

Tea workers in fear of attack

Armed with sharp weapons and sticks, they guard their area at night

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Around five thousand families of agitating tea garden workers in Chandpur of Habiganj are passing their days in fear of attack by Chunarughat upazila chairman men who allegedly roughed up three protesters on Saturday.

The labourers are against a government move to set up a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the area while locals say the chairman is supporting it.

Divided into small groups and equipped with sharp weapons and sticks, the males of the families have started to guard their houses and adjacent paddy fields at night to counter any possible attack.

Local students have also stopped going to their school three kilometres away.

The police are patrolling the area to avert any untoward situation.

On Saturday, the labourers chased away Chunarughat Upazila Chairman Abu Taher and around 200 of his men who had gathered on the proposed SEZ site in Chandpur to showoff their strength in favour of the government plan.

On their way, the chairman's men had beaten up three villagers, including two students involved in the ongoing demonstration, alleged tea garden workers who had blocked a nearby road for three hours in protest that day.

Avirat Bakti, convener of Chandpur Bhumii Rokha Committee (a com-

mittee to save the land of the tea garden workers) yesterday said fear of further "attack" has gripped around five thousand families of tea garden workers in the area following the incident that day.

Swapon Santal, joint convener of the committee, alleged that the upazila chairman is out to evict the workers, who have been cultivating rice in the arable land to supplement their meagre incomes for years, from Chandpur.

Faruq Mahmud Chowdhury, president of Sylhet unit Sushasner Jonno Nagorik, a civil society platform, said, "This is a conspiracy against the tea garden workers who worked hard on the infertile land for over a century to turn it into an arable one."

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, Prof Mesbah Kamal of Dhaka University's History Department demanded punishment for those behind Saturday's assault on three villagers in Chandpur.

He also claimed the land belongs to the workers as per the International Labour Organization Convention.

Contacted, Abu Taher, the upazila chairman, refuted all the allegations against him.

Amulya Kumar Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Chunarughat Police Station, said additional members of law enforcement agencies were deployed, and the police were patrolling the area to avoid any unwanted situation.

He also said they were looking into



Equipped with sharp weapons and sticks, tea garden workers of Chandpur in Habiganj's Chunarughat guarding their area on Saturday night, apprehending attacks by the men of the local upazila chairman.

PHOTO: STAR

Int'l sanctions on Iran lifted

FROM PAGE 1

The removal of sanctions comes as President Obama begins his last year in office, and almost seven years to the day since he called on Iran to "unclench your fist" and take steps toward rapprochement with the United States and the world. As a result of the agreement, he said Tuesday in his final State of the Union speech, a "nuclear-armed Iran" has been prevented, and "the world has avoided another war."

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that a nuclear deal with world powers was a "golden page" in the country's history, a day after sanctions against the Islamic republic were lifted in return for Tehran complying with a deal to curb its nuclear ambitions.

Addressing parliament and presenting the draft budget for the next Iranian fiscal year, Rouhani said the deal was a "turning point" for the country's economy.

Rouhani said the deal "opened new windows of engagement with the world" and the country should "get ready to seize the opportunity to make an economic leap and development", while speaking in Parliament yesterday.

Hours after sanctions imposed by US, UN and EU on Tehran were lifted - thereby removing an obstacle to exports - the deputy oil minister announced Iran was ready to increase its crude oil exports by 500,000 barrels a day.

Rouhani said Iran should use the expected influx of money and investments following the end of sanctions to spark the "economic mutation" of the country, creating jobs and enhancing quality-of-life for Iranian citizens, after the country has suffered double-digit inflation and high unemployment rates for years.

PRISONER SWAP
Three Iranian-Americans left Tehran yesterday under a prisoner swap following the lifting of sanctions on Iran.

A US official said a Swiss plane had left carrying Jason Rezaian, the Washington Post's Tehran bureau chief, Saeed Abedini, a pastor from Idaho and Amir Hekmati, a former Marine from Flint, Michigan, as well as

some family members.

One more Iranian-American released under the same swap, Nosratollah Khosravi-Roodsari, was not aboard the aircraft. A fifth prisoner, American student Matthew Trevithick, was released separately on Saturday, a US official said.

"We can confirm that our detained US citizens have been released and that those who wished to depart Iran have left," a senior US administration official said.

Several Iranian-Americans held in US prisons after being charged or convicted for sanctions violations have also been released, their lawyers told Reuters yesterday.

WHAT IT MEANS

The EU terminates all nuclear-related economic sanctions, including an embargo on buying Iranian crude oil and restrictions on Iranian trade, shipping and insurance.

The US no longer applies its crippling sanctions on Iran's economy, especially on the banking sector.

Iran will be able to export as much crude oil to the world as it can, or as much as it can find demand for.

Tehran will hike sales by **500,000** barrels the day after sanctions are lifted and increase total exports to around **2.5** million barrels within the next year.

Iran can increase its revenue from oil exports by **\$10bn** by next year.

Iran's central bank says lifting banking sanctions will allow **\$30bn** of foreign reserves currently frozen in accounts around the world to be brought back - the US Treasury says the figure is **\$50bn**.

Iran can boost its GDP growth to around **5%** in 2016-17, from almost zero currently, says IMF.

SOURCE: Bbc

The prisoner deal was the culmination of months of diplomatic contacts, secret talks and legal manoeuvring which came close to falling apart because of a threat by Washington in December to impose fresh sanctions on Iran for recent ballistic missile tests.

US President Barack Obama yesterday hailed the release of five Americans who had been held in Iran, even as three of them were on their way to Switzerland.

"When Americans are freed, that's something we can all celebrate," he said in a televised statement from the White House.

BALLISTIC MISSILE SANCTION
Just a day after the sanctions were lifted, the United States on Sunday announced new sanctions linked to Iran's ballistic missile programme.

In remarks shortly before the US announcement, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani of Iran said that any new American sanctions would be "met by an appropriate response."

The US Treasury Department said in a statement that it had added five Iranian nationals and a network of companies based in the United Arab Emirates and China to an American blacklist.

It said the network had "obfuscated the end user of sensitive goods for missile proliferation by using front companies in third countries to deceive foreign suppliers" and that the five individuals had "worked to procure ballistic missile components for Iran."

Adam J Szubin, acting under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said that "Iran's ballistic missile programme poses a significant threat to regional and global security, and it will continue to be subject to international sanctions."

Rouhani, speaking at a news conference in Tehran some 90 minutes before the new US measures were announced, was asked what would happen if the United States imposed new sanctions or violated terms of the nuclear agreement.

"Any action will be met by a reaction," he said.

"If the Americans impose any measure they will receive an appropriate response."

OVERVIEW

INT'L SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN

June 2010

Places new restrictions on Iranian investments and bans sales to Iran of battle tanks and combat aircraft.

UNITED STATES

Nov 1979

Washington begins to ban businesses and individual Americans from trading with Iran except with Treasury Department approval in response to the hostage taking at the US embassy in Tehran.

June 1995

Implements a broad economic embargo against Iran.

Nov 2008

Forbids US banks to take part in fund transfers involving Iran.

July 2010

A law targets the supply of petrol to Iran, which is highly dependent on refined products, and foreign firms that invest in the Iranian energy sector.

Nov 2011

Washington reinforces sanctions on goods services and technologies for Iran's petrochemical sector.

Dec 2011

Assets of foreign financial institutions that trade with the Iranian Central Bank in the petrol sector are frozen.

July 2012

The US imposes new economic sanctions on Iran's oil export sector and on two banks accused of dealings with Tehran.

June 2013

Washington unveils sanctions on the rial currency and the auto sector.

EUROPEAN UNION

July 2010

The EU bans technical assistance or the transfer of oil technologies to Iran. It also bans the activity of some Iranian banks and adds names to the United Nations list of individuals banned from travelling.

Jan 2012

Approves a ban on Iranian oil imports and freezes assets of the Iranian Central Bank.

Oct 2012

New sanctions target EU dealings with

SOURCE: AFP

Stop charging

FROM PAGE 1

monthly tuition and other fees defying the government's directives.

"As a result, an adverse reaction has been created among the students and their guardians," said the order signed by Additional Secretary Chowdhury Mufad Ahmed.

Twenty-six eminent citizens have meanwhile strongly protested and condemned the "ill-attempt" of the private education institutions of collecting additional fees.

In a statement, they said such incidents of increasing the fees defying the government policy were gradually going to an unbearable level.

The guardians took to the streets as the rigidity of the authorities concerned of the education institutions created the unrest, they said.

"We are deeply worried over the situation," reads the statement, expressing the hope that the government will take immediate steps to stop such "illegal and discriminatory attempts."

Prof Anisuzzaman, Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, Qazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad, Prof Nazrul Islam, Selina Hossain, Sultana Kamal, Rasheda K Choudhury, Syed Manzoorul Islam, Hossain Zillur Rahman, M Hafizuddin Khan, Iftekharuzzaman and Shaheen Anam, among others, were the signatories to the statement.

Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhobhabok Oikya Forum, a national

platform of guardians, has meanwhile thanked the government for issuing the directive.

"The government should monitor the situation to ensure that the schools return the already collected hiked fees or adjust it in the coming months," he said.

Among the Dhaka-based schools that hiked the fees most are Willes Little Flower School and College, Viharunnisa Noon School, Udayan Higher Secondary School and College, BIAM Model School and College, Mohammadpur Preparatory Higher Secondary Girls' School and College, Shaheed Police Smrity School and College, Shaheed Bir Uttam Lt Anwar Girls' School and College, and Bangladesh Bank High School and College.

Every year, the schools of repute increase the admission and tuition fees, citing rise in maintenance and other costs. But this year, they increased the fees exponentially.

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education in an investigation found that Willes Little Flower School and College charged 49 percent additional fees from the students.

The tuition fees in Class-II rose to Tk 1,500 from Tk 675. Similarly, the tuition fee in Class-V increased to Tk 2,550 from Tk 1,500.

Similar additional fees were slapped on students in other private schools as well.

Devotees

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka ahead of the first phase and attended both the phases of Ijtema, staying in his relative's house at Dakkhin Khan.

"I will try to come [to the Ijtema] next year again if I stay alive though I know the Ijtema authorities have divided the [64] districts into four phases," said Lal.

Noorjahan, 65, who reached near the ground from the capital's Jatrabari on foot to take part in the final prayers, said she is not financially capable of going to the Hajj. So, she opted for the Ijtema.

Scores of people joined the final prayers from roofs of vehicles, trains and nearby houses, on boats, and roads. Those who could not reach the Ijtema ground participated in the prayers through cell phone and electronic media.

Vehicular movement towards the venue was stopped early yesterday. Many devotees walked around five to 10 kilometres to arrive at the ground.

About 10,000 foreigners of around 100 countries joined the three-day long second phase. The first phase was held on January 8 to 10 where devotees from 17 districts joined. The second phase began on January 15 with the participation of devotees from 16 other districts.

To attend the final prayers, a good number of women came near the Ijtema ground on Saturday night and stayed the night at different nearby places. Many others had been participating in the second phase of the Ijtema since Friday.

Lights were out during pile-ups

FROM PAGE 1

Engineer Abul Kalam Azad said, "The lights are automatically turned on when the sun goes down in the evening and turned off when the sun is up."

If his claim is true, the lights should have been on during the first pile-up which happened at 6:30am and off during the second pile-up which was at 9:45am.

Azad, who along with a few other engineers look after the bridge, did not want to say when the lights were actually turned on or off that day.

The Daily Star talked to two people who until October last year were involved in operating and maintaining the bridge.

They said a time-triggered device turns the lights off at 5:30am during the summer and at 6:00am during winter. The BBA officials could override the system considering visibility on the bridge, they added.

Both the pile-ups happened in dense fog on January 9.

A police investigation also found that lights were off on the day of the pile-up. "There were no lights on during the first pile-up," said Additional Superintendent of Police (North) of Tangail Mohammad Aslam Khan on Saturday.

The BBA officials had been claiming that the lights were on during the first pile-up. They are now saying that the crash actually took place at 5:30am and some of the lights, among half the lights they keep on, at the scene were

out of order.

Earlier, they had told the media that the first crash happened at 6:30am when it was completely dark and visibility was poor.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, who was involved in the building of the Bangabandhu Bridge, was surprised to know that the BBA was using only half the lights and that too were switched off.

"In August last year, when I was crossing the bridge, I saw many of the lights were off. It was dark and I called engineer Azad who told me that they were saving energy," Jamilur told this paper yesterday.

"I told the engineer that these few lights will not contribute much to energy savings. I also informed the BBA chief engineer of the matter. But I don't know why the lights were off amid dense fog. All the lights should have been on."

He recommended an enquiry with experts and BBA engineers to know more about using half the lights and the reasons for the crashes.

However, the BBA feels no necessity to probe the pile-ups.

"There was no fault on the part of the BBA... The accidents happened as vehicles one after another hit from behind due to reckless driving amid fog," Bridges Division Secretary Khandaker Anwarul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked why the BBA uses only half of the lights when all the lights were there, he replied half of the lights were

enough to light the bridge. He claimed that visibility did not improve in fog even if all the lights were on.

Several experts disagreed with the secretary and engineer Azad's views.

"This is true that drivers never follow the 80kmph speed limit and overtake on the bridge. But the BBA and its officials at the bridge site cannot avoid responsibility just by giving this excuse as they did nothing to check the crashes on that day," an expert told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

Several sources at the bridge site said the crashes occurred due to sheer negligence of the BBA officials who should have monitored the situation and switched on all the lights instead of turning them off in poor visibility.

They could have suspended vehicular movement until visibility improved. They could have at least slowed down the release of vehicles from the toll plazas. They did not alert drivers about the condition either, they said.

Three patrol cars were supposed to monitor the bridge by crossing it from both ends every two hours. But the vehicles were not used, they added.

The visibility was poor during rescue operations after the first pile-up but the BBA officials did not bother to take any precautionary measures and was more interested in keeping operational the bridge, which connects Dhaka to the north.

They had set up a contraflow (lane

reversal) which caused the second pile-up in poor visibility at 9:45am. The lights were still off then, witnessed our Tangail correspondent who was there.

The second pile-up left two people dead.

A number of sources in the BBA claimed that the practice of "saving energy" began after a joint venture company got the job of running the bridge in 2010. The operator persuaded the BBA officials to use half of the sodium lights for its benefit.

The BBA took over from the company in December and many inside the BBA alleged that Executive Engineer Abul Kalam Azad, responsible for monitoring the bridge and ensuring smooth vehicular movement, failed to act on January 9 and use the manpower and equipment at his disposal.

Azad, who has been with the bridge operations since its opening in 1998, could not be reached over the last two days for comments regarding allegations of his negligence in duty.

The Daily Star correspondent in Tangail during a visit last Monday evening found that only half of the lights were on.

However, visiting the bridge again early Friday, he found all the sodium lights were on but was turned off at 6:57am in foggy weather.

Bridge operators requesting not to be named said half the lights are kept off even though traffic mishaps happen in low visibility during winter

Journo among

FROM PAGE 1

On information, a team of the Detective Branch of police raided Nadim's house at Mashkanda around 4:00am and recovered two pistols with six bullets and sharp weapons, said Imarat Hossain Gazi, officer-in-charge of DB Mymensingh.

Materials for making firearms and sharp weapons were also found, he said. A case was lodged against the duo with Kotwali Police Station under the arms act and the explosive substances act.

Md Abdur Rashid, assistant superintendent of Kotwali police, said that in the primary investigation, police found Nadim's involvement in drugs trade.

The two were being interrogated as of the filing of this report, the OC said. Nadim's mother Prof Rebeqa Yeasmin, editor of the Dainik Jahan, claimed that police had not found any firearm in his possession.

Describing the recovery of arms as a conspiracy to tarnish the image of the daily and the family, she rejected her son's involvement in drugs trade as well.

Police said Nadim has confessed to having been involved in drugs trade over the last five years and that he had even tried to make magazine and triggers of pistol for the last two years.

He also told police that he had links with a notorious arms and drugs trader of the town, the ASP said.

Police, however, did not disclose the name of the notorious arms trader for the sake of investigation.