

8 BJMC mills closed on jute crisis

Chairman, director blame each other for situation

REAZ AHMAD

The struggling jute sector faces a serious threat as almost half the state-run jute mills have closed down production because of a jute crisis.

Officials at the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) said the jute crisis emerged while the chairman and director (production and jute) of the corporation blamed each other for the situation.

Director Khairul Alam has alleged that the chairman did not hike jute procurement price in a heated market and so the mills are running dry as purchase could not be made. But Chairman AFM Solaiman Chowdhury has brought allegations against the director of procuring low quality jute at high price.

At the height of the rift between the two top-brass in the BJMC, production at as many as eight out

of 22 jute mills has fully stopped and four other mills are also on the verge of closure for lack of jute at the peak production season.

Jute Minister Shahjahan Siraj told parliament last night that the mills have closed down for non-availability of funds for jute purchase in time and then not purchasing the raw material even after belated funds availability.

The representatives of workers and employees of 14 jute mills met

the speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad on Monday pleading for early payment of their outstanding salaries for the last seven months.

As against a demand of over 70 lakh maunds of raw jute in 22 mills, the BJMC could procure only 32 lakh maunds this fiscal year resulting in a drastic production slump in carpet packing cloth (CPC), hessian and sacking. A recent BJMC meeting expressed fear that due to closures of

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7 Asia-Pacific nations support US bill for free RMG import

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading apparel exporters' associations of seven Asia Pacific countries including Bangladesh yesterday extended their full support to a proposed US legislation that will provide duty-free access to the US market for the least developed countries (LDCs).

The Dhaka Declaration they signed in the capital said the Tariff Relief Assistance for Developing Economies Act 2004 (Trade) will ensure preferential market access which will help the LDCs compete

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Petrobangla running out of manpower

60pc posts remain vacant for years; no new recruitment since 1999

SHARIER KHAN

Amid sheer negligence of the government, around 60 percent of posts in Petrobangla have remained vacant for several years, making it very difficult for the organisation to monitor and coordinate the country's gas sector, which generates nearly Tk 3,500 crore in annual

revenue for the state.

Presently three out of five posts of directors remain vacant. The position of the director of operation has remained vacant for 10 months, the director of mines and minerals for six to seven months, and the director of planning for the last one month.

The mid-level of Petrobangla is nearly totally empty. The technical

posts are mostly vacant," says an energy ministry source. "Most of the posts of general managers and deputy general managers are also vacant."

Of the five general managers posts in the Operations Directorate of Petrobangla, three remain vacant.

Such a void has been created as

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US under secy to focus on political climate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs R Nicholas Burns will arrive in Dhaka on June 26 for discussion on the political climate and bilateral issues with government and opposition leaders.

According to an announcement of the State Department in Washington on Monday, Burns will also hold talks with members of the civil society in Dhaka.

It said Under-Secretary Burns will begin a week-long tour of

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Security beefed up as Narsingdi goes to by-polls today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tight security measures have been taken to ensure free and fair voting in the Narsingdi-1 by-elections today, in which the ruling four-party alliance will face an independent candidate in the race in absence of the main opposition Awami League (AL).

The first election under newly

appointed Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz, the by-election has also become an acid test for him to prove his capability and neutrality to conduct polls.

The AL in the beginning declared to participate in the polls but later boycotted saying it will not join any polls under the new CEC as the party

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INDO-BANGLA TALKS Foreign secys review top issues

PTI, New Delhi

Foreign Secretaries of India and Bangladesh met in New Delhi yesterday to review the issues to strengthen mutually beneficial and friendly relations, official sources said.

Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran is heading the Indian delegation while Bangladeshi side is led by his counterpart Mohammad Hemayatuddin. The two-day meeting is taking place after a gap of 15 months.

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TAX ON SIM CARD

Saifur snubs mobile operators' plea

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday turned down the private cell phone operators' plea to withdraw the newly imposed tax of Tk 1,200 on every mobile SIM (subscriber identification module) card and connection.

Top executives of all four private

cell phone operators met the finance minister and urged him to reconsider the issue, drawing his attention to the fact that the imposition of the new tax will severely affect the growth of the country's fast growing mobile telephony sector, meeting sources said.

GrameenPhone CEO Erik Aas, Banglalink CEO Lars P Reichelt, and

representatives of the CityCell and AKTEL Siddique Ali Miah and Fazlur Rahman called on Saifur Rahman at his office.

"The government has not imposed any extra tax on cell phone connection; it has rather diverted the tax from mobile handset to new connection," sources attending the

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Bidisha to be quizzed at prison cell

Permits court

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted the investigation officer (IO) permission to interrogate Bidisha at the prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) in the money laundering case.

Metropolitan Magistrate MA Salam issued the order after reviewing a report on Bidisha's health that the BSMMUH director submitted to

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