the coming HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) examination.

Helping students to copy in examination is a serious crime as are committed by criminals. So they deserve the same punishment given to criminals, he said.

Cheating has been greatly curbed. This must be totally eliminated, which needs cooperation of all teachers and officials, Milon said.

"We must win the war to build a good education system and a generation of well educated people."

"We want to keep up the success

achieved in the past several years. Everything will be done for this"

Milon also warned that action would be taken against any school or college doing bad result.

At the meeting, Milon asked seven headmasters in Daulatpur upazila to explain why any student could not pass SSC examination from their schools last year.

He teachers apologised publicly and promised to take steps to improve their performance.

Milon said the government spends Tk 150 crore every month on salary of high school teachers and so negligence will not be tolerated.

With Jessore Education Board Chairmen ABM Sattar in the chair, the meeting was also addressed by, among others, its Controller Amirul Alam Khan, Kushtia Deputy Commissioner Jamal A Naser Choudhury, Kushtia Police Superintendent Sahabuddin Khan, Bangladesh Teachers Association President Kazi Abdur Razzak, Kushtia Government College Principal Mozibur Rahman, Islamia College Principle Ahaj AFM, Najmus Salehin and Kushtia Ali Madrasha Principal Yakub Ali.

Allow rice import thru' Bhomra port

Traders claim lesser import cost

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Traders in Satkhira have reiterated their demand for allowing rice import through Bhomra land port again, saying it will involve lesser cost than through other ports.

Rice import through the port was stopped by the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

Talking to this correspondent, Satkhira Chamber of Commerce and Industries President Sheikh Azhar Hossain said Bhomra port's distance from Calcutta is lesser than any other land port in the country. Import cost will be lesser through Bhomra port than through Benapole port, he claimed. Revenue earning from the port will also increase substantially if rice import is allowed, he said.

The government had earlier allowed rice import through the port but the NBR stopped it for unknown reasons.

The trade body has given a representation to the NBR with recommendations from local lawmakers, he said.

The port was established nine years back but required infrastructure facilities are yet to be built though it exceeds the targeted revenue earning every year, according a customs official at the port.

The customs official said a project proposal involving Tk five crore for construction of infrastructure is lying with the Satkhira Public Works Department.



PHOTO: STAR

Hindu devotees offering prayers at Brahmanbaria Sathsanga Kendra on Friday.

Anukul Thakur's birth anniversary observed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

The 117th birth anniversary of Thakur Anukul Chandra, a Hindu religious leader, was celebrated here with due fervour.

A two-day programme was chalked out by Brahmanbaria Sathsanga Kendra to mark the occasion.

At least 1,000 Hindu devotees attended the programme which concluded on Friday.

Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner (DC) Md Jahirul Haque was present at the inaugural function held at Anandamoyi Kalibari as the chief guest. Brahmanbaria Superintendent of Police (SP) ATM Tareque, Brahmanbaria Pourasabha Chairman Md Hafizur Rahman Mulla, district BNP Vice-President were special guests.

A 'Dharma Sabha' was held which was presided over by Dritabrata. It was addressed, among others, by Sukumar Ranjan Das, Bijoy Kumar Roy, Mrinal Chawdhury and Chandan Ghush.

A mothers' get together titled 'Matri Sammilon' was also held. Mina Rani Banik was present as chief guest. It was addressed, among others, by Krishna Chakrabarty and Surabhi

Chakrabarty.

A 'Lila Kirtan' was also held. Indian artistes, Gupal Chakrabarty, Shamol Deb, Ratan Dey and Mrinal Kanti Das enthralled the audience with their songs.

Other programmes included morning prayer, Usha Kirtan, Bani Path, Reciting from Maha Bharat, dance, Gita Path. Bhajan, discussion meeting, evening prayer and Lalan song.

The discussion meeting was presided over by Brahmanbaria Sathsanga President Anil Kanti Roy.

Mangal Chandra, Project Director and Secretary of Hindu Dharmiya Kalyan Trast was chief guest in the discussion meeting while district Awami League President advocate Lutfal Hye, Lion Firojir Rahman and an Indian citizen Kajal Chakrabarty were present as special guests.

Among others, it was addressed by Sukumar Das Ranjan, Dipak Kumar Talukder, Ajit Kumar Roy, Professor Ashuthush Das, Karun Kumar Deb and poet Joydul Hossain.

Noted Lalon exponent Farida Parveen enthralled hundreds of people by rendering a series of Lalon songs.

Four more held in Kulaura shrine blast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Four more persons have been arrested from Sylhet for their alleged involvement in the grenade blast at a shrine on the premises of Prithim Pasa Nawab Bari in Kulaura upazila during an Ashura programme on the night of February 20.

All of them are madrassah students, according to the Officer-in-Charge of Kulaura thana.

They were held following information given by madrassah student Maruf Md Ishaq and Hafiz Qumrul Islam, a teacher, during interrogation while on remand.

The arrestees confessed that they exploded the grenade to create panic to stop a planned Ashura procession, saying it is against Islamic Shariah, according to Moulvibazar Police Superintendent Raushan Ara Begum.

Meanwhile 14 Political parties including Awami League, Communist Party of Bangladesh and Jatiya Party (Ershad) jointly organised a meeting at Prithimpasa protesting the incident and demanding punishment of the culprits.

Ali Abbas Khan of the Nawab Bari, a former Jatiya Party lawmaker from Moulvibazar-2 constituency, said traditional Ashura programmes are being held by the family for about 200 years.

Summer onion holds hopes for farmers

Additional 40,980 tonnes can be produced in 4,725 hectare fallow lands

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Cultivation of high yielding variety of summer onion holds good prospect for farmers and the country as well.

A farmer can earn at least Tk 15,000 from one bigha of land by cultivating BARI-2 and BARI-3 varieties of the onion, evolved by Magura Regional Spice Research Centre (RSRC). One bigha yields around 80 maunds of summer variety of onion.

Sources at Jessore Regional Agriculture Extension Department office here said additional 40,980 tonnes of onion worth about Tk four crore can be produced in 10 districts under Jessore Agriculture Region by bringing 4,725 hectares of fallow lands under its cultivation in summer season.

Researchers at the Magura RSRC achieved the success in evolving high yielding variety of summer onion after several years' research and experimental cultivation in cooperation with One Farm Research Division (OFRD) under BARI (Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute).

Talking to The Daily Star recently, RSRC Scientific Officer Alauddin Khan said, the summer onion can be harvested in 105 days from sowing. About

4,725 hectares of land in Jessore, Jhenidah, Magura, Narail, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur districts remain fallow during the summer season, where the variety of onion can be grown well.

The RSRC has taken up a programme to popularise summer onion cultivation among farmers.

Bangladesh now produces around

1.6 lakh tonnes of onion in 34 thousand hectares against an annual demand of around 3.5 lakh tonnes, officials said.

Cultivation of the onion in some demonstration plots in Hazrapur in Magura and Katura Kandi in Jessore has raised hopes among farmers in the areas. The cultivation will increase substantially this year, they hoped.



PHOTO: FILE

Farmers at a summer onion field in Hazrapur village in Magura last year.

SNAPS

Moulvibazar Bar polls held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Gono Forum leader Advocate Shantipada Ghose and Awami League supported advocate Qumrul Ahmed Chowdhury were elected president and general secretary respectively of Moulvibazar Advocate Bar Association in polls held recently. Shantipada Ghose has been elected for the second time. Other office bearers are Rezaur Rahman Chowdhury (vice-president, Abdul Matin (assistant secretary), Shah Akhlaq Ambia (library secretary), Syed Mayeen Uddin (sports and cultural secretary) and members Radhnapada Deb, Chand Murali Singha, Mijbur Rahman, Shamimur Rahman and Abdulwahid.

Youth slaughtered in front of family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

A youth was slaughtered at Folia village in Saikupa upazila in Jhenidah district Friday night. Police said an armed gang of 10, introducing themselves as police, called Jhantu, 35, out of the house, took him to a nearby field and slit his throat in presence of family members. Jhantu, a peon at high school, is the son of Jhanu Biswas. The murder could be retaliation to the murder of one Fazlu of the same village, committed about a year and half before, police suspect.

3-day agri-tech fair begins at Muktagachha

BSS, Mymensingh

A three-day agri-technology traders' fair began at Muktagachha on Friday. State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain inaugurated the fair on the premises of the Upazila Parishad. Upazila Krishi Office organised the fair. Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Shakkur Ali presided over the opening function. Twenty stalls were set up in the fair, according to official sources.

Ananda Mela begins in Rajshahi

RU CORRESPONDENT

A month-long Anando Mela began at Rajshahi Stadium on Friday.

The Mela has been organised by Rajshahi Krira Sangstha to collect funds for the Independent Day Football Tournament beginning here on April 20.

Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque inaugurated the Mela as chief guest.

Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) Mayor Mijanur Rahman Minu, Divisional Commissioner Moslah Uddin, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner Nayem Ahmed and Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industries President Lutfar Rahman were also present at the inaugural ceremony, presided over by Deputy Commissioner Sayed Ahsanul Haque.

There are of 89 stalls at the fair. Cultural functions, motorbike and cycle race and lion circus are added attractions.

Fifteen teams including some foreign ones will take part in the tournament.