

Declare *monga*-hit dists as distressed areas

Kamal demands at 14-party rally in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Gano Forum President Dr. Kamal Hossain yesterday urged the government to declare Rangpur and four adjoining *monga*-hit districts as 'distressed areas' and arrange adequate food assistance for thousands of poor people there.

A number of people died of starvation in Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat districts but the government cared little, he claimed.

The coalition government must seek apology publicly for its failure to protect lives of *monga*-hit people in northern districts, Kamal told a public meeting in Gangachara.

The eminent lawyer bitterly criticised the government for its alleged indifference to the disastrous plight of thousands of people.

"The incompetent government

failed to do anything good in any sector after it came to the power", he told the crowd at KNB Government Primary School ground at Kochua.

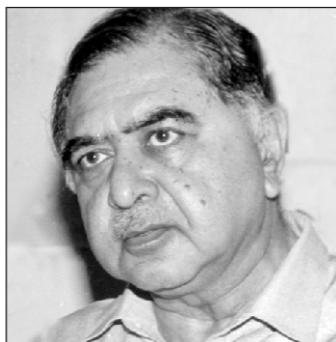
Dr. Kamal was also critical of the alleged government move to cut the number of VGF (vulnerable group feeding) beneficiaries in every union.

"Last year there were 4000 VGF beneficiaries in every union across country whereas the number is 2200 this year", he said.

He gave an assurance that *monga* would be eradicated with long-term programmes if the 14-party alliance goes to power in future.

A plan for this will be declared at the November 22 grand rally of the alliance in Dhaka, he said. Gono Forum is a component of the alliance led by Awami League.

Dr. Kamal said, after visiting Rangpur and Kurigram last year, he had urged the government to launch food for works



Dr Kamal Hossain

programme in *monga*-hit areas but it did not care.

Awami League Presidium member Suranjit Sen Gupta MP called upon the people to unite to oust the alliance government from power with an aim to form a 'pro-people government'.

He bitterly criticised the alliance

government for Bangladesh having topped the list of corrupt countries in the world for the fourth consecutive year under its rule.

Suranjit demanded distribution of 20 kg rice a week to every VGF cardholder in northern districts during the *monga* period.

After the meeting, the alliance leaders distributed 1.5 tonnes of rice among people in Kochua union.

Organizing Secretary of JCD Rezaul Karim Tansen, JSD Joint Secretary Najmul Hoque Pradhan, Workers Party Politbureau member Fazle Hossen Badsha, AL Relief Affairs Secretary Prof Nazma Rahman, AL Treasurer HN Ashiqur Rahman, Gonotantri Party Presidium member Mohammed Afzal and Gono Forum leader Mostafa Mohshim Montu and local AL leader Tipu Munshi also addressed the meeting presided over by AL district unit president Sha Abdur Razzak.

Eid today in some areas of Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ppatuakhali

Over 2000 people of about 500 families in some areas in Patuakhali will celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr today.

As per their tradition, about 500 people of Badarpur village, 800 of Gosekhali, 300 of Moudubi and 200 each of Rangabal and Dakua villages began to observe the holy Ramadan a day earlier.

They are followers of Gazi Kalu, a religious leader, sources added.

42 ships fined by mobile court in Ctg port

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

The mobile court of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) realised a fine of Tk 7 lakh from 42 ships in a week till Tuesday for violating law and operational discipline.

CPA Magistrate Mohammad Munir Chowdhury conducted the drives in the port area from Patenga estuary to Karnafully Bridge.

The court penalised the ships under port law and liner movement law for over-loading, illegal entry, disrupting movement of foreign vessels, plying without Karnafully Endorsement, lacking of proper and legal documents and permission.

The court detained five lighter vessel for entering the port region with illegal token and date-expired survey certificates. The vessels are MV Moksedpur-2, MV Tishan, MV Tabassum Shafin, MV Seven Circle-20 and MV Master Sohul-2. The vessels will not be allowed to move in the port area and carry goods until they produce survey certificates and other documents, port sources said.

Furnace oil crisis in Nilphamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

At least 100 industrial units in the district are facing closure due to crisis of furnace oil.

Workers in many factories apprehend loss of jobs ahead of the Eid. About 5000 workers work in the units, most of which are located in Saidpur upazila.

But the units are not getting furnace oil supply for about a month. This correspondent visited some industrial units including Saidpur Aluminum Works, Poddar Agro, R M Chemical, Grameen Agro, Sonali Agro in Saidpur on Saturday. The owners said their factories are facing closure for want of furnace oil. The production cost will rise if they use other fuel except furnace oil.

They said they contacted officials of Jamuna, Padma and Meghna oil companies in Bogra, who could not ensure them a steady supply of furnace oil.

The factory owners alleged that the oil companies suspended furnace oil supply to Saidpur on the plea of inadequate supply from Chittagong. If this continues, they will have no alternative to closing down the factories, the owners said.

'My call went unheeded'

Ruling BNP failed to come to aid of the *monga*-hit people: MP Noor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Awami League leader and lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor blamed State Minister for Education and Minister-in-charge for Nilphamari district A N M Ehsanul Haque Milon for not visiting the *monga*-hit district.

He alleged that people are suffering

for want of food but BNP leaders are oblivious of their plight. He claimed that freedom fighter Nabo Kanto of Dhoba Danga village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila 'committed suicide due to starvation'. Noor is a lawmaker from Nilphamari Sadar constituency.

The Awami League leader was addressing a gathering while distributing rice on Tuesday among people in Dingding Para village, the area in Sadar upazila worst affected by *monga* (near famine situation) and diarrhoea.

He alleged that Milon and other ruling party leaders paid several visits to the district and held public meetings during good days. But they are absent in bad days.

Noor said that at a recent press conference at Nilphamari, he had urged the government to declare Nilphamari district a distressed area. "I also urged the Prime Minister to visit the district and to see the sufferings of the people. But she did not respond", he regretted.

Noor alleged that he, as a lawmaker from the area, did not get any allotment of rice to distribute among the distressed. But the two ruling party MPs from the district are getting huge quantities of food grains and money for relief, he claimed.

Noor distributed four kilograms of rice among each of 700 distress families in the village from his own funds. Awami League will start relief distribution in the *monga* affected areas in Nilphamari after the Eid, he told the gathering.

GANO SASTHYA KENDRO OFFICIALS SAY NGOs should cut interest rates

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A section of non-government organisations (NGOs) are exploiting the poor people in northern districts in the name of helping them with microcredit, officials of Gano Sasthya Kendro, a Dhaka-based voluntary organisation, said at a press conference here on Tuesday.

They realise over 35 per cent interest on loans, which is three times higher than rates stipulated by the government. No economic activity is viable with such high-interest loan, they said at the press conference held at Gaibandha Press Club. The NGOs should lower the interest rates if they really want to help the poor improve their condition, they said.

Most of the loan recipients are illiterate and poor and they, in most cases, do not utilise the loans in profitable or productive activities because they do not have any training.

The NGOs do not go to the ultra poor in shoal areas of Teesta and Brahmaputra river basins because those people do not have any ability to repay loans, the officials alleged.

The press conference was addressed by Saiful Islam Shisir, Executive Director of Gano Sasthya Kendro. Its officials Sall Khan, Shafiqul Islam Alamgir and Julfikar Ahmed Jewel also attended the press conference.

It was organised on the eve of distribution of rice and potato packets among several thousand destitute families living on flood control embankments at Saidpur in Fulchari upazila.

Gano Sasthya Kendro will provide assistance to 5,000 *monga*-affected

families in Gaibandha and Kurigram after Eid, the officials said.

It will also set up a hospital at Chandia village in Fulchari upazila and construct 35 primary schools for shoal children, they said.

They alleged that the NGOs do not have any sustainable programme for generating livelihood in shoal areas.

The poor loan recipients rarely realise that they are paying so high interest because they repay it in small amounts in weekly installments.

Scheduled banks provide small loans at 10 per cent interest. The rate is 5 per cent in *monga*-prone areas, they said.

It is hardly possible for borrowers under microcredit system to better their economic condition as they are to start repaying along with interest soon after getting the loan. This leaves little opportunity to go for income generating activities, they said.

"Some particular NGOs simply invest money on interest under the banner of microcredit. They are no better than Kabuliwallas", Saiful told the press conference.

They suggested that a sustainable integrated programme for development of livelihood of shoal people in Kurigram and Gaibandha districts should be taken up jointly by the government and NGOs.

Narrating their experience during their visit to some remote shoal areas, the Gano Sasthya officials said shoal people prefer long term loans bearing small interest instead of microcredit now being provided by NGOs.

No salary for 28 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Seventeen teachers and staff of the Bandarban Shishu Poribar Kendra under Social Welfare Department are not getting salary for 28 months.

The project work was started in 1998. Its tenure expired on June 30 last year but the project was not included in the revenue budget.

Sources at the Kendra said the teachers and staff were recruited in

May 2003. They are not getting salary since July 2003 as fund allocation was stopped following an allegation of corruption against its authorities.

The 100 boys housed at the Kendra are now being fed with voluntary food supplies from Bandarban Hill District Council, the sources said.

Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Muhammad Muzahid during his visits to the Shishu Paribar last year and this year assured that either the

project would be included in the revenue budget or funds for their salary would be disbursed, the sources claimed. But nothing has been done, they added.

Shafiqul Islam, Deputy Supervisor of the Shishu Paribar said letters were sent to higher authorities several times for sanctioning funds, but to no reply yet.

Fishing boats looted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Fishes worth about Tk 2 lakh were looted from 15 fishing boats from Kuakata coastal area Bay Tuesday night allegedly by pirates belonging to notorious Alauddin Bahini.

About 20 fishermen were injured in the attacks, Kuakata police said yesterday. The boats were going to Mohipur in Barisal.

The pirates on four boats sailed towards Bhola after looting the boats.

The same gang also looted five boats carrying merchandise on Tentulia river on Friday, police said.

Seminar on education

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A seminar on 'Quality Primary Education in Bangladesh' was held at Shyamnagar on Tuesday. It was jointly organised by Manusher Jonno and Uttaran, two NGOs, with assistance from the Commonwealth Education Fund, marking the Dakar Declaration on Quality Education for All.

Speakers stressed the need for launching a program to train teachers on modern methods of education.



PHOTO: STAR

After buying new clothes, Baby Nishat in Magura is now in Eid mood after decorating palms with henna patterns.

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