

Tea workers lowest paid

Speakers tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tea plantation workers remain one of the least paid labourers in the country who live a very miserable life, said the speakers at a seminar yesterday.

However, increased wages and facilities can improve the life of workers and raise their productivity benefiting the tea industry eventually, they added.

The seminar titled 'Tea workers, forests and forest people' was organised by Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) at the WVA auditorium in the city as part of a national assembly of tea workers and forest dwelling people.

"Tea workers are paid only Tk 32.5 as daily wages while

the present price of one kg coarse rice is Tk 20 or more. Most of us have eight to 10-member family. With the price of every essential going up regularly, we can barely survive," said Rambajan Koiri, the newly elected general secretary of Bangladesh Tea Workers Union.

Koiri also pointed out that around Tk 60 is deducted weekly from the meagre salary as electricity bill while another seven percent is deducted monthly as provident fund.

"With this amount we cannot improve our life. We cannot buy property and we are totally dependent on landowners. Having no other skills we cannot escape from this life. Moreover, to cope with the price hike many workers have taken loans

which they cannot pay back," he added.

At present there are around 118,000 labourers working in 163 tea estates.

Most of them are situated in Moulovibazar, Habiganj and Sylhet. There are also a few in Panchagarh, Chittagong, Rangamati and Brahmanbaria.

The first tea garden of the country was established by the Duncun Brothers at Malinichhara (Surma Valley) in Sylhet in 1854.

Ancestors of most of the tea workers were brought in from Assam, Madras, Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal of India as cheap labour.

They belong to different ethnic groups like Oraon, Shantals, Munda, and Gondos. Gain said life of a tea worker remains the same as it was when they were brought to this country from India in 1850s.

In addition to a meagre salary, they are also deprived of education, quality housing and health facilities, he added.

He said labour law is regularly violated at tea gardens and the workers remain isolated from the mainstream.

Gain laid emphasis on increasing the wages and providing education to the children of tea workers.

Dr Pratima Paul Majumder, senior researcher at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), and Farhad Mazhar, managing director of Ubinig, also spoke on the occasion.



BRAC BANK HEIST
Locker renters demand proper compensation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A number of affected locker renters of Brac Bank formed a human chain in the city yesterday demanding proper compensation for their gold ornaments and other valuables stolen from the lockers at the Dhanmondi branch of the bank last year.

The victims also warned that they would go for legal action if the bank fails to compensate them properly.

A gang of burglars had looted gold ornaments and other valuables of the bank's clients from the lockers in January last year.

Soon after the incident, the bank officials disclosed that some 70 lockers, out of 132, were found broken and 15 of them were not in use at the time of the heist.

"I had nearly Tk 20 lakh worth of gold ornaments in my locker, but the bank offered me only Tk 1.5 lakh compensation," said NGO activist Shoaiba Rahman, an affected locker renter.

BRAC Bank offered a compensation package of three categories -- Tk 1.5 lakh for small, Tk 2.5 lakh for medium and Tk 5 lakh for big locker renters.

Shoaiba said at least 16 renters rejected the bank's compensation package, saying that 'it is too small compared to their claims'.

Dr Mushtak Hossain, another victim, said he has been offered only Tk 2.5 lakh against a deposit of 150 tolas of gold ornaments worth nearly Tk 40 lakh.

Both Dr Mushtak and Shoaiba said they would go for legal action if the bank fails to pay proper compensation for their valuables stolen.

When contacted, a senior BRAC Bank official told The Daily Star that the bank authorities offered the compensation package on the basis of a central bank order regarding the insurance coverage for lockers in banks.

After the heist at BRAC Bank, the central bank made the insurance coverage mandatory for lockers, the official said.

He also said over 50 percent of the 47 victims have already received their package offered by the bank.

ACC replies to questions of cabinet division

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five hundred unnamed students of North South University (NSU) were sued for damaging university offices and attacking law enforcers on Sunday.

Two separate cases were filed with Gulshan Police Station in this connection.

Badrul Alam, owner of the NSU administrative building, Star Tower, filed one case for damaging his building and Sub-Inspector Helaluddin of Gulshan Police Station filed the other for attacking law enforcers.

The plaintiffs however did not name any student in the cases. None was arrested in this connection.

The NSU students staged demonstration and put up barricade on roads, leading to clashes with police, protesting an increase in tuition fees.

The NSU authorities on Sunday shut the university for two days to avert further unwanted incidents.

ACC acting chairman Habibur Rahman said this while talking to journalists yesterday.

The four questions that the cabinet division put to ACC are -- how ACC paid honorarium to its lawyers; how ACC promoted its 48 officials recently even after it was asked to postpone the matter; why its 148 officials were not absorbed and how ACC collected income tax documents of individuals accused of corruption from the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

ACC officially did not disclose anything about its reply.

According to sources, the ACC in its reply said that after the commission was reconstituted in 2007, ACC absorbed its officials in accordance with Section 35 of Anti-Corruption Act 2004. But ACC did not absorb those officials working under establishment ministry and working on deputation at the commission.

Regarding the promotion, the ACC explained that promotion of the 48 officials were done in accordance with the law and no irregularity took place in this regard.

Regarding NBR files, ACC replied that it has the authority to ask for any government file under Section 19 (Gha) of its act. Besides, in accordance with section 19 (Cha) of Emergency Power Rules, the commission has the authority to ask for documents from NBR, the sources said.

About lawyers' honorarium, ACC replied that under section 25 (1) of the ACC Act, the commission was given the freedom to spend its funds, the sources added.

ACC also explained in its answer that it had to spend higher amount of money on senior lawyers as it was not possible to hire experienced lawyers with the amount of money fixed by the government.

Meanwhile, a team from the office of auditor and comptroller general has already examined ACC's expenditure on lawyers and did not find any irregularity.

The team, however, mentioned that the honorarium given to lawyers was higher than the amount fixed by the government.

The Indian people were casting vote without untoward situation being created. "In Rajasthan and Jharkhand, we have seen that there are no festivities of election. Nobody is concerned with the polls," he said.

"We saw some micro-election observers deployed in some critical or vulnerable polling areas to watch the elections and they were maintaining full connection with the Election Commission," he said, adding that during by-elections and some upazila elections at home, Bangladesh election commission has the authority to ask for documents from NBR, the sources said.

Sources said Bidisha stated in her petition that Eric has been in the custody of Ershad for a long time but he has not allowed her to meet Eric since January 2008.

The petitioner also said earlier they reached a compromise through their lawyers after their divorce in 2005 that Eric would remain in the custody of both of them for one week by rotation.

Explaining his election observation in India, he said

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