

Formulate independent policy for revival of jute sector

Speakers urge govt at roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demanding an immediate end to the interference of the World Bank, the speakers at a roundtable yesterday urged the government to formulate an independent policy for the revival of jute sector in the country.

They observed that Jute and Industries Adviser Geeti Ara Safiya should immediately stop her 'crusade' for regaining the golden days of jute that concentrated on harsh measures like job cuts and closure of mills only.

At the Saptahik-2000 roundtable titled 'Jute industry in Bangladesh: Current perspective' at The Daily Star conference room, the speakers highlighted those issues which have pushed the once glorious sector to the verge of ruin.

They insisted on opening the closed mills immediately and asked not to shut down any mill in future because if the country wants to stand on a strong economic footing, jute can play a significant role as the demand for jute is increasing worldwide.

Apprehending that Bangladesh may turn into an exporter of raw jute and jute products some made ridiculous comment that jute would not be viable in this country, said Prof Muzaffer Ahmad.

"It is also not justifiable to impose all the responsibilities on jute mill workers for the loss in jute sector as 65 percent of the total expenditure is spent for buying raw materials and only 12 percent is spent as salary to the workers," he added.

Earlier jute used to play the role of

insurance for farmers who produced jute in rainy season instead of rice, said Prof Muzaffer, adding that under various circumstances farmers have now shifted to mono-crop and eventually lost their insurance.

Prof Abu Ahmed of economics department at Dhaka University (DU) observed that BJMC or jute ministry cannot do the needful, the government should look for other options.

"We would decide what we should do with our jute. In last 15 years the government did not spend as much in revitalising the jute sector as it spent on appointing consultants to implement the projects of WB and IMF in the privatisation board," he said.

Terming the World Bank initiatives a 'concerted efforts' to wipe out jute industries from the country, Prof Anu Muhammad said, "The predatory attitude of the rulers was compounded with the WB and IMF's Jute Sector Adjustment Credit and WB's destructive development project in damaging the sector."

He presented a comparative study between Jute policy: 2002 and the Reforms in 2007 which shows that both the governments were enthusiastic only in retrenching the workers and shutting down the mills.

DU Prof Syed Manzurul Islam laid emphasis on the humanitarian disaster caused by the closure of mills, adding, "When we tried to unite civil society for launching a grill kitchen the response was disappointing."

He called for permanent rehabilitation of retrenched workers.

Citing the examples of theft by two

retrenched workers at Khalishpur in Khulna, Editor of the Bhorer Kagoj Shyamal Dutta said, "While the PRSP recommended job creation for 30 lakh people a year, the government is deliberately shrinking the job market."

Pointing finger at the former finance minister Saifur Rahman for implementing the WB vision for destroying the jute sector, Worker's Party President Rashed Khan Menon said, "If we want to save our jute sector from the 'national betrayers', the government should form a national commission with all the stakeholders."

Though the Awami League government could not do much for reviving the jute sector but at least did not destroy it, said AL leader Matia Chowdhury regretting that, "We could not encourage the farmers in growing jute as the farmers were not getting fair price of their produce."

She added that the private sector in the country is equally inefficient as the public sector.

Criticising the trend of encouraging 'consumer's culture, CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said, "In 1954, we fought for the nationalisation of jute industries under six-point and 11-point movement. Now we are moving towards privatisation, and without reinvestment we have adopted consumer's culture."

Shahidul Islam Helal, an industrialist and exporter of jute and jute goods, called for protective mechanism to save the jute industry.

"During the Ershad regime, it was compulsory to use jute carpets in all

government offices. Seven carpet factories were in market at that time. Now even the conference room at the jute ministry uses synthetic carpet and all those factories have been shut down."

AL leader Col (Retd) Faruq Khan said the closing down of jute mills and retrenching of workers are the violation of the constitution that ensures liberation of farmers. He also spoke of misery of the farmers.

Mazharul Quddus, former chairman of BJMC, said the government should frame a policy keeping the interest of the mill workers as well as agricultural and industrial aspects in view.

"We want a comprehensive policy that would look into the well-being of three crore people dependent some way or other on jute, otherwise the disgruntled, distressed workers would launch a movement...the policy makers should be aware of that," he added.

Labour leader Shahidullah Chowdhury said if the workers get their salary regularly, if the management is corruption-free, the jute mills can run well as we know that Bawani Jute Mills gained a profit worth Tk 15 lakh."

Activist Simin Hossain Rimi delivered the keynote speech while veteran journalist Ataus Samad, Farhad Mazhar of UBINIG, labour leader Lutfur Rahman, Dr Shamsul Alam, and BNP Joint Secretary General Ashraf Hossain also spoke on the occasion.



Two children sleep on the shoulders of their mothers who wait in a long queue of flood-affected people to receive relief in the city's Kamrangir Char area yesterday.

Machinery, valuables gutted in footwear factory fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A devastating fire ripped through a footwear factory at Shyampur in the city early yesterday, burning down machinery and other valuables.

The blaze, which started at around 12:30am, also caused partial damage to a filling station and Otobi building adjacent to the factory, Maxxon Rubber Industries Ltd.

A fire fighter was injured trying to put out the fire.

Police and fire brigade suspect that an electrical short-circuit in a tin-roofed godown of the factory sparked off the fire, which soon engulfed other

godowns.

The raging fire also burned down the factory administrative building and parts of adjacent filling station and Otobi building.

Fire brigade sources estimated the loss at over Tk 4 crore.

Nine fire fighting units from Sadarghat and Postogola and fire brigade headquarters managed to bring the blaze under control at around 3:30pm.

The factory has about 1200 workers, but there was no report of casualties as the factory was closed at the time of the fire incident, police said.



Participants at a roundtable titled 'Jute industry of Bangladesh: Present context' held at The Daily Star office yesterday. The weekly Saptahik 2000 organised the event.

2 lighter vessels capsized in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A lighter vessel with 700 tonnes of cement clinker sank in the Kamaphuli estuary near outer anchorage of Chittagong Port while another vessel with 1100 tonnes of crude oil capsized partially at the offshore of Sandwip Channel in the Bay of Bengal yesterday.

The clinker-laden MV Feroz Farzana with its 12 crew sank when it was caught in a storm at around 12:30am, sources said.

There was no casualty as the nearby trawlers and boats rescued them all.

The vessel took delivery of clinker from a Korean vessel at the outer anchorage on Friday night and

was heading for Chittagong port.

Two tug boats Kandari9 and Kandari-10 tried to locate the sunken ship but they failed in the face of stormy weather and wounded up their operation in the afternoon.

Port Radio Control sources said the ship was carrying clinker beyond its capacity that resulted in the capsizing of the ship.

Away at Sandwip Channel, another lighter vessel named Saima-3 with crude oil sank partially as water entered into its engine room at around 12:45pm.

Sources said the voyage of Narayanganj-bound vessel from Chittagong was suspended as a mechanical glitch developed in the

engine because of the water.

A team of Bangladesh Navy rushed to the spot and was engaged in salvaging the vessel till filing of this report at 5:00pm, sources in the Port Radio Control said.

Meanwhile, a two-member committee headed by Ship Surveyor Engineer Sirajul Islam of Marine Mercantile Department was formed to probe into the capsizing of lighter vessel at the outer anchorage of Chittagong port.

The committee comprising Assistant Harbour Master Captain Rahmat Ullah was asked to submit its report within the shortest possible time.

Young businessman stabbed to death

UNB, Keraniganj

A young businessman was stabbed to death near his shop in Banshpatti area of South Keraniganj on Friday night for refusing to pay toll.

The victim was identified as Abdul Mannan, 19, owner of Shawan Traders and son of Abdur Rahim of the area.

Witnesses said 4-5 assailants stabbed Mannan near his shop at about 7:30pm, injuring him critically.

Mannan was rushed to Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries at about 8:00pm.

Family sources said Mannan was killed as he refused to pay a toll of Tk 50000.

Low over Bay intensifies

UNB, Dhaka

The low over northwest Bay off West Bengal and Bangladesh coast intensified into a well-marked low over the same area yesterday noon.

It is likely to intensify further and move in a northwesterly direction, said a warning message of the Met office.

Under its influence, deep convection is taking place over north Bay. Squally weather may continue to affect the maritime ports.

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to hoist local cautionary signal number three.

All fishing boats and trawlers over north Bay have also been advised to take shelter immediately and remain in shelter until further notice.



Singer Bappa Majumder performs at a cultural function at the Teacher-Student Centre auditorium in the city yesterday. Dhaka University Debating Society organised the function to raise funds for flood victims.