

Rejoinder and our reply

The Grameen Bank has issued a rejoinder to a report headlined "62 NGO branch offices stop operation in Khagrachhari" published in the Daily Star on page 6 on September 1.

The rejoinder said: "We were shocked to see the news. We immediately contacted our zonal office in Rangamati. We were reassured that nothing like the event you described actually happened. We have 49 branches in three hill districts. None of the branches was ever shut down for even a day for any reason.

Your reporter appears not to be aware of the difference between "Branch" and "Kendra". The use of the word "Branch", which is a big office of Grameen Bank's operation has created a major confusion. We request you to clarify this immediately.

Also, we would like to point out that Grameen Bank is not a NGO, it is a bank. Such a mistake, after so many years of Grameen Bank's operation, is not expected from a paper of The Daily Star's stature.

Our Reply:

We stand corrected on both the wrong use of the word "branch" and calling Grameen Bank a NGO. However we reiterate that 26 Kendras (not Branches) were closed and to that extent our report is correct, which was the main focus of our story.

We want to further clarify that 26 centres (Kendras) of Grameen Bank out of existing 1557 centres in Chittagong Hill Tracts were closed because of extortionists' threats, as reported in our original story. Grameen Bank has 49 branches in the three hill districts and all of them are fully operational.

We regret any confusion created by using the word "Branch" where we should have used the word "Kendra".

Most leaders in Moulvibazar say 'no' to Bhuiyan, Saifur

Naser Rahman's alleged abuse of power annoyed senior BNP leaders in district, insiders say

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Majority of BNP leaders in Moulvibazar district are with newly appointed secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hussain.

They said they will not support party stalwart Saifur Rahman and expelled secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

Talking to this correspondent, they said BNP was organised by Ziaur Rahman and now Begum Zia is the symbol of unity and ideology of party unity. So, BNP led by Begum Zia is the main stream of the organisation, they said.

This correspondent talked to many front ranking BNP leaders, some of whom were stripped of positions in last five years. They were found unhappy with BNP stalwart Saifur Rahman and his son former lawmaker M Naser Rahman.

Naser Rahman, president of district BNP, and its general secretary Fayzul Karim Mayun are now in detention on corruption charges.

At least eight other leaders of district BNP committee are also in jail and at least 25 are on the run to evade arrest. All of them were earlier known to be aligned with Naser Rahman.

After assuming the post of Moulvibazar district BNP president, Naser Rahman reorganised the district committee by taking in his loyalists and dropping senior leaders.

Leaders who were sidelined by Naser Rahman in last five years have



SAIFUR RAHMAN

now become active again. They are contacting grassroots leaders and activists to reorganise the party in the district, party sources said.

In last five years, Saifur Rahman enjoyed absolute authority in party affairs in Moulvibazar. But the scenario has changed now, party insiders said while talking to this correspondent.

Saifur's reported support to Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and takeover as party chief will not create any positive impression among senior and dedicated party leaders in the district, they said.

After being elected lawmaker in a by-election in 2001, Naser Rahman took over as president of Moulvibazar BNP and dissolved the district committee. He dropped many senior leaders and appointed his loyalists to different posts including that of general secretary.



ABDUL MANNAN BHUIYAN

This angered most of the senior leaders but they remained silent. They have now become active while many of Naser loyalists are behind the bar or on the run, party sources said.

Begum Khaleda Rabbani, former president of district BNP and former lawmaker from women's reserved seat, now leads BNP in Moulvibazar. She is a staunch supporter of Begum Khaleda Zia, the sources claimed.

BNP senior leaders earlier dropped from the district committee are now united under the leadership of Khaleda Rabbani and trying to reorganise the party. They include former general secretary advocate Juned Ahmed, former joint secretary Muazzem Hussain Matuk and former organising secretary Musharraf Hussain Badshah, the sources said.

Talking to this correspondent, Khaleda Rabbani and the three

leaders said they have extended their support to Khandaker Delwar Hussain.

They said Naser, by abusing power, sidelined many dedicated party men at different levels and harmed BNP in Moulvibazar. They said they would not follow Saifur Rahman as he aligned himself with Mannan Bhuiyan.

Khaleda Rabbani said a good number of party leaders came to her house on September 5 (the day following Khaleda Zia's arrest) to reiterate their allegiance to her leadership. She claimed that many others at upazila level are maintaining contact with her.

However, senior vice president of district BNP advocate Mujibur Rahman Mujib was found loyal to Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

He expressed his support to reforms proposed by BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

"It is not important who will lead the party. Reform is now important for each BNP man", he said.

He also criticised 'corrupt' leaders in Moulvibazar BNP. He however declined to name who are with him in Moulvibazar in supporting Mannan Bhuiyan.

Alleged misuse of power by his sons in last five years is mainly responsible for this, they said. So, it is natural that majority of senior BNP leaders who were stripped of party positions by his son (Naser), will now stand against him.

Piranha or Thai Chanda?

Mymensingh farmers protest govt order for destruction

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Fish farmers and hatchery owners in Mymensingh have claimed that fishery authorities have 'branded' their Thai Chanda as Piranha and asked them to destroy those.

Piranha eats other fishes and is harmful to the environment.

Fish farmers at a recent press conference at a hatchery at Ragabpur in Sadar upazila claimed that Thai Chanda is being cultivated in Bangladesh for long. The authorities have "wrongly" identified it (Thai Chanda) as Piranha, they claimed.

There are around Tk 1,000 Thai Chanda fishes and fries in some 100 hatcheries and several hundred farms in Mymensingh and Comilla districts, the farmers said at the press conference.

They also informed that Thai Chanda belongs to Colossoma species. It is known as Pacu, Pirapitinga and Pal Pacu in Thailand and is consumed widely in that country.

Piranha is available in South America and Guyana and is also eaten by humans there.

Mymensingh district fishery department made announcements over loud speakers recently, asking fish farmers to kill Thai Chanda fishes, taking those to be Piranha, they told the press conference. The authorities took the decision without proper investigation, they claimed.

They also claimed that Fisheries Faculty of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) and Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI) conducted a field survey in 2005, which did not identify Thai Chanda as Piranha or declare it harmful to

the environment.

Thai Chanda can be cultivated with other fishes including indigenous Ruhi, Katla, catfish and Telapia and no farmer reported that it eats other fishes, said Md. Muzammel Karim, owner of Muktagacha Fisheries in Muktagacha upazila.

Md. Sham Miah, owner of

Mukammel Hossain is working to settle the issue. The team includes fish scientists from Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute, Mymensingh and CARITAS. It will give a report within a week, he said. He said order was given to



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer with a Thai Chanda and a Piranha fish with sharp teeth (right)

United Fisheries in Comilla, said cultivation of Thai Chanda increased the country in last two years.

Media reports describing Thai Chanda as Piranha has put us in a great crisis, they regretted.

Over 50 hatchery owners from different upazilas of Mymensingh and Comilla were present at the press conference.

On contact, District Fisheries Officer Syed Arif Azad said a team led by Director General of Fisheries Department Md.

stop cultivation of Piranha.

Asked about the worries of fish farmers, he said they should prove that they are cultivating Thai Chanda not Piranha.

Prof. Dr. Muklesur Rahman, Head of Fisheries Biology and Genetics Department of BAU Fisheries Faculty who has been working on Piranha fish since 2002 told the Daily Star that its cultivation is harmful.



PHOTO: STAR

(From left) Flooded Shantinagar area in Khagrachhari, flood water from Brahmaputra overflowing Gaibandha-Fulchari road at Chandia in Gaibandha and a collapsed bridge at Gaokandia on Durgapur-Gaokandia road in Netrakona yesterday.

3 more jute mills to be privatised

Production falls by 60pc in 6 state-owned mills in Khulna-Jessore

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation BJMC Chairman Ataharul Islam has alleged that corruption by CBA leaders is delaying full payment of gratuity to retrenched workers of closed Peoples Jute Mills.

Full payment of gratuity will be paid one week after probing into corruption by CBA leaders, he said. But he did not clarify how CBA leaders did corruption in the full payment of gratuity.

The BJMC chairman yesterday visited three state-owned jute mills in Khulna amid tight security. He was accompanied by four other BJMC high officials.

Ataharul Islam, when asked, said that closed Peoples Jute Mills

and Daulatpur Jute Mills would be privatised as per recommendation of Privatisation Board.

If privatised, the government will bear all financial liabilities of Peoples Jute Mills and Daulatpur Jute Mills, he said.

The BJMC chairman cautioned that Alim Jute Mills would also meet the fate of Peoples Jute Mills shortly. He blamed corruption and labour unrest for hampering production in Alim Jute Mills.

He said casual workers of state-owned mills were getting wages higher than those in private-owned mills. Any attempt to create chaos in this matter will be severely dealt with, he warned.

"I have come to Khulna to end deadlock in the jute mills and not to get locked in any controversy", he

said.

Meanwhile production in six state-owned jute mills of Khulna-Jessore industrial belt has decreased by about sixty per cent as over 5,000 casual workers have been on work stoppage since September 3 in demand for their arrear wages and other benefits including bonus and issuance of gate pass.

The six jute mills are Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills, Crescent Jute Mills, Star Jute Mills, Carpeting Jute Mills and Eastern Jute Mills.

Convenor of Khulna-Jessore regional unit of casual jute mill workers' association Shahidul Islam said in a press statement yesterday that they would not join work at Tk 90 instead of Tk 165 as daily wages.

Work stoppage will continue until our two demands are fully met, Shahidul Islam said in the statement.

He alleged that casual workers of state-owned jute mills were being deprived of their legitimate right of getting daily wages on government holidays.

"We are being branded by BJMC as daily basis workers in total violation of labour law", the statement said.

He further alleged that authorities of the six jute mills had threatened to implicate labour leaders in criminal cases for stopping work.

Casual workers want BJMC chairman to intervene in the matter to meet the demands, the statement said.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Frisky children collect water lily at a wetland in Faridpur. The beautiful flowery plant that grows in plenty in rural areas is also a highly nutritious vegetable.

Nat'l ID card distribution begins in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Distribution of national identity (ID) cards began here at a function held at the local Zila Parishad auditorium yesterday.

Rangpur Deputy Commissioner (DC) Khandoker Atiur Rahman was in the chair while Acting Division Commander of 66 Infantry Division Brigadier General Muhammad Ferdous Miah, PSC, attended the function as chief guest.

Lt Col Shahariar Ahmed Chowdhury and other army officials engaged in the voter and national ID card registration process were present.

Earlier, the voter registration with photographs including fingerprints for preparing national identity card kicked off in Rangpur municipality on August 19.

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