

'Sudden sharp' rise in taxes annoy Sylhet city dwellers

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, *Sylhet*

A sharp rise in holding tax by Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) has sparked commotion among city dwellers. Every day, hundreds of people throng the SCC tax department to know reasons behind the 'sudden and irrational increase' in taxes.

The officials only give them a form of review petition without giving any satisfactory explanation, some people told this correspondent.

However, the city corporation has extended the date for submitting appeal/review petitions till April 1, they said.

The SCC did not raise the holding tax in last five years after the Sylhet Pourashava was upgraded to a city corporation, sources in SCC told this correspondent yesterday.

A resident of Dariapara area in the city alleged that his holding tax

was raised to Tk 1500 from Tk 110 per year. My small tin shed structure stands on only two decimal land whereas the same amount had been fixed for my neighbouring house on about 40 decimal land, he alleged.

Ayub Ali of Subidbazar area said his tax has been re-fixed at Tk 4500 against the previous amount of Tk 900.

Elected representatives did not do the 'unpopular job' apprehending commotion and fearing loss of vote, they said.

However, with the takeover by the caretaker government, the situation has changed. A good number of people voluntarily go to the corporation's tax department every day to pay taxes which remained outstanding for long.

There has been a huge rush for payment of other dues like water bill.

"We are ready to clear the dues and pay taxes but the main problem

lies with the SCC staff", alleged Md. Anwar Hossain of Ambarkhana area in the city.

"Our ward commissioners and the Mayor were not serious to realise taxes. In the changed situation, they are to do the big job in a hurry", he said.

Shamsu Miah of Kumarpara said, "The SCC authorities are now just harassing us in the name of fixing new rates".

Abdul Mannan of Shibganj area alleged that, in the absence of a uniform rate, SCC staff are taking decisions at whims while fixing the revised rates of holding tax.

Shamsunnahar Khanom of Rainagar area said, "Our commissioners and the Mayor were busy with other jobs whereas crores of takas remained outstanding with the city dwellers for long. But there was no action or any notice even. All of them are too much active now and taking advantage of the situation".

However, S C C W a r d

Commissioner Syed Ahmed Hossain told The Daily Star that the city corporation staff were directed to follow existing rules in re-fixing holding tax. If there is anything wrong, it will be corrected, he claimed.

The revised rates were fixed on the basis of a survey done about two years ago but the taxes were not re-fixed.

Normally, the yearly holding tax should be equivalent to two months' rent of a house, said an official in SCC. However, it will vary in case of multi-storied buildings, he added.

Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran said the SCC has decided to constitute review bodies at ward level. These will comprise a lawyer, a ward commissioner, Mayor's representative and an SCC engineer. The review boards will start work in April, he added.

Satkania Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Dr Farhad Uddin said the sick people suffered from infective diarrhoea. There is nothing to be worried, he said.

Satkania Police Station second officer Abdur Rauf said they are probing the incident.

FOOD POISONING

300 fall sick in Satkania

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

About 300 people were food poisoned in Satkania upazila Monday night.

About 4,000 people joined a Mezban (traditional Chittagong feast) organised by Shahidul Islam alias Bholia Mia Sowdagar at Satpara village of West Demshera under Satkania upazila. Three hundred invitees fell sick after the dinner. Of them, 100 were rushed to Satkania Upazila Health Complex.

They included former lawmaker and Awami League leader M Siddique and local ward commissioner AKM Morshed.

Two medical teams are working in the area and taking care of sick villagers.

Satkania Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Dr Farhad Uddin said the sick people suffered from infective diarrhoea. There is nothing to be worried, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members yesterday destroying phensidyl bottles seized in Bogra.

JCD activist turns big gun, earns quick buck

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Netrakona*

The party in power came as a magic lamp for JCD activist Khairul Murshed. He became a millionaire allegedly by virtue of being a personal assistant (PA) to former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar.

He now owns 10 decimal land worth about Tk one crore in Uttara in Dhaka, a 50-acre farmland worth about Tk one and half crore, a big luxurious house in his native village Barivadera in Madan upazila. He also owns a big house in Ukipara in Netrakona town, allegedly built by grabbing a government land, sources in intelligence agencies said. He also owns flats in Dhaka, they disclosed.

The sources said Khairul Murshed has about Tk 10 crore in four bank accounts in Dhaka.

Sources in the district police said they are hunting for Khairul.

Asked whether he is on the arrest list, one source said, "Now list is not needed to arrest any corrupt person".

Khairul's main income source was collecting money from the contractors of different projects in the name of 'minister's political expenditure'.

Allegation have it that he also earned money promising transfer and promotion of officials in Netrakona district by using the name of the former state minister.

Khairul was a student of Netrakona University College and a JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal) leader. He could not pass Master's degree. He took part in the election of Netrakona University College Student Union as VP candidate under the banner of JCD in 1995 but

failed.

After the 2001 election when Babar became state minister for home, he returned Netrakona town.

In July 2003 Babar appointed him as his PA. This gave him the scope to earn illegal money. He also engaged some 'agents' in Netrakona to realise toll and percentage from different government departments.

He also used to receive realised money to influence cases, the sources claimed.

One Jewel, now in Netrakona jail, was his main agent. Jewel organised a group which used to collect toll.

This correspondent made several attempts but failed to contact Khairul in person on cell phone.

Hindu girl 'forced' to be a convert, get married

Seven sued in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

A case was filed with sadar thana accusing seven people including four lawyers of judge court yesterday allegedly for abducting and raping an adolescent Hindu girl.

The victim's mother Mati Rani Das filed the case against the accused under the Woman and Child Repression Act of 2002.

The accused are Advocate Azharul Islam, Adv. Sirajul Islam and Adv. Rezauddowla Bachchu. Adv. Ashraful Islam identified her even knowing her tender age, police said. "They have damaged the communal harmony and created chaos by forcing her to embrace Islam and get married unlawfully" police said. On contact, Sadar Thana OC Sufiqur Rahman confirmed the incident.



JMB 'commander' Shahin, arrested in Pabna, was sent to the capital yesterday for quizzing.

5 'outlaws' held in Bagmara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

Police arrested five 'listed' outlaws belonging to Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) in Bagmara upazila early yesterday.

They are Rahim Uddin, 52, of Jamgram, Amjad Hossain, 28, Rafikul Islam, 22, Joban Ali, 32, and Mahbubur Rahman, 25, of Boro Maria. Later, they were sent to court.

Bagmara Police Station officer-in-charge Mirza Golam Sarwar said the arrestees are accused in cases including murder and extortion, he said.

9 diagnostic centres and hospitals closed in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

Nine diagnostic centres and private hospitals in the city were closed yesterday for operating without licence.

Eight diagnostic centres and a hospital were fined Tk 5,000 each while another hospital was fined Tk 20,000.

The drive was launched by a team led by Magistrate Md. Abdul Hai Al Mahmud.

The magistrate told The Daily

Star that the drive was launched as per a list supplied by the Director of Health, Sylhet division. The list was sent to the Deputy Commissioner two weeks ago.

The closed diagnostic centres and hospital are: Fair Health Hospital at Miremaidan; Renesa Imaging at Stadium market; Ideal Diagnostic Hospital & Cardiac Centre at Lamabazar; Apollo Diagnostics at Stadium market; Healthcare Hospital & Trauma Centre at Kajolshah; Medi Lab

Computer & Diagnostics Centre at Modhushahid; Lad De Nova at Stadium market and Jalalabad Diagnostics Centre at Modhushahid.

Besides, Mariam Ishaque Stone Crush Hospital at Airport Road was fined Tk 20,000.

The team fined a medicine store Tk 50,000 for selling date-expired medicines. More than 25 per cent medicines at the New Centre Pharma at the city's Housing Estate were found date-expired, the magistrate said.

In another drive, a mobile court led by Magistrate Md. Abdul Hai Al Mahmud yesterday fined Pushi Bread & Biscuit Factory at Housing Estate Tk 50,000 on charge of using unsafe ingredients for preparing bread and other items. The factory has also been shut.

Correction

The Daily Star in a news item "A beauty spot fails to land grabbers," published on March 12 inadvertently wrote 'acre' in place of 'k'ear.'

In the second paragraph of the story it should be read 'around 50-k'ear sheet of water.' Locally a 'k'ear' is equivalent to about 30 decimals of land whereas an acre is 100 decimals.

We regret the mistake.

5X3

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Nilphamari*

The District administration, Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), an NGO, and Water Aid, a British charity organisation, jointly organised a workshop on 'Implementation of Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Nilphamari District.'

Held at the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) conference room, the workshop was presided by DC Khondokar Moklesur Rahman. Water Aid advisor Azahar Ali read out the key-note paper.

Speakers there stressed the need for coordinated efforts by government agencies and different NGOs to attain cent percent sanitation in rural areas.

6X3

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8X3