

Jute workers demand minimum nat'l wage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers of Bangladesh Private Jute, Cotton and Textile Mills at a press conference in the city yesterday demanded minimum national wage similar to the government employees.

They also demanded to reopen all the closed mills and factories including jute mills immediately for the sake of the workers' future.

The leaders said private jute, cotton and textile mills and factories workers are passing an inhuman life, as they have been receiving only Tk 560 as basic wage for 21 years.

They were excluded from the National Wage Commissions in 1991, 1997 and 2006, they added.

Despite their repeated appeals, the government did not pay heed to their demands, they said.

Hedayetul Islam, convenor of the central committee, said with price hike of essentials, it is now difficult to run our families with the meagre amount of money.

He demanded payment of all the arrears of the workers of the closed mills and factories.

The worker leaders announced different programmes including gate rally in different mills and factories on May 28 and sit-in at Muktangan on June 12 if their demands are not met.

Musa Mia, joint convenor of central committee, Shahidullah Khan, president of Mohsin Jute Mill, Khulna, Manirul Islam, president, Narshindi Jute Mill and different jute mill leaders were present at the conference.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

UNFPA to launch awareness campaign soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is going to launch a country wide awareness programme on gender equality and prevention of violence against women through one million members of Boy Scouts and Girls Guides.

UNFPA is currently developing a curriculum to train up the trainers on the issues.

Camps will be held later where the one million youths from across the country will be oriented on different aspects of reproductive health, gender equality and violence against women.

"Although progress has been achieved, there is a need for greater efforts to end gender discrimination and violence," Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, UNFPA executive director and also UN Under-Secretary General, told reporters during a press meet at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

The Saudi Arabia-born Thoraya Obaid said the UNFPA is also running a project with Imams to disseminate messages on gender discrimination and violence against women to local community and to support family planning and safe motherhood.



PHOTO: STAR

UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid speaks at a press conference at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

The UNFPA is also working with BGMEA, different NGOs and youth groups to make people aware of these issues, she said.

Besides working with police, UNFPA is now working with the Ansars to sensitise law enforcers to the issues, she added.

Mentioning taboo on discussion of HIV/AIDS, she stressed educating youths how to protect themselves from threat of the pandemic disease.

According to the third survey by

the ICDDR, 4.9 per cent of injecting drug users of Bangladesh is HIV positive and the rate is 8.9 in Dhaka, Suneeta Mukherjee, UNFPA Representative, told reporters.

Talking about fistula, she said poor, young and illiterate girls who are suffering from this condition are often abandoned by their husbands and families, and left to suffer in silence and shame.

"We're planning to make the Fistula Centre (at Dhaka Medical College Hospital) a centre of excellence in South Asia," said Thoraya.

Although a study based on hospital records said 70,000 girls and women are suffering from fistula, the number will be much more as many incidents are not reported.

The UNFPA is planning to conduct a detail study on it, she said.

On population and fertility, she said there is an unmet need for family planning.

"Although fertility rate has dropped by half since 1975, the decline reached a plateau in the past few years and has just started to decline again," she said.

If the trend stays the same as of today, another 70 million people will be added in next 45 years, she added.

Saying that an estimated 14,000 Bangladeshi women die from pregnancy and childbirth complications every year, Thoraya said, they are working to improve access to family planning, skilled attendants at birth and emergency obstetric care.

"So far, 1535 community-based skilled birth attendants has been trained, 288 are currently being trained and we're working with WHO, Unicef and the government to train 13,500 more by 2010," she said.