

Corrupt band together

Arrested postal officials tell the tale of corruption

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Audit teams from Dhaka came to Nilphamari Head Post Office every year but returned with bribes, allowing a section of dishonest employees to misappropriate depositors' money. This was disclosed to police by the three postal employees now in custody. They are Assistant Post Master of Nilphamari Head Post Office Mir Nura Islam Munna, Ledger Operator Ahmedul Islam Raju and Postal Operator Liaquat Ali. The three along with another Postal Operator Taslim Uddin face two cases for alleged misappropriation of depositors' money. Taslimuddin is absconding since filing of the cases, one on April 6 and the other on April 13. The audit teams used to be led by an official of the rank of Postal Superintendent or Audit Inspector, they told police during interrogation on remand. The teams used to detect misappropriation but were 'managed' by the corrupt employees and sent back to Dhaka, police sources quoted the three as telling them. This was disclosed to this correspondent

by high police officials seeking anonymity. The three told police that they used to share misappropriated money with some members of audit teams. They also disclosed names of some postal officials in the audit teams that came to Nilphamari but the police sources declined to name the officials. The three also told police that as per routine, statements of accounts were sent to the Chief Accountant's (Postal) office at AG (Accountant General) office in Dhaka after every fifteen days. But those were never opened as a section of employees used to get a share of the misappropriated money. The remand of the three accused postal employees ended on Saturday but they were not produced before court till yesterday. Once produced in court, they would be required to give statements under Section 164, the sources said. Earlier, the probe body detected misappropriation of Tk 3.12 crore in the savings certificate section at the Head Post Office. Probe in the postal savings account section was supposed to

begin on April 17, according to sources at the Head Post Office. But it did not begin till yesterday. This has raised wild speculations by some postal employees here that the probe could be slowed down or the head of the probe body might have been relieved of responsibilities as the team leader. The head of the probe body, Additional Director General of Postal Department Mobasserur Rahman, known as an honest officer, returned Dhaka a week ago. This correspondent also contacted Rezaul Islam, Deputy Post Master General (DPMG) of Dinajpur Region who is also in charge of Rangpur region now. He dispelled the rumour and said Mobasserur Rahman is in Dhaka for "important talks" with high officials of his department and the Post and Telecommunication Ministry. He said the team members are now busy preparing documents in support of the two cases filed earlier. The DPMG said the probe body would start investigation in the postal savings account section within two to three days. Meanwhile vested quarters are

seen at the post office, court premises and at the jail gate, who are allegedly trying to save the accused postal employees. This correspondent also talked to Nilphamari Sadar thana Officer-in-Charge (OC) Shohorab Hossain and asked him why the accused persons are not produced in court. The OC is also the investigation officer of the cases. He said there is documentary evidence on the anomalies done by the four postal employees. "So their confessional statement (in court) is not important now", he said. Additional Police Superintendent Ali Azam, who is the SP in-charge, said, "Documentary evidence against them is in our hand. "If necessary they will be taken on remand again. We will also make them give confessional statements under Section 164 if needed". The liquidity crisis at the Head Post Office has been resolved, according to Post Master Torab Ali. He said the post office got Tk 16 lakh as monthly allotment on Thursday.

Nor'wester lashes 10 Gaibandha villages: 75 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

About 75 people were injured as a nor'wester lashed 10 villages in two upazilas in the district yesterday. Of the injured, 19 persons were admitted to Gaibandha hospital for treatment. Most of them were injured due to house collapse. The nor'wester lasted for an hour damaging over 3,000 dwelling houses. The badly affected villages are Ballamjhar, Gideri, Kholahati, Ramchandrapur, Shahpara and Boali in Gaibandha Sadar upazila, Bhatgram, Bongram, Faridpur and Jamalpur in Sadallapur upazila. 'Boro' crops on 3,500 hectares of land were badly damaged by the nor'wester accompanied by hail-storm, according to sources in the district relief and rehabilitation office.

UNDP projects in CHT extended for 5 years

All 25 upazilas to be brought under programme

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Development projects under the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) will continue for five more years. This was announced by Deputy Minister for CHT Tracts affairs Moni Sawapan Dewan at a meeting held at the Bandarban Local Government Council office yesterday. He said all the 25 upazilas in the three hill districts of Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari will be covered under the UNDP

programme in next five years instead of only 10 now. He said, the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Finance and Planning have approved the proposal for continuation of UNDP projects. UNDP started its projects in CHT in 1999 when peace returned to the hills after signing of the CHT peace accord between the then Awami League government and the PCJSS (Parbatitya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Parishad) in 1997. UNDP took up five-year projects involving about 500 million dollars. The project period ended in June

last year, which was extended by one year. The projects now being implemented cover road and infrastructure development and programmes designed to improve life of the hill people. Replying to a question after the meeting, Moni Sawapan said the total involvement of projects in the next five years is yet to be determined by the government. He however said the projects will cover all aspects of hill life including education, healthcare, livestock development and income generating activities.

Protect our rights, culture

Indigenous people in Rajshahi demand

ABU KALAM, back from Tanore

Rajshahi: Indigenous people at a gathering at Tanore upazila in Rajshahi district have demanded enactment of laws to protect their rights, language and culture. The demand was made at a gathering and day-long cultural programme, held at Dewla football ground on Friday during 'Bhaha' festivals marking 'Pahela Baishakh'. The programme was organised by Adivasi Unnyon Sangstha (AUS). Several hundred indigenous people from different villages joined the programmes that began with offering Puja at the foot of a big tree, followed by a colorful procession.

The processionists paraded different roads in Dewla village. A large number of indigenous people and Bangalees joined the procession. At the 'Boishab' fair, traditional songs and dances were the main attractions. AUS Executive Director Bhavagat Tudu and its President Ghan Chandra Mazi were present as special guests. AUS leaders William Nablet, Shudir Shasda and many journalists attended the cultural programme, moderated by Rangit Sharan. The speakers demanded of the government enactment of laws to protect rights of the indigenous

people and their traditional culture. They said many indigenous people are becoming homeless as local influentials have grabbed their lands and homesteads in different areas in Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Tangail and Rangpur. As they are poor they cannot seek legal protection. The government should form special body to look into these problems. Hundreds of Bagalees, NGO workers and foreign national also enjoyed the daylong cultural programme and fair.

Akhaura land port now normal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Import-export activity at Akhaura Land Port resumed on Saturday after a week of work suspension. Dry fish, pebble, small fish, lab plastic tube and poultry feed were exported through the port in two days. According to Akhaura port Land Customs Officer (LCO) Muhamad Ali, the government lost at least Tk 40,00,000 due to work stoppage at the port. 'At present the port is functioning smoothly,' he said. According to another source in the port, the port earned 93, 77, 557 taka by exporting dry fish, juice, pebble, plastic tube, waste cotton, plastic products, Soya bean oil and poultry feed from April 1 to 15. Following border tension, the port activity stopped from April 16 to 22. Several flag meeting were held between the BDR and the Indian BSF on Zero line of Akhaura border. At present the situation is normal, according to BDR sources.

‘Arrest rapists, killers of indigenous woman’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Several hundred indigenous people at Lohanipara in Badarganj upazila yesterday brought out a procession demanding immediate arrest to the culprits responsible for rape and killing of a young indigenous woman. The processionists paraded the main roads of the upazila headquarters chanting slogans against police for their failure to arrest the criminals who killed the indigenous woman named Bishor, 22, after gang rape. Local people told this correspondent, the victim was kidnapped from her husband's house on April 17 night. Police recovered the body from a nearby pond the next day. She might have been killed after gang rape, police apprehended. The leader of indigenous people in the area, Jay Ram Soren lodged a case with Badarganj Police Station.



The main portion of the bridge (right) has been built but the approach road (left) cannot be completed due to litigation over land acquisition.

PHOTO: STAR

Rajshahi divn debate contest begins

RU CORRESPONDENT

A weeklong Rajshahi Divisional Debate Championship, 2005 began at Rajshahi University Engineering and Technology (R U E T) yesterday. The programme is organised by the RUET Debating Society. RUET Vice-chancellor Prof Dr AFM Anwarul Haque inaugurated the programme as chief guest. Divisional Coordinator of Bangladesh Debate Federation (BDF) Mahfuzur Rahman Mishu, former IEB president Shah Khaled Hassan and RUET Debating Society General Secretary SM Zahangir were present as special guests at the inauguration function. At least 50 participants form Rajshahi University, RUET, Rajshahi College and reputed colleges in Rajshahi division will take part in the competition. After the inauguration programme, a day-long workshop on debate was held at the same RUET auditorium for all participants. Prof Shatil Siraj of RU Mass Communication Department, BDF's Rajshahi Coordinator Mahfuzur Rahman Mishu, RU debate leader Yusuf Ali and some BDF members also attended the first day's programme. Two teams will take part in the competition every day, the organisers said.

SHAHJALAL BRIDGE-3 ON THE SURMA DELAYED

Cost of a wrong approach

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Shahjalal Bridge-3 on the Surma could not be completed even after 18 months of the actual deadline because of failure in land acquisition for its approach roads. The 261-metre bridge requires 9-kilometre approach roads for both ends, according to the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) officials. Work on the Tk 45 crore bridge on the Dhaka-Sylhet-Sunamganj Highway started on August 14,

2000. It was scheduled to be completed in August, 2003 within 36 months of beginning of the project work. But the work was suspended at many points adding to the delay for further nine months, according to the officials. Meanwhile, the construction materials are being stolen from the work site, locals alleged. The cost of the project will also increase further due to unusual delay in the work, an official said. According to project proposal, a link is supposed to be estab-

lished between the Dhaka-Sylhet and Sylhet-Sunamganj highways through the approach roads bypassing Sylhet city and the journey time is supposed to be reduced by one hour. When contacted, a RHD official could not say when the work on the approach roads would start as there were a series of litigation over land acquisition for the approach roads'. He, however, said that steps are being taken to 'resolve the problem at the earliest.'



PHOTO: STAR

Indigenous people presenting a traditional dance at a day-long cultural programme, held at Dewla football ground on Friday during 'Bhaha' festivals marking 'Pahela Baishakh'.

Internal feud surfaces in Satkhira BNP

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Internal feud in Satkhira district BNP surfaced following holding of a press conference by the party general secretary here on Saturday afternoon. One group of faction is being led by the district BNP president Habibul Islam Habib MP, while the other group is being led by its general secretary (GS) Rahmatullah Palash. In the press conference held at the Satkhira Chamber of Commerce and Industries auditorium, Palash accused Habib and former GS advocate Syed Iftekhar Ali of hatching a conspiracy to oust him from the post. Palash organised the press conference protesting a report published in a national daily against him. Palash also accused Habib of forming a new district Krishak Dal committee without his consent by dissolving the existing committee.

He further accused Syed Iftekhar of conducting the party activities sidelining its devoted leaders and activists since 1999. BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia formed a new district BNP committee headed by Habibul Islam Habib MP, MA Jalil and Rahmatullah Palash as president, senior vice-president and general secretary on June 27 last year. She formed the committee by dissolving the former committee headed by MA Jalil and advocate Syed Iftekhar. In reply to a query by a journalist, he said they could not form a full-fledged committee because of unwanted intervention of a lawmaker in the party activities. Palash alleged that a few of his party men helped publish the news by giving misinformation to journalist with an ill motive to tarnish his image. He termed the news item false, fabricated and motivated.