

STATE-OWNED JUTE MILLS IN KHULNA-JESSORE

Workers reject BJMC offer for voluntary retirement

Former whip Ashraf Hossain terms it a 'new conspiracy to destroy jute mills'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Workers and employees of eight state-owned jute mills in Khulna - Jessore industrial belts have rejected a BJMC offer to go on voluntary retirement to get their arrear wages and other benefits and threatened tougher agitation for reopening of the mills.

"It is a new plot by BJMC to close down the mills and deprive workers of their arrears", Sardar Motahar Hossain, convener of Khulna-Jessore Regional Committee of Patkal Sangram Parishad (PSP), told this correspondent yesterday.

About 1500 workers and employees of the eight mills who went on voluntary retirement in

December last year on such BJMC assurance are yet to get their arrears amounting to Tk 90 crore, the Motahar said.

Discontent is brewing and violence is feared in the industrial belts after the BJMC chairman issued an official order extending lay-off of Peoples Jute Mills, Crescent Jute Mills and Star Jute Mills by 15 days more with effect from May 10, he said.

Coordinator of Khulna zonal office of BJMC Shaikh Shamim Ahmed received the faxed letter Tuesday evening. The letter bears signature of BJMC secretary Md Fazlul Haque.

In the face of workers' agitation for arrear salary, the BJMC on April 19 laid off the three jute mills for 21

days and the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill for 45 days.

In another notice, BJMC urged workers and employees of the eight jute mills to go on voluntary retirement within 10 days from Tuesday to get 'full payment of gratuity, provident fund and arrear wages and salaries'.

Workers and employees of the four jute mills stopped work from last April 16 and launched agitation for payment of their arrear wages and salaries which triggered clashes with police that left over 150 injured. Seventy-seven workers were arrested.

Government allocated Tk 19.74 crore for partial payment out of Tk 70 crore arrear wages and salaries. The partial payment

began on April 28.

When contacted, former BNP whip Ashraf Hossain termed extension of the lay-off and notice for voluntary retirement a 'new conspiracy to destroy jute mills of Khulna-Jessore area'.

He said Tk 3,000 crore would be required for payment of gratuity and provident fund of workers and employees of the eight jute mills and another Tk 300 crore to resume production in the mills and make them profitable again, he said.

BJMC has violated law because it can not issue notice asking workers to go on voluntary retirement while the lay-off is in force, said Ashraf Hossain, who was a prominent labour leader in Khalishpur industrial belt in the 60s.

5 AL, BNP men held in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khagrachhari*

Police in separate drives yesterday arrested five activists of BNP and Awami League including Khagrachhari district Juba League office secretary for their alleged involvement in terrorism and other crimes.

Police sources said, acting on a tip-off, a police team led by Sub-Inspector Mohammad Safiqul Islam raided Shalbagun and Muslimpara in the Sadar upazila and arrested 'wanted-accused' BNP activists Mohammad Ali Akber and Ashraf Alam and Juba League office secretary Mohammad Shawkat Ali.

In a separate drive, another team led by sub-inspector Mohammad Farid raided Shantinagar area and arrested Awami League activists Parimol Debanath and his brother Shamol Debonath.

They were produced before court yesterday. The court sent them to Khagrachhari jail.

UP chairman held in Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kurigram*

A Union Parishad (UP) chairman of Nageswari upazila in Kurigram district was arrested with a smuggled motor cycle on Thursday night.

Sources said, acting on a tip-off a team of police raided Raygonj bazar and arrested Raygonj UP chairman Nuruzzaman Mondal with a smuggled motor cycle.

There were allegations of terrorist activities, abduction and narcotic trading against him. He was an associate of Kurigram godfather and district BNP General Secretary Saifur Rahman Rana, sources said.

A case was filed against him under the Special Powers Act.

JMB suspect remanded in Habiganj

UNB, *Habiganj*

An expatriate, who was arrested for his suspected link with outlawed JMB, was granted a three-day police remand by a court here on Thursday.

Magistrate M Jahirul Islam granted the remand of Bangladeshi expatriate in UK Abdullah Al Mamun Khaled when he was produced before the court.

Rab arrested Abdullah from Dhaka on Monday.

The elite force later recovered Islamic books, CDs, laptop, VCD and cameras from Dakghar area in Habiganj town according to his confessional statement.

TIB SURVEY IN MYMENSINGH SADAR

Tk 865 for filing GD, Tk 5,313 to avoid torture on remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Mymensingh*

Sixty-eight per cent of complainants had to pay a bribe of Tk 865 on an average for filing a general diary (GD) with Mymensingh Kotwali police station.

Twenty-nine per cent of complainants said that they had to offer a bribe of Tk 2000 on an average to get the accused arrested. Seventy-one per cent of the arrestees paid Tk 6,141 on an average.

29 had to pay Tk 2000 on an average while 26 per cent had to pay Tk 4258 to avoid arrest.

These were revealed by Concerned Citizens' Committee (CCC), local unit of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), at a press conference at Mymensingh Press Club on Thursday. The CCC earlier conducted a survey on alleged graft by police at Kotwali police station.

A total of 154 people who went to the police station or were taken there were interviewed during the survey conducted from February 11 to April 10 last year, CCC Convener Prof Mokarram Hossain told the press conference.

The survey also identified problems faced by policemen in their work.

At the Kotwali police station, the number of cases on land dispute was the highest and that on murder was the lowest.

The survey revealed that 46 per cent of the people who informed police about their cases verbally paid a bribe of Tk 2150 on an average and 67 per cent of the bribe money went to pockets of police officials.

It was claimed in the survey that 62 per cent of the accused placed on remand paid Tk 5,313 on an average to avoid torture.

The CCC survey report also suggested some steps to improve the standard of police service. These include a separate pay scale and more facilities for policemen and providing more logistics and formation of a committee to monitor work at the police station.

The press conference was also attended by CCC members AHM Khalequzzaman and Emdadul Haque Millat, Acting Police Superintendent of Mymensingh SMAkhtaruzzaman.

SM Akhtaruzzaman welcomed the CCC survey but pointed out some 'systematic faults' in it.

He also said at the press conference that the survey report was not accurate.

'Empower EC to institutionalise democracy'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said only an independent and strong Election Commission (EC) can hold a free, fair and credible election by debarring corrupt, inefficient people and black money holders from the process.

This is vital to institutionalise democracy and ensure good governance for development of the country, the said.

The speakers also urged political parties not to nominate corrupt, inefficient people and black money holders in election for the sake of development of the country.

Nominating 'clean' candidates in the next election has now become a demand of the people, they said at the discussion organised by Satkhira chapter of Shushaner Janney Nagorik (Sujan), an NGO.

Journalists, freedom fighters, professionals took part in the discussion.

Demanding compulsory registration of political parties, they said this is vital for ensuring transparent and fair political process free from corruption.

Without registration, there will not be any democratic practice in parties. Democracy can not be institutionalised if there is no democracy in parties.

Some of the speakers referred to the present position of the two major parties and said they are responsible for the uncertain political situation in the country.

CHAR LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMME Govt funds gobbled up in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Gaibandha*

Joint forces have detected corruption and irregularities in implementation of the ongoing Char Livelihood Programme (CLP) in Sundarganj upazila in Gaibandha district.

In a preliminary report to the district administration given on May 9, the joint forces suggested action against the wrongdoers, sources said.

The programme was undertaken in the current financial year in five unions in Sundarganj upazila along Teesta and Brahmaputra river basins involving an amount of Tk 32 lakh. Under the programme, homesteads of destitute shoal people are being raised above the flood level.

Each family is supposed to get Tk 13,000 or an equivalent quantity of foodgrains for earth filling work. But most of the beneficiaries got amounts between Tk 2,000 and Tk 500, and many even did not get anything.

During probe by the joint forces, it was revealed that the programme envisaged raising homesteads by seven and a half feet but those were actually raised by three to four feet as the beneficiaries did not get the full amount of assistance.

The probe followed complaints by local people to Sundarganj

Upazila Nirbahi Officer earlier.

Labourers working under the programme got only Tk 50 a day against a sanctioned wage of Tk 70, they alleged.

Nepotism and irregularities were also alleged in forming project committees. Most committees were formed after the choice of local influentials.

Allegations have it that most vulnerable groups in areas worst hit by floods were sidelined in selecting beneficiaries only to misappropriate funds.

Seeking anonymity, some local people told this correspondent that a project was taken up in Badamer Char in Sundarganj upazila, where a local NGO had earlier implemented a similar project in 2004 while many deserving areas were ignored.

In many areas, solvent households were included in the programme, leaving out the ultra poor, they alleged.

On getting allegations, the Sundarganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer asked the Upazila Education Officer to submit a report after investigation on CLP work. The Upazila Education Officer conducted an investigation on April 18 in Kapasia union and submitted a report to the UNO on April 29. The UNO then requested joint forces to probe the matter.

BARISAL T&T REVENUE SCAM Property attachment of eight ordered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

A court here has ordered attachment of property of eight absconding accused including the bother of city Mayor and a BNP leader and ward commissioner in a case for alleged misappropriation of cores of Taka revenue of T and T department.

The eight are Mijanur Rahman Wahid, younger bother of Barisal City Corporation (BCC) Mayor Majibor Rahman Sarwar, BNP leader and BCC Commissioner Mosharraf Ali Khan Badsha, Munir Hossain, Sajeda Rahman, Liton Karmokar, Anwar Hossain Jewel, Apu Talukdar and Mahbub Molla.

First Class Magistrate Munim Hassan Thursday afternoon ordered attachment of their property by May 17 and issued arrest warrants against the absconding accused.

Court sources said if the accused fail to appear before court to face trial, a seven-day notice would be published in newspaper.

If the accused remain absconding after that, charges would framed and trial would be

completed within 60 days in absentia by Speedy Trial Tribunal.

The accused persons took 12 illegal telephone connections in false names and addresses by exerting their influence in April 2002.

Officials and staffs of T & T department were forced by them to give those illegal telephone connections.

They ran VOIP network and misappropriated cores of Taka of revenues of T & T. They even did not pay arrear bills of T & T amounting to over Tk 84 lakh, the sources said.

After proclamation of emergency, joint forces arrested Mizanur Rahman, owner of the illegal VOIP centre and his brother Mamunur Rahman on March 16.

Mizan on remand disclosed names of the eight persons. Their wrongdoing was revealed during investigation by a team from Dhaka, followed by filing of a case.

The case was sent to Barisal Sadar Upazila Magistrate court on May 9, which sent it to Barisal Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal on May 10.

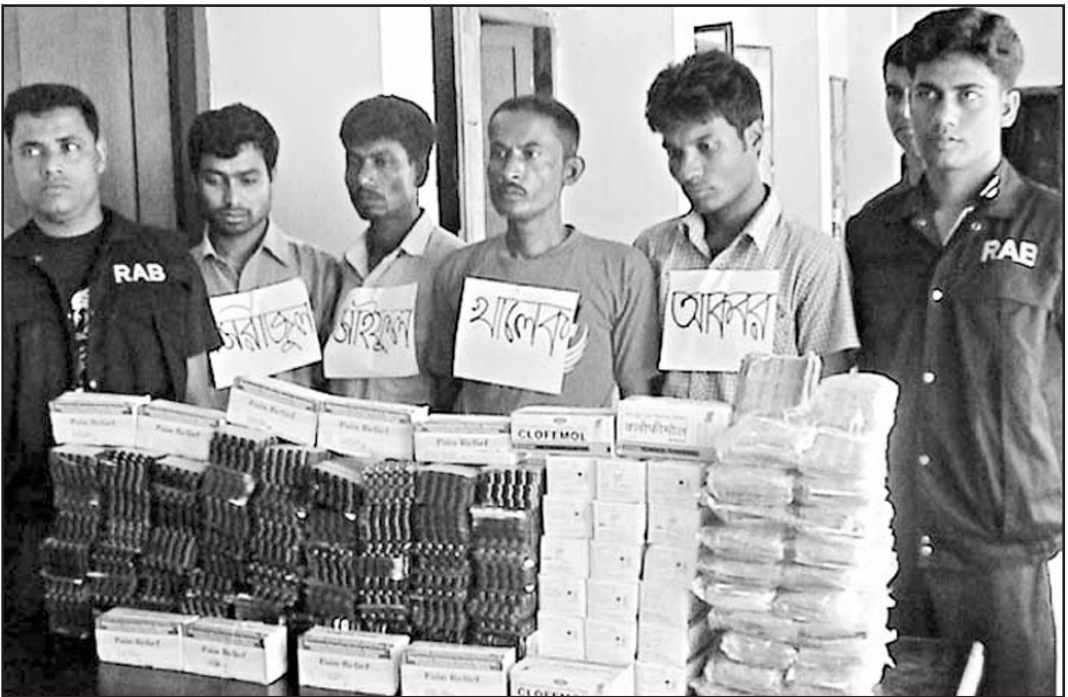


PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) recovered Tk 8 lakh contraband Indian medicines from a village in Panchbibi upazila in Joypurhat district yesterday and arrested four persons.

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