

THOUSANDS JOIN HUMAN CHAIN IN CHITTAGONG

Save ship-breaking sector, cry jobless workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Thousands of workers of different ship-breaking yards yesterday formed a human chain on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Sitakunda demanding steps to save the sector now in limbo.

They sought the prime minister's immediate intervention saying 30,000 workers would be jobless in case the yards are shut down following a High Court order.

A High Court (HC) bench on March 17 directed the government to close operation of all ship-breaking yards

that run without clearance from Department of Environment (DoE) within two weeks.

The order followed a writ filed by Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) in September last year.

Meanwhile, two ruling party ministers spoke in favour of protecting the ship-breaking industry but said they must comply with the rules concerned.

Around 10 thousand workers from all the 36 ship breaking yards here joined the human chain stretching

around 10 kilometre area from Bhatiari at Fouzderhat to Kumira. The three-hour long programme started at around 9:30am.

The workers carried placards and posters with various slogans urging the authorities to stop what they said foreign conspiracy to close the ship-breaking sector in order to save workers from being jobless.

They also chanted slogans against NGOs -- BELA and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) -- blaming them for hatching plots as foreign agents.

Earlier, leaders of Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association in a meeting on Friday decided to appeal to the Supreme Court in this regard. Association General Secretary Abul Kashem said they would go to the higher courts if necessary.

He said, as the government never declared the ship-breaking sector as an industry it was difficult for them to get any clearance certificate from the environment department. "Around 400 re-rolling mills and steel mills and a number out-fitting furniture shops will be hit as they are directly

dependent on the ship-breaking yards," Kashem said.

An owner of a ship-breaking yard said at least 15 lakh tonnes of scrap is made in a year by breaking the ships imported from foreign countries.

The scrapped vessels are used for local consumption and the industry is playing a vital role in different sectors including industrialisation, construction and employment, said Siraj Dowla, owner of Pakhiza ship-breaking yard.

Meantime, Shipping Minister Afzarul Amin, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Hasan Mahmud and lawmaker from Sitakunda ABM Abul Kashem observed that ship-breaking is an old and big industry and livelihood of thousands of workers and their families depend solely on it.

The HC has given an order and we all must abide by its instruction. The present government is not against the ship-breaking industry but the owners of the yards must comply with rules including that on environment, they said while speaking at the launching ceremony of KDS Logistics Ltd, the country's largest off-dock Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Sonachhari in Sitakunda Friday morning.

The ministers and the lawmaker said the industry should continue for the greater interest of the country's economy.



Freedom fighter Afiz Uddin, 63, struggling hard to survive with his present job of rickshaw-pulling, finds it hard to console himself with the prospect of any posthumous honour.

Disgusting, disgraceful
Funeral grant for freedom fighters rarely reach families in time

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The government initiative for helping families of insolvent freedom fighters through monetary grant for their funeral turns nuisance for the bereaved people who have to wait long tiring months or years to get the 'aid of honour'.

Termining the dilatory and complicated process to get the grant as 'disgraceful', freedom fighters in the district have urged immediate steps for handing over the grant money to the families of deceased freedom fighters on the funeral day.

It would save the needy freedom fighters' families from the disgrace of moving from door to door for help, they said.

As per a government decision taken in 2005, the district or upazila administration would arrange monetary grant for their burial or cremation and other religious rituals of the insolvent deceased freedom fighters, said freedom fighters and sources at district administration.

Several members of deceased freedom fighters' families said they had to manage funeral expenditure with the help of neighbours and villagers as they did not have the means to do so.

The funeral grant was given after a long time of the burial or cremation, they said, adding that they had to submit vouchers of burial expenditure and it followed long and complicated process of verification in several

steps by upazila Muktiyoddha Sangshad commander, upazila nirbahi officer and district administration.

After freedom fighter Jamir Uddin Mia of Bazitpara village of Sadar upazila died at the age of 65 on April 16 2006, his poor family members moved from door to door to manage the cost for his funeral and other religious rituals.

After burial, upazila Muktiyoddha Sangshad officials persuaded his wife Morjina Begum to submit application with vouchers to get the funeral grant.

"After two years of untold harassment in different offices, I got grant of only Tk 5,000 although I prayed for actual expenditure of Tk 10875," Morjina said in a choked voice.

"I did not submit any prayer for getting the grant as the process is not honourable. My husband joined the Liberation War out of patriotism only," Saleha Begum, wife of deceased freedom fighter Sajir Uddin (57) of Kishoreganj upazila, said.

"As I live a miserable life when alive, what is the use of posthumous honour for me?" remarked Afaz Uddin, a veteran freedom fighter who now pulls rickshaw for livelihood.

"Deputy commissioners can give instant monetary assistance to the victims of flood, fire incidents and other calamities from the disaster management fund. Why should they not be empowered to give freedom fighters funeral grant on the spot?" Shamsul Islam, former district commander of Muktiyoddha Sangsad, said.



Thousand of jobless workers of ship-breaking yards in Sitakunda form a human chain on Dhaka-Chittagong highway yesterday demanding steps to save the sector.

1 killed, 15 hurt as
AL rivals clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

One person was killed and 15 others were injured in a clash between two factions of Awami League (AL) Mehendiganj upazila unit under Mehendiganj yesterday.

One faction is led by upazila AL President Sardar Maheb Hossain while the other by Maj (ret'd) Nasir.

The dead, BCL activist Riazuddin Palash, belonged to Maheb Hossain faction. He succumbed to injuries on way to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (BSBMCH).

Six of the injured-- Manir, Kalu Bepari, Nirob, Yunus, Sahabuddin, Dijen were admitted to BSBMCH while the rest given first aid.

Police and local sources

said the clash ensued over convening an extended meeting of the local AL unit by Maheb Hossain at his residence in Badarpur area of Mehendiganj upazila town.

Nasir supporters decided to boycott the meeting, saying that Maheb convened the meeting without consulting with upazila AL Secretary Kamaluddin Khan.

Both sides exchanged heated words over the matter and at one stage locked in a fierce clash that continued for about two hours.

The situation became tense after the death news of Palash reached the Mehendiganj town. A procession, led by AL leader and Sadar Union (UP) Chairman Nizamuddin, was brought out in the town demanding punishment to the killers of Palash.

Roadblock to free
3 BCL leaders

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

BCL and a section of Awami League (AL) activists blocked Pabna-Chatmohar highway in Athgoria upazila yesterday morning demanding release of three local BCL leaders.

Athgoria police arrested three BCL leaders--Md Shariful Islam, Md Asad and Golam Mowla Pannu--on Friday night in connection with a criminal case filed against them by a mobile phone shop owner with Speedy Trial Tribunal, Pabna, on March 1.

In the case, complainant Md Abdullah Al Amini stated that the accused beat him up and took away a gold chain worth Tk 36 thousand, a wrist-watch worth Tk 1200 and a mobile set from him.

Following arrest warrant issued by the court, Athgoria police arrested the three from their villages.

Termining the case filed against the BCL leaders 'false', local BCL and some AL activists staged a demonstration in front of Athgoria Police Station and put up a barricade on the Pabna-Chatmohar highway, disrupting traffic for four hours from 6:00am.

The demonstrators alleged Abdullah is a BNP supporter and he filed the case to harass the BCL leaders.

They demanded immediate release of the BCL leaders and removal of some police officials of Athgoria Police Station.

The arrestees were yesterday produced in the court that sent them to jail.

7 injured as
rival Mongla
dockers clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Seven people were injured in a clash between two rival groups of dockers at Mongla port on Friday night.

The injured are Akhter Sardar, Shafiqul Islam, Zulfiqar, Moinuddin, Abul Kalam Azad, Anwar Sarder and Kalam. They are undergoing treatment at Upazila Health Complex.

According to witnesses, the clash ensued at around 8:00pm as sacked dock workers came under attack by the dockers working in a stevedoring agency owned by Abul Khair Abdullah Khokon.

General Secretary of Mongla Sramik Sangha Md Sahabuddin alleged that the dockers working in 'Union Enterprise' swooped on the jobless dockers when they took out a procession as part of their agitation to realise their five-point demand.

16 AL, Jubo
League men
expelled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Sixteen leaders of Awami League and Jubo League Digholia upazila units have been expelled for their alleged involvement in anti-party activities during the last upazila election.

This decision was taken in a meeting of the executive committee of AL Khulna district unit held at Digholia Union Parishad auditorium on Friday evening.

The expelled leaders are vice presidents SM Golam Rahman, Gazi Golam Mostafa and Dipak Kumar, general secretary Molla Akram Hossain, joint secretary Gazi Rezaul Huq, organising secretary Noor Islam Shabbir, president of Digholia upazila Jubo League Sheikh Monirul Islam, general secretary Sheikh Iajul Islam, Jubo League leader Selim Masud, and general secretary of upazila unit of Swachhasebok League Abdul Kalam Azad.

DROUGHT-LIKE SITUATION IN MOULVIBAZAR
Cultivation stops although
Hakaluki not far away

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

As the country observes International Day of Water today, farmers along Hakaluki Haor, one of the largest water bodies, are abandoning Boro cultivation for want of water due to a drought-like situation in the district.

Water level in Hakaluki has fallen to such a point that water cannot be supplied from it for irrigation as it may threaten the fish and other aquatic lives in the natural water body, officials said.

The story is almost the same for whole of Moulvibazar.

The district is facing acute crisis. Even people in the rural areas are not getting drinking water as underground water layers have fallen sharply and the rivers, haors, ponds and natural canals have almost dried up.

"Cracks have developed in my crop land for want of irrigation water," said farmer Abdul Latif of Hakaluki Haor area under Kulaura upazila, adding, "Now I have no alternative to giving up cultivation this season."

Abul Kalam, another farmer of Athangiri village under Sadar upazila, said, "Mango blossoms are dying due to drought while Pijush Kanti Bhattacharya, manager of Nahar Tea Garden, said that due to prolonged drought and lack of rain, tea production is greatly hampered. Farmer Zahir Ali said, "If it does not rain immediately, we will not be able to harvest Boro paddy this year."

Housewife Rahima of Kulaura lamented, "We are suffering from acute water crisis. Our daily jobs like bathing, cooking, cloth washing etc are about to stop."

This correspondent has visited different areas of the district and found the standing Boro crops greatly damaged for want of water.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Moulvibazar district office sources said they had fixed the target of Boro cultivation in Moulvibazar at 49 thousand hectares. But due to drought-like situation they will have to cut it down by half.

Farmers in different areas said they are now using the dead paddy saplings as fodder. Blossoms of mango, jackfruit, litchi etc are also damaged. They said seasonal fruits would not see good harvest this season for drought.

Water Development Board (WDB) and Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE)



A dried up field on the bank of Hakaluki Haor in Kulaura upazila under Moulvibazar, above, and tube-wells at many places cannot draw sufficient water as underground water level has fallen.

official sources said main sources of surface water for Moulvibazar are rivers Monu, Dholai, Fana, Gupla and Kushiya, haors Hakaluki, Kawadighi and Hail besides the large ponds and natural canals. But most of these are gradually silting up. So these water reservoirs cannot store sufficient water in dry season.

Bijoy Kumar Deb, water supply superintendent of Moulvibazar Municipality, said they failed to supply required water to the town dwellers as the underground water levels have fallen alarmingly and their deep tube wells cannot extract much water.

Poor navigability hits water
transport in Barisal region

RAFIQUL ISLAM, Barisal

Drastic decrease in navigability due to siltation and emergence of shoals on the river routes has severely hit water transport in Barisal region.

Fearing a dim future, a large number of launch owners have given up the trade adding to the sufferings of the passengers.

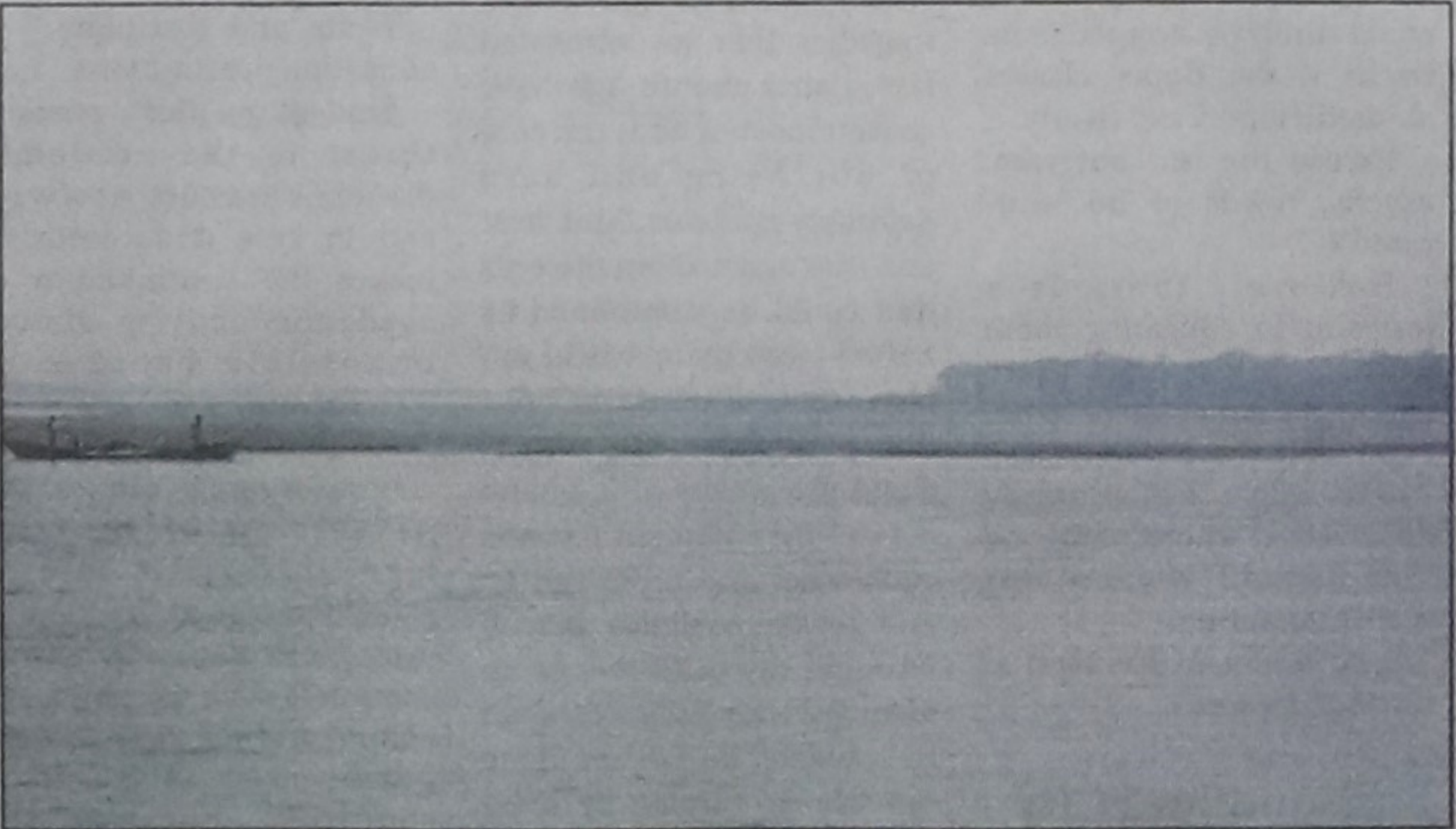
Sources said some 400 launches used to leave Barisal port for 78 regional routes every day a few decades ago but now just 35 water transports ply only eight routes, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) sources said.

There were 24,000 kilometres of waterway network in the country in 1971, but in little more than a decade it reduced to 8,400km in the rainy season and 5,200km during winter in 1984.

Today there are only 6,000km waterway network in the rainy season and 3,800km in winter, BIWTA sources said.

Some 30 kilometre waterway under 20 river routes in seven upazilas of Barisal region are fast losing navigability due to emergence of numerous shoals and siltation at different points.

Bara Machhua launch ghat (terminal) in Mathbaria upazila under Pirojpur, Kasherhat in Muladi upazila and Bhabanipur and Dhamura in Uzirpur upazila



River transport faces setback, like many other areas in the southern region, in Tetulia River adjoining Patarhat port in Mehendiganj upazila in Barisal district as a number of shoals have emerged there.

under Barisal have been closed down due to poor navigability.

A good number of steamers, launches, cargo vessels and oil tankers used to ply these water routes for going to different destinations including Dhaka, Narayanganj, Bhola, Patuakhali, Mongla, Pirojpur, Madaripur, Barguna, Torki, Galachipa, Khepura and Mehendiganj.

Shoals have emerged at different points on the river routes of Kirtonkhola, Arial Khan, Kalabadar, Shikarpur, Hizla, Naya Bhanguni, Sugandhaya and Meghna

threatening the movement of water transports.

In recent years, all 10 launches of Talukdar Navigation, eight of Mohan Navigation, two of Abdullah Navigation, two of Alam Brothers and five of Chowdhury Navigation have been sold out to scrappers or cargo or fishing traders.

Sheikh Abdur Rahim, a leader of Barisal Launch Owners Association, said he is now engaged in readymade garment and sari business after recurring huge loss in water transportation business.

Now 13 launches on

Barisal-Bhola, eight launches on Barisal-Patarhat, one launch on Barisal Hizla and two launches on each of the Barisal-Kaliganj, Barisal Mojuchowdhur Hut, Barisal-Char Biswas, Barisal-Lalmohan, Barisal-Barguna routes are plying.

Although local BIWTA authorities claim safe navigation on 28 routes in the region, practically passenger services are operating on only eight internal routes amid high financial and operational risks, Khorshed Alam, vice chairman of Barisal Launch Owners Association, said.

Over 200 kids languish in jails

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

More than two hundred children have been detained in several jails in the country as prisoners for alleged involvement in different crimes as of March 20 this year.

Rafiqul Islam, a retired superintendent of police (SP) and general secretary of Retired Police Officers' Welfare Association Bangladesh (RPOWAB), revealed the information in a seminar on 'How to Release Children from Jail'.

RPOWAB and NGO Human Development Foundation (HDF) arranged the daylong seminar in Bogra

Police Lines Auditorium yesterday.

Retired inspector general of police Dr M Enamul Haque, who attended the seminar as chief guest, presented the keynote paper at the seminar.

At least 4,594 children were arrested in the capital from 2000 to 2008 for their alleged involvement with crimes including murder, retired Inspector General of Police Dr M Enamul Haque said in his address as chief guest at the seminar.

During the period, police arrested at least 142 children in connection with murder cases and 594 children in cases involving arms and explosives, he said.

Speakers at the seminar suggested the organisers to arrange more awareness programme with the housewives and guardians of the children to check children's involvement in criminal activities.

Md Ziaur Rahman, senior judicial magistrate in Bogra, and Md Anwar Hussain, additional district magistrate, attended as special guests at the seminar presided over by Md Akram Hossain, superintendent of police in Bogra.

About 100 people including officials of police and civil administration and members of the civil society participated in the seminar.