

## Harassment adds to plight of old pensioners

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD

Pensioners continue to suffer when they come to draw their pension at the Pay & Cash Office of Bangladesh Railway in Chittagong every month.

Indifference of the authorities concerned to the problems causes the sufferings to pensioners when a section of dishonest staffs at the Cash Office cash in on the situation to realise speed money for payment and add to the plight of the elderly people.

Around 12,000 pensioners of Bangladesh Railway eastern zone come to draw their pension at the Pay & Cash Office adjoining to old building of Chittagong Railway Station every month, sources said.

With some 4000 of them receiving the pension through postal service the rest of around 8000 pensioners are to draw it directly from the cash office, sources added.

As such, several hundred pensioners, mostly old and infirm or helpless, crowd the Pay & Cash Office and struggle for hours for payment.

There are two small waiting rooms with poor sitting arrangements and two dilapidated latrines giving off bad smell for the elderly men and women, waiting for pension.

With the waiting rooms outside the main building of Pay & Cash Office always remaining overcrowded, they wait for hours standing in a long queue in the open space being exposed to sun and rains, alleged some of the pensioners on the Pay and Cash Office premise on Sunday.



Elderly pensioners wait in queue for hours to draw pension in front of the Pay and Cash office of Bangladesh Railway in Chittagong.

"Only erection of a shade structure and a stall for refreshment in the open space of Cash Office compound could ease our sufferings to a great extent," pensioner Abdus Sattar said, adding, "The uncared for and unusable latrines also need some improvement."

"The staffs concerned take so-called 'stamp fees' and speed money against most of the payments. Otherwise, they force the pensioners to stand for long and harass them in different ways," alleged Maksud Mia, a pensioner.

Sources said, usually the pensioners can draw their money through wards or representatives each month or at a time after several months.

But, during the "Hazira" (annual attendance) each of around

12,000 pensioners is to appear before the officials concerned in person from different parts of the country. The crowd go beyond tolerable limit at this time, they said.

The authorities concerned have fixed December for annual hazira of those drawing pension directly from Pay & Cash Office (headquarters) and January for those receiving payment through postal department.

During the second phase of hazira in January, the scenario is more piteous with the pensioners arriving from remote areas of different districts including Dhaka. After the journey, it takes them at least two days to register their attendance.

However, there is scope for registering attendance appear-

ing before the pension department at Central Railway Building (CRB) at any time of the year. But, one has to face harassment while registering attendance at this unscheduled period.

One Mosharrat Hossain of Railway Nirapatta Bahini said he took her octogenarian mother for recording her attendance on March 8 when an assistant pay master (pension) demanded speed money from him saying, "You have to spend something to get something."

He said the official refrained from registering her attendance as I refused to pay the speed money.

He said he has lodged a written complaint with Financial Adviser and Chief Accounts Officer (FA&CAO) Saroj Kanti Dev

in this regard.

When contacted Saroj Dev said a committee has been formed to probe into the matter and the officer concerned will be punished if the allegation is proved.

Meanwhile, the pensioners said payment through banks can reduce their sufferings like other civil departments.

Saraj Dev said they had taken such an initiative but could not be implemented due to reluctance of the banks. He said the banks are reluctant to take up the responsibility of disbursing the pension even for one percent service charge. He, however, said they are still trying to make arrangement to pay the pension through banks.

Shakhawat Hossain, manager (Pay & Cash) said to cope with the pressure of pensioners the Cash Office with its inadequate staffs sometimes runs even in the night.

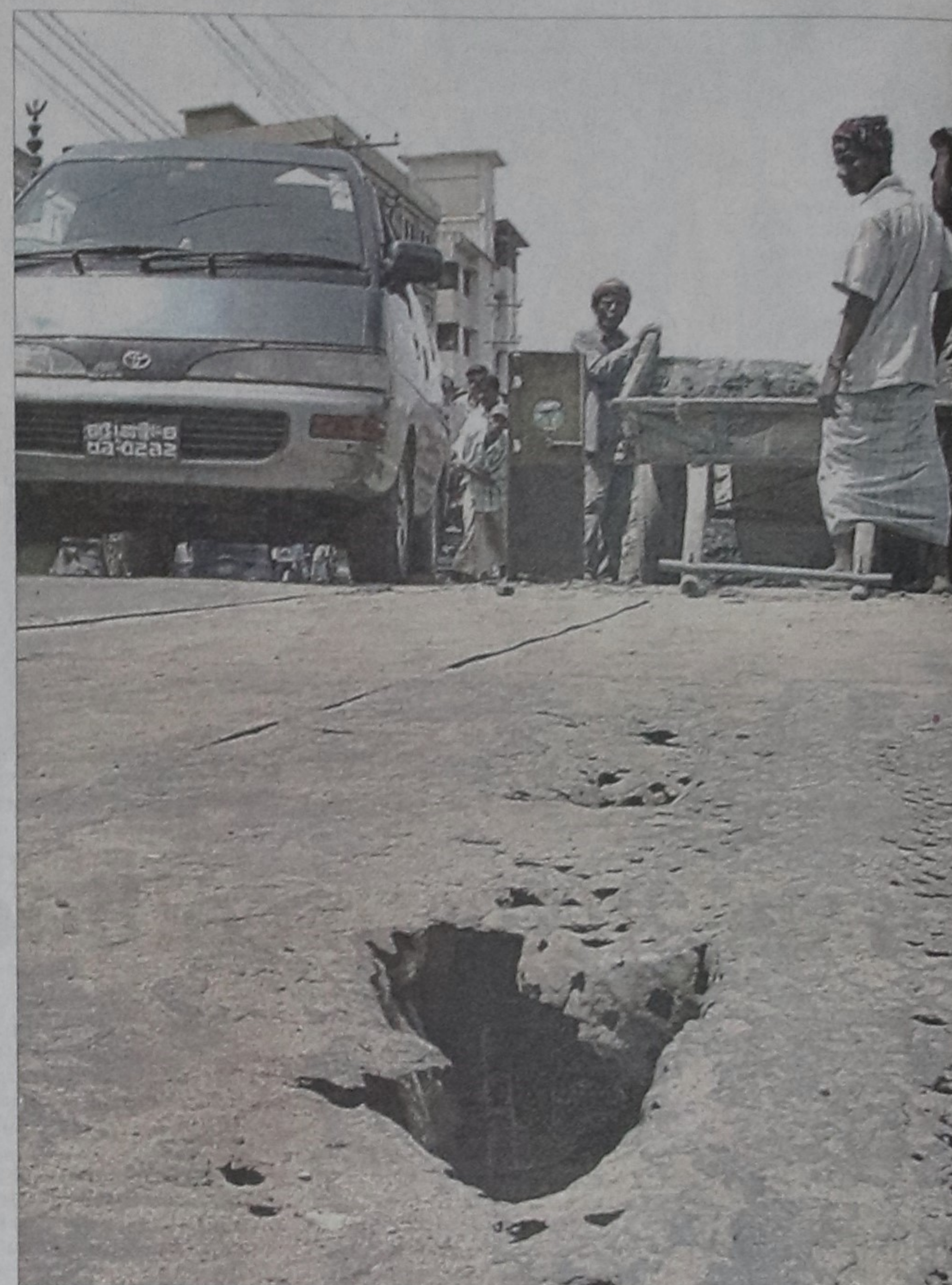
He said they have divided the pensioners into several groups and fixed separate dates for each group to ease payment throughout the months.

Shakhawat said yet the crowd is much more larger at the beginning of the payment dates when as many as 500 to 600 come to draw pension everyday.

Asked about the bribing and speed money

Shakhawat said they get complaints of receiving speed money very often. They serve notices cautioning the employees and officials concerned, he added.

He said they will definitely take action if anyone is found involved in such evil practice.



Rust is corroding the iron structure of a Bailey bridge, popularly known as Mirzapul, over Mirza canal on Muradpur-Panchlaish road, posing danger to passengers as well as passers-by.

PAHELA BAISHAKH

## Local boutiques track the trend



DWAIPAYAN BARUA

Fashion houses in the port city have already come up with exclusive collections for the Pahela Baishakh to meet the demand of both the trendy and festival lovers.

To attract the people who like to celebrate the day with essence of being Bangalee, more than one dozens of local boutique houses have tried to track the trends with varieties in design and colour combination.

But the sale is not satisfactory compared to the previous years due to the poor financial condition of the customers, traders said.

Most of fashion outlets are focusing on bright coloured dresses, including the traditional combination of red and white of Baishakh with variety in boutiques, blocks and embroidery.

Shailpi, a popular shop, arrayed their five branches at different city markets with variety of dresses like salwar kameez, panjabee, fatua, shirt and T-shirt at reasonable prices.

They focused on bright eye-catching colours like parrot green, pink and magenta in the dresses using karchupi, hand embroidery, computer embroidery, screen print and hand painting.

Salwar kameez is being sold at Tk 700 to Tk 1700, fatua at Tk 300 to Tk 900, shirt at Tk 500 to Tk 1000, T-shirt at Tk 150 to Tk 350.

Salsabil Boutique House at CDA Avenue of East Nasirabad has taken preparation for customers of all ages.

It is selling Tangail sari at Tk 350 to Tk 1250, sari in block and handprint at Tk 650 to Tk 900, hand block sari at Tk 700 to Tk 1500, women's fatua at Tk 400 to Tk 800, men's fatua at Tk 450 to Tk 550, panjabee at Tk 800 to Tk 1,500.

Doll's House, the oldest boutique house of Chittagong, organised a three-day exhibition titled 'Porao Megh Orao Megh' from April 4 displaying different clothing and ornaments designed by designer Ivy Hasan.

Ivy said she tried to introduce a sort of comfort in her Baishakh collection of sari, fatua and salwar kameez in endy cotton and khadi with traditional borders.

Shells, mirrors, beads, metals and pottery have been used in ornaments as embellishments. Price of sari ranged from Tk 800 to Tk 2,400, fatua from Tk 350 to Tk 600, ornaments from Tk 100 to Tk 650, salwar kameez from Tk 1,200 to Tk 3,000.

Pinson Sarighar at OR Nizam Road welcomes Baishakh with an exciting collection of cotton sari in block, handprint, acrylic and chumki. Price ranges from Tk 550 to Tk 1,400.

Craft Castle has launched fatua and panjabee of more than 20 designs at its show rooms at different markets, including New

Market and Mimi Super market.

Craft cotton fatua are being sold at Tk 500 to Tk 700 while prices of fatua in embroidery and block are in slightly high that start from Tk 800. Prices of Men's panjabee in embroidery and applique are also in higher here starting from Tk 2000 to Tk 3,600.

Other houses like Mia Bibi at Probartak, Aryan at Jamakhan, Gift Avenue at Momin Road, Ramania at Mehediabagh, Taznur Boutiques at Zakir Hossain Road, Swastika Boutique at MM Ali Road and Masum Cloth Store at Terri Bazar also have made preparations for celebrating New Year.

Traders, however, said sale is yet to get momentum as people are in financial crisis due to price hike of essentials.

Monika Bhattacharya of Swastika Boutique said people from middle-income groups who usually love to celebrate the traditional festivals and like to usher in Pahela Baishakh with traditional dresses are now passing through hardship and this why sale is not up to the mark.

Rajib, a university student, was seen looking through the panjabees displayed at a shop at New Market on Sunday but the higher prices discouraged him to buy.

Ziaur Rahman, director of Craft Castle, said they had to keep the price little higher as they tried to maintain the quality.

Moreover, price hike of different raw materials forced them to keep the higher price of dresses.

## theweekthatwas

### ICT-based education underscored

Speakers on Saturday emphasised the need for inclusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education at all levels.

"Inclusion of the ICT will help young generations update alongside national prosperity," they said.

They were addressing a view exchange meeting on "ICT Based Education" organised by South East University Chittagong Regional Office.

Vice Chancellor and founding Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh Open University Prof Dr M Shamsur Ali was the chief guest at the meeting with the Regional Office Coordinator and Resource Director Seija Saleh in the chair.

The university Adviser Dr Manjurul Islam, Daily Amar Desh Chittagong Bureau Chief Jahidul Karim Kachi and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) Bureau Chief Shahnawaz took part in the discussion.

### Hepatitis-B vaccination programme held

Sandhani, Chittagong Medical College (CMC) unit launched a hepatitis-B vaccination programme on Friday.

A total of 305 people were provided with the vaccine in the daylong programme. Of them, 105 people received first doses while 95 second doses, 54 3rd doses and 51 buster doses.

The unit of the Sandhani has been conducting the programme on every Friday for the last 18 years.

The unit President Muhammad Erfanul Alam, General Secretary Smritikona Majumder, Patient Welfare Secretary Israt Jahan Ema, Publicity and Publication Secretary Mohammed Shariful Islam Sajib and Student Welfare Secretary Habibullah Tomal were present at the programme.

Hepatitis-B is an infectious disease and two to five lakh children born with the diseases who bear it in future.

Around 25 per cent of the patients finally contact permanent Hepatitis-B, liver cirrhosis and liver cancer.

### Call for launching social movement

Revolutionary Binod Bihari Chowdhury on Friday said a social movement is needed for eradicating injustice and dishonesty, which have been prevailing in the every sectors of the society for long.

"Proper education will have to be provided to the young generation as they will lead the movement for social changes in future," he said.

He was addressing the 25th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Bangladesh Hindu Foundation as the chief guest at Moitry Bhaban at Monin Road in the port city.

Foundation Chairman Purnendu Bikash Chowdhury presided over the ceremony while Foundation Secretary General Dulal Kanti Majumder presented the annual report.

Finance Secretary Dilip Kumar Majumder, Education Secretary Nani

Gopal Dutta, and Relief and Rehabilitation Secretary Narayan Krishna Gupta also placed their respective reports.

Tinkori Chakrabarty, Nital Prasad Ghosh, Subhas Chandra Lala, Prof Ranjit Kumar Dey, Rana Das Gupta and Prof Manoranjan Chowdhury also took part in the discussion.

### 2,000 prisoners shifted to new buildings

Chittagong Central Jail authorities shifted 2,000 prisoners to the newly built three five-storied buildings on Friday.

Construction of the new buildings started under "Chittagong Central Jail Modernisation and Expansion Project" in 2000 to ease congestion of the prisoners.

The new buildings having 20 wards in each were constructed for 1,200 prisoners and 2,000 were shifted there from the previous buildings, sources said.

The project also include a new

100-bed jail hospital, a female ward and cell, a godown, a work-shed, a case-table-cum library, interview room and an administrative building are also scheduled to be constructed in place of the worn out existing buildings.

A total of 6,662 inmates were staying on Friday in the previous prisons having accommodation capacity of only 1507 prisoners, including 37 female ones.

### Tribute paid to Malik Sobhan

Speakers at a condolence meeting recalled the contributions of journalist Abdul Malek alias Malik Sobhan and said he was a hard working newsman and worked without fear and favour.

They prayed for salvation of his departed soul and expressed sympathy to his bereaved family.

Chittagong University Journalist Association (CUJA) organised the meeting at Library auditorium on Saturday.

CU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr M Badiul Alam was the chief guest at the meeting with the association's President Ehsan Jewel in the chair.

Prof Dr Hasan Mohammad, Dr Mokhtar Ahmed, Prof Dr Mahibul Aziz, Prof Dr Shirin Akhter, lecturer Shahab Uddin and former presidents of the association also spoke at the meeting.

Malik Sobhan, the founding general secretary of the CUJA, passed away due to brain-haemorrhage at a clinic in the capital on March 31.

### Suprabhat unit formed

Faruk Taher and Aurpona Khastagir were elected unit chief and deputy unit chief of Daily Suprabhat Bangladesh unit of Chittagong Union of Journalists (CUJ) on Friday.

Earlier, the biannual general meeting of the unit was held at the office of the daily with the unit President Rashid Mamun in the chair.

CUJ President Shaid Ul Alam, former president M Nasirul Haque, Mostaq Ahmed, Vice President SM Ibrahim, General Secretary Riaz Haider Chowdhury, Joint Secretary Nirupam Das Gupta, Organising Secretary Shamsul Huda Mintu, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) Member Nazim Uddin Shyamal and CUJ Executive Committee member Khorshed Alam spoke at the meeting.



Students from Nepal perform dance at a reception to the first batch of the Access Academy of Asian University for Women (AUW) at Theatre Institute Chittagong (TIC) on Saturday.