

Govt acting racial

Say Adivasi leaders as LGRD ministry restricts celebration of indigenous people's day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A letter of the LGRD ministry "restricting" the celebration of World's Indigenous People's Day here on August 9 has generated strong reactions among Adivasi leaders.

They branded the letter as "racial" and a "fanatic act of the government".

Signed by Deputy Secretary of the ministry Dr Md Sarowar Bari, the letter was dispatched to all deputy commissioners (DCs) across the country on March 11. It was later forwarded to Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) and all Union Parishads (UPs).

The letter instructs the administrative units to "monitor intensively that no support from the government side is granted to any programme of the indigenous people's day".

"The month of August is a mourning month, so unnecessary ceremonies of delight should not be organised during this month", quotes a statement posted on the website of Kapaeng Foundation, a rights body for indigenous people.

Shakti Pada Tripura, organising secretary of Bangladesh Indigenous People's Forum, said in the statement, "It is nothing but a racial act of the government".

"Every citizen has the right to liberty, freedom of assembly and association. So, the letter issued by MoLGRD [Ministry of LGRD] is a direct violation of the constitution".

He went on, "The Awami League-led grand alliance government is acting more fanatical than the communal and fundamentalist groups".

Chairperson of Kapaeng Foundation and President of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, Rabindranath Soren, demanded the immediate withdrawal of the letter.

Sondha Malo, executive director, Women Commission for Development in Bangladesh, brought the letter to the attention of the audience at a roundtable at the National Institute of Local Government in the capital yesterday.

Addressing the programme as chief guest, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman said, "The government of a people's republic like Bangladesh can ill afford to show such audacity towards indigenous people".

The discussion was preceded by the unveiling of a study on indigenous people.

The report shows some 88 percent indigenous people think that development efforts in areas populated by Adivasis will be accelerated if formal governance coexists and coordinates with customary institutions of the indigenous communities.

It also found 46.7 percent of the participants not agreeing on the success of existing coordination between formal governance and the customary system.

The study is styled "Coherence between customary practices of selected marginal ethnicities and formal governance system in Chittagong Hill Tracts and North-West of Bangladesh". A total of 120 participants were surveyed during the research period.

Responses also show 75 percent Adivasis think customary institutions actively conduct local judicial activities such as Bichar, Salish (arbitration) etc, while 64 percent support these institutions for resolving social conflicts, particularly at Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The study was conducted by Research and Development Collective (RDC) in association with National Institute of Local Government (NILG) and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO).



A school boy walks by gravel, mud and construction materials piled up on Mirinda Lane at Pathorghata in Chittagong as part of repair works of a drain on the lane. The repair work, which was undertaken by Chittagong City Corporation, was ongoing for more than 20 days, causing huge sufferings to pedestrians and commuters in the area. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Withdraw plan to tax bidi industry

Urges HR chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman urged the National Bureau of Revenue to withdraw its plan to impose new taxes on the bidi industry considering the interests of the workers there.

This industry is being gradually destroyed and hiking taxes would cause many bidi factories to close, axing the jobs of the workers there, the majority of whom are women, he said.

Prof Mizanur was addressing a views exchange meeting, "Politics of smoking and cigarette business versus the unemployment of bidi labourers", organised by

Research and Development Collective (RDC) at the capital's National Museum on Sunday.

Representatives and leaders of the workers, at the meeting, demanded the government to increase tax on cigarettes by at least five-fold.

RDC General Secretary Zannat-e-Ferdous presented a keynote at the meeting, presided over by Prof Mesbah Kamal of Dhaka University. Public health expert Dr Muhammad Abdus Sabur, Bidi Sramik Federation General Secretary MK Bangalee and some female workers of bidi factories also spoke.

2 workers killed in sun-shade collapse

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two construction workers were killed while another was injured when a sun-shade collapsed on them at Halishahar area in Chittagong yesterday.

The deceased are Md Shahjahan, 55, hailing from Bhola district, and Md Mosleh Uddin alias Babul Contractor, 50, hailing from Laxmipur district.

Another worker, Md Rakib, 18, hailing from Halishahar, is being treated at Chittagong Medical College Hospital for severe injuries to his waist, knees and legs.

Witnesses said the accident occurred when four workers were removing the supporting pillars of a recently constructed sun-shade covering four shops at the area's Jora Pukur Par at around 9:00am.

The six-inch-thick concrete slab, measuring 32 feet by 3 feet, killed the duo on the spot, they said.

One local contractor alleged that the structure's owner used a lower number of iron rods, used to make the slab stronger and connect it to the building, than required to save costs, leading to the disaster.

However, denying the accusations, the owner, Md Jasim, put the blame on the contractor-cum-mason, Mosleh.

TRAWLER CAPSIZE 6 still missing in Bay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six people have been missing since Friday when a fishing trawler capsized in the Bay near Cox's Bazar.

FV Maritime-2 carrying 32 people sank around 11:00am. Twenty-six of them however were rescued but the six could not be traced till filing of this report last night.

The six victims are second officer of the trawler Mujibur Rahman, sailors-Md Elias Najmuddin, Kabir, Manir and cook Abdur Rahman.

The authorities of the "fishing boat" said tidal wave caused the accident but sources said the trawler owned by Marine Explorer Limited was actually an oil vessel, but it was transformed into the fishing boat.

Shibu Prasad Das Sharma, general manager of the company, claimed it as a "fishing boat" which was imported seven years back from Thailand and to have all related documents and licence.

The company informed the Marine Fisheries Department about the incident on Sunday.

Contacted, Nasiruddin Mohammad Humayun, director of Marine Fisheries Department, said the department would talk to the captain of the trawler today to know about the accident.

One 'kills herself'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A domestic help allegedly committed suicide at Central Road in the capital yesterday.

Selina Akhter, 13, daughter of Lalu Miah of Kamalapur slum, had been working in the house of Rafiqul Islam, a physician of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Rafiqul said he locked the main door from the outside in the morning and when he returned home around 2:30pm, he found Selina hanging from the ceiling fan.

Bahauddin's qulkhwani today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Qulkhwani of Bahauddin Choudhury, a language movement veteran,

will be held at the Jatiya Press Club auditorium after Asr prayers today.

His relatives, friends, all members of the Press Club and well-wishers are requested to attend the programme, says a press release.

Bahauddin Choudhury, former information secretary and also a life-long member of the Press Club died in a hospital in the capital on May 17.

He played a very significant role in realising the historic Six-Point demand in 1966. He had also worked in some newspapers and magazines, including the Sangbad, the Morning Sun, the Barta of Rajshahi, the Azad, the Dinkal and the Lal Sabuj.

Death anniversary of Golam Rasul today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Today is the fifth death anniversary of Golam Rasul Mallik, a freedom fighter and former chief editor of now-defunct Eastern News Agency (ENA), says a press release.

On the occasion, destitute feeding and qurankhwani programmes will be held at his residence after Asr prayers.

Local bodies ineffective for lack of policies

Say speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In spite of enacting laws to strengthen local government bodies four years ago, the government is yet to formulate policies in light of those laws, said speakers yesterday.

The speakers, among whom were a ruling Awami League lawmaker, some elected union and upazila parishad representatives and experts, also said the present government itself was ignoring parliament by not implementing those laws.

The discussion was organised by Municipal Association of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum at the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

All the political parties strongly speak in favour of strengthening the local government bodies but act just the opposite after coming to power, they said.

Awami League lawmaker AKM Mozammel Haq said elected representatives of union parishad and upazila parishad, for

want of policies, have no authority to run the local government bodies.

He, however, advised chairmen and councillors of upazila parishads to exercise their authority on upazila nirbahi officers in running the local government body if the government fails to formulate the policies soon.

Prof Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman of Dhaka University said it is imperative to formulate policies on "inter-government fiscal transfer" (disbursing funds to local government bodies) and decentralisation to strengthen the local government bodies.

DU Prof MM Akash said mere discussions will not be able to put pressure on the government. "Time has come to wage a movement to meet the demands," he added.

Prof Tofail Ahmed, Prof Dilara Choudhury, Tongi Municipality Mayor Azmat Ullah Khan, Natore's Singra Municipality Mayor Shamim Al Razi and Sahapara Union Parishad Chairman Mahbubur Rahman Tulu also spoke at the discussion.

20 injured as RMG workers clash with cops in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

At least 20 persons, including five law enforcers, were injured in a clash between garment workers and police at an export-oriented garments factory in Sonargaon in Narayanganj yesterday morning.

The clash ensued after some workers of Sinha Garments were given termination notices.

The workers ransacked the company's computers, furniture, minibuses and building in Kanchpur area. They also set fire to vehicles and readymade garments.

Witnesses and police said when they [workers] went to the factory in the morning they found a notice saying that some workers would be sacked.

The clash ensued at around 10:00am when agitated workers tried to barricade the Dhaka-Sylhet highway but were obstructed by police. Locked in chase and counter-chase, both the groups pelted brickbats at each other injuring 20 persons.

Police lobbed 20 tear gas canisters to bring the situation under control at around 1:00pm. The wounded were given treatment in different hospitals. Additional police have been deployed there.

The company terminated many workers violating labour laws and also did not give them adequate compensation, the workers alleged.

The owners of the factory could not be reached over mobile phone.

ILLEGAL GAS LINE Re-rolling mill fined Tk 60 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court of state owned Petrobangla, on the first day of its drive against illegal gas connections yesterday fined Tk 60 lakh and disconnected gas connection of a re-rolling mill at Postogola in the capital.

The mobile court of Petrobangla, led by its magistrate, Raza Mohammad Abdul Hai, also awarded one month imprisonment to the owner, Nur Mohammad, who is absconding.

The mobile court found an illegal gas connection behind the boiler of the mill during its drive.

Petrobangla sources said the mill had taken the connection to use 80,000 cubic feet gas for Tk 5 lakh as monthly bill.

Though the production of the mill had been increased but it was giving bill Tk 42,000 monthly showing the use of 7000 cubic feet gas depriving Petrobangla Tk 54 lakh annually, they said.

Magistrate Raza said they had conducted the drive suspecting of illegal connection as the mill had been giving comparatively less bill, reports ATN Bangla.

Current net worth Tk 94 lakh seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Members of Bangladesh Coast Guard seized contraband current net worth over Tk 94 lakh in Laxmipur and Cox's Bazar yesterday.

A team of Coast Guard (East Zone) Motirhat Contingent, in a drive, on Meghna River in Batirkhal, Matirhat and Lodua areas under Kamalnagar Police Station of Laxmipur district seized 1 lakh metres of current nets worth Tk 57 lakh, said a press release.

Another team of Coast Guard (East Zone) seized 65,000 meters current net worth over Tk 37 lakh in Adinath Bandar area.

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