

Minister vs officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior district administration and police officials of Moulvibazar have expressed frustrations over Social Welfare Minister Syed Mohsin Ali's alleged misbehaviour with them at a recent meeting.

The minister hurled abusive words like "bastards" at senior officials, made some stand up and threatened to "strip their skin from your [their] back" if they didn't act the way he wanted, according to at least five people, including an upazila chairman, who attended the monthly law and order meeting of the district.

He made the officers-in-charge of Kulaura, Juri and Borolekha police stations stand for half an hour, accusing them of corruption.

This paper contacted the OCs but all of them declined to comment on this.

That's not all.

He reportedly called female students of two universities "sex workers". We are withholding the names of the universities since his allegations were unverified.

Mohsin Ali, who has a history of misbehaving with journalists and making controversial comments, also allegedly told the meeting that he had the previous superintendent of police (SP) of Moulvibazar transferred for not appointing his men in the police department.

Then again, an Ansar-VDP official was slammed for wearing his official cap during the meeting, according to the meeting sources.

After the meeting, SP Tofail Ahmed faxed the police headquarters, describing the incident, and saying that the public servants were feeling uncomfortable to work there following the minister's behaviour, police sources told this paper.

Contacted, the SP didn't want to comment on the matter.

"We are stunned by the acts and behaviour of the minister. We want to work for the people and the government, but with honour. Why should we work here, putting our dignity at stake?" said another official who was present at the meeting.

"We have discussed this [misbehaviour of the minister] among ourselves. Now most of the officials here wish to be transferred elsewhere. We don't want to work here anymore," he told The Daily Star. He wished anonymity, fearing "backlashes from the minister".

The minister, however, justified his actions, saying: "I simply disciplined the corrupt officials."

"There's no place for corrupt officials in my area," he told journalists in Moulvibazar yesterday.

"The SP has taken Tk 3.5 lakh each from at least 100 leaders and activists of the BNP, Jamaat and Shibir to recruit them in the police," he alleged, adding that he had a list of corrupt district officials with proofs of their corruption.

China wants deal

FROM PAGE 1
anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Of the two deals Bangladesh and India signed on June 6, one was on "Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean", which envisages cooperation on blue economy and maritime sphere for capacity building, training and joint research collaborations, and setting up of a Joint Working Group for further cooperation in this area.

The other MoU was between Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) of India and University of Dhaka for joint research on oceanography in Bay of Bengal.

China, which has ensured its strong presence in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan's sea through its massive funding for development of port projects, has also been trying to build a deep-sea port in Sonadia Island for Bangladesh.

2 Jubo League

FROM PAGE 1
the two leaders.

At one stage, Yamin slapped a police constable, added witnesses.

Later, police detained Yamin and Saddam and took them to Motihar Police Station.

Talking to this correspondent, Sub-inspector Selim Reza, also the acting officer-in-charge of the police station, said the two scuffled with a police team and prevented the law enforcers from discharging their duties.

Quoting Yamin and Saddam, Reza said, Rakib had borrowed some money from Yamin and was dilly-dallying to return that. They had gone to the scene to talk to Rakib in this regard.

"Police did not find Rakib on the spot to have his statement," the police official said.

Iftekhair Alam, spokesperson for the Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that the two leaders were detained for interrogation.

According to him, Rakib is also a Jubo League leader.



Top left, Babu, second from right, with his family members. Bottom left, Milon with his wife and child. Right, Alhaj and Nazmul. They all endured inhuman physical and mental torture for about two months at sea. They were repatriated from Myanmar five days ago. PHOTO: STAR

Nightmare voyage

FROM PAGE 1

a job at a brick field in March and met a man there, named Baser Mallick who also hailed from Pabna.

Baser lured him into taking the perilous sea voyage. "He even told us that we would not have to pay. I agreed and left for Malaysia on March 20 without informing my family members," Milon said.

They reached Chittagong on March 20. Next day Baser, who was basically a trafficker, took Milon to Teknaf and handed him over to another trafficker. This trafficker took him on a boat, along with some other people, to an island, Milon recalled.

The trafficker then handed Milon and the others over to another trafficker who carried them on a trawler to another larger trawler waiting in the

sea waters.

"This is the ship [trawler] that will take you people to Malaysia," he quoted one of the traffickers as saying. There were around 250 people on board.

Milon said the nightmare began once they got on the larger trawler. "It was like a hell," he said.

The traffickers started torturing them and forced them to contact their families for ransom. "They demanded Tk 1 lakh from my family," he said.

His father managed Tk 40,000 and paid the traffickers through b-Kash. "But we were tortured and kept unfed," Milon said, adding they were given a half-plate of rice with dried chillies for the whole day. "In the evening, they gave us puffed rice," he said.

"We were given a small amount of water. Whenever we cried for food or

water, they beat us. Many of us fell sick," he said.

He said before boarding the larger trawler, most of them had no idea that they were being trafficked.

The main man in the trawler, whom Milon dubbed as Hamid dalal, told them that they were sold every time they were handed over. "He [Hamid] informed us that we're sold at different prices in different places. In one place we were sold at Tk 5,000 while in another place at Tk 10,000."

Milon said the traffickers tried to reach Malaysia through different routes, but to no avail. Finally, as they were drifting off near the Myanmar coast, the Myanmar Navy caught them. They were kept in a camp in Myanmar and sent back home on June 8.

On reaching home, Milon filed a

case on Thursday with Sujanagar police station, accusing Baser Mallick.

"Baser is the local agent of a human trafficking gang," Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Sujanagar Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The trafficker went into hiding after media brought the issue of human trafficking to the fore, he said.

The OC said four other youths from another village of Sujanagar were also lured into the traffickers' trap, but they are yet to get any news of them. He said the family members of these victims have already paid the traffickers over Tk 9 lakh.

The four are: Saddam, Bacchu, Baki and Hanif. Aged between 25 and 30 years, they were related to one another.

Visiting the houses of the victims yesterday, this correspondent found them reeling with deep sorrow and

uncertainty.

Saddam's brother Rony Hossain said his brother along with three of his cousins went to Dhaka for earning a living, but they also fell straight into the same traffickers' trap. They have been missing since mid April, he added.

"The traffickers phoned us and told that they confined my brother in a trawler and demanded a huge amount of ransom. They also let our brothers talk over the phone," Rony said.

Each of the four families managed Tk 2.30 lakh and sent it to the traffickers in the first week of May, he said.

"But after paying the money, we could not connect to our brothers. We could not know anything about their fate," he said.

The OC of Sujanagar said another case was filed in this connection.

Litchis not that safe

FROM PAGE 1

protecting his fruits from pest attack is all; he does not know the doses or the harmful effect of chemicals on health.

"Insects are increasing every year and we need to spray insecticide and medicine [hormone] at least once in every two weeks. I eat litchis on the day I apply pesticide. It is not harmful at all to our health," he said.

CRACKS ON LITCHI SKIN

During a recent visit to an orchard at Maheshpur village of Biral upazila, The Daily Star found two workers using chemical on litchi. They said they usually sprayed insecticide once a week and even more when it rained.

Thanks to the overuse of growth hormones, the litchis in their orchard have grown so big that cracks have developed on the skins of most litchis.

"It happened because of the overuse of medicine [growth hormone]," said Obaidul, one of the workers, showing cracks on China-3 litchis in a tree.

Alarmingly, Obaidul could not even tell the name of the pesticide he was applying. He has no idea about its doses either.

Most of the time farmers rely on the

advice of pesticide dealers who always push for maximising their sale. As a result, sale of pesticides and growth hormones shoot up during fruit season, agro officials say.

"We record the maximum sale of pesticides during the fruit season. It goes up by up to 60 percent during this time," said Abdur Rashid, a pesticide seller from the Cheradengi area of Dinajpur town.

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) has been examining seasonal fruits and found high quantity of pesticide like Organophosphorus in the sample.

"We have detected pesticides in 14 percent sample of litchis that came from Dinajpur [this season]," said Syed Nurul Alam, chief scientific officer of BARI.

Farmers do not need to use Organophosphorus on litchis, but they still do it on instructions of pesticide dealers, he said, adding that chemical residues remain in fruits for 10 to 12 days after application.

Experts say consumption of pesticide-contaminated fruits could cause serious diseases, including cancer, and

damage kidney.

According to the Department of Horticulture, Dinajpur is growing litchis on 4,100 hectares land, compared to 3,100 hectares last year.

Production in the district is expected to be 30,000 tonnes, about 15 percent of the country's total production.

Asked about control and regulation, Imrul Ali of Dinajpur horticulture centre said they offered advice when farmers visited the centre and sought help.

"But we do not have any fund to visit their orchards or undertake monitoring programmes," he told The Daily Star.

In June 2012, 14 children aged between two to 16 died in Dinajpur and Thakurgaon several days after eating litchis.

The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) suspected that the litchis were contaminated.

For confirmation, the IEDCR later sent to the US samples of blood and urine of children who had similar symptoms. The test found traces of pesticides in the blood and urine.

18 return home

FROM PAGE 1

pay traffickers ransom. Minhaz Uddin, who hails from Alamdanga of Chuadanga, told BBC Bangla Service that he was feeling lucky to have returned home.

"Some brokers lured us into going to Malaysia by sea by promising us good jobs there. But instead of jobs, we were in captivity and we starved for days," one of the victims told a journalist.

They said each of them was asked to pay Tk 2 lakh to Tk 2.2 lakh only after reaching the country. But, the traffickers demanded the money in the middle of the journey.

After being abandoned, the Bangladeshis were adrift at sea for days. They were rescued after they came to the notice of the Indonesian authorities. They were taken to a refuge centre in that country afterwards.

Later, they contacted the Bangladesh embassy in Indonesia and sought its help, said the victims.

After their nationalities were confirmed, the IOM arranged their repatriation upon Bangladesh government's request, said Anindya.

The victims demanded that the traf-

fickers be arrested and given exemplary punishment.

Relatives of the returnees alleged that the traffickers were moving freely and no action was being taken against them.

The crisis of human trafficking through the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea unfolded in the first week of last month when Thailand found mass graves of "trafficking victims" in its southern Songkhla province.

Last week, 144 Bangladeshis returned home after being rescued from the Bay by the Myanmar navy.

PM reaches

FROM PAGE 1

passenger lounges and exchanged pleasantries with the Europe-bound travellers and inquired about their well-being.

Bangladeshi expatriates in the UK would accord a reception to Hasina on June 14 for outstanding achievements of Hasina and her government in different fields, particularly the recent success in resolving the Land Boundary Agreement with India.

The PM is scheduled to return home on June 18.

Petrol bomb victim dies

FROM PAGE 1

Paribahan bus came under petrol bomb attack near Bangladesh Jet Research Centre on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Chandina. Eight people were injured in the incident, including Ranajit.

Ranajit was rushed to the DMCH along with five others. They are still receiving treatment at the hospital.

Of them, Anjan Kumar Dey, an adviser at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, who sat beside Ranajit in the bus, is undergoing treatment at the ICU.

Yesterday, the body of Ranajit was handed over to the family after an autopsy.

A graduate in Mathematics from Dhaka University, Ranajit taught at different colleges in the hill tracts region. He had been on leave preparatory for retirement since October last year.

On that fateful night, Ranajit was returning home in Rangamati from

Dhaka. He went to the capital to complete the arrangements for getting the retirement benefits, family members said.

"His plan was to get involved in social work after his retirement. He wanted to devote himself in expanding education among the hill tracts people," said victim's brother-in-law Deb Choudhury.

"There was no hartal or blockade on that day. Then, why did he have to face such a tragic death?" he asked.

Comilla police claimed that Jamaat-Shibir men threw two petrol bombs at the bus. Mohiuddin Mia, inspector (Investigation) of Chandina Police Station, told The Daily Star that they so far arrested nine Jamaat-Shibir men in connection with the arson attack.

Abdur Razzak, one of arrestees, gave confessional statement before a Comilla court.

Future bleak for victim families

FROM PAGE 1

but he never agreed just for the sake of his children," Shaheensaid.

Hakim's mother Monwara Begum, who filed a murder case for the killing, said after her son's death she started working as a domestic help.

"I want punishment for my son's murderer though I don't know whether a poor woman like me will get justice when the killer is an influential person," she said.

Like Monowara Begum and her two grandchildren, Yakub's family members are passing dark days.

"We don't know how we'll survive," said Yakub's step daughter Runa Akhtar. "My mother has been suffering from heart ailment and she needs medicines. But now she cannot buy those regularly."

After Yakub got separated from his first wife, he married Runa's mother Salma Begum.

"My mother took out a high-interest

loan of Tk 70,000 for my father's treatment hoping that he would recover. We don't how she will repay it," said Runa.

Salma is now staying with Runa, whose husband works at an engineering workshop. "We cannot run our family of four smoothly with the income of my husband," she added.

Runa, however, said whatever it takes, they want justice.

Bakhtiar told investigators that he had gone to a local bar in the evening and a DJ party at Sonargaon Hotel later at night on April 13.

Returning drunk from Sonargaon around 1:30am, he was feeling suffocated inside his car caught in a traffic gridlock near Dilu Road. That's why, lowering the car window, he fired four to five times from his licensed pistol, DB officials quoted him as saying.

Bakhtiar is involved in Jubo League politics. His three friends, who too are Dhaka city Jubo League members, were with him at the time, an investigator

said.

Narrating the shooting, his driver has already made a confessional statement before a magistrate. Bakhtiar is now on a four-day remand which will end tomorrow.

"We may produce Bakhtiar before the court tomorrow [today] but will not seek further remand," said investigation officer of the case, DB Sub-Inspector Dipak Kumar.

He said they might not ask Bakhtiar to make confessional statement before court either because the driver already made it.

Asked if there is pressure from any quarter for producing Bakhtiar before the court a day before the end of his remand, a DB official, wishing anonymity, said in every case, the family of the accused try to exert some influence.

Interrogators said Bakhtiar already admitted to random shooting, injuring several people, but he did not know whether anyone was killed.