

Jute mill workers call off strike

Hopes to get due salaries and wages by April 25

UNB, Dhaka

The workers of seven state-owned jute mills in Khulna and Jessore yesterday withdrew their indefinite strike that began 10 days ago over the arrears of salaries and wages.

Mohammad Sohrab Hossain, convener of the CBA and non-CBA Oikya Parishad of the seven jute mills, announced the withdrawal of the strike after a meeting with the minister and the state minister for textiles and jute at the secretariat in the capital.

"As the prime minister has allocated Tk 1,000 crore and the minister and the state minister assured us of clearing all the arrears, we call off the strike right now," Sohrab told reporters.

He hoped the workers would get their due salaries and wages by April 25.

Leaders of the CBA and non-CBA Oikya Parishad sat in the meeting with Minister Emaz Uddin Pramanik and State Minister Mirza Azam in the afternoon.

After the meeting, the state minister said the jute mill workers will get all the due wages and allowances by April 25.

The ministry is going to take specific measures over the next five years to reduce the losses incurred by Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BGMC), added Azam.

The CBA and non-CBA Oikya Parishad of the seven jute mills -- Crescent Jute Mills, Platinum Jute Mills, Khalispur Jute Mills, Star Jute Mills, Eastern Jute Mills, Jessore Jute Mills and Carpeting Jute Mills -- enforced the strike on April 4.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday asked the finance ministry to allocate Tk 1,000 crore to the textiles and jute ministry for clearing some arrears of the workers.

The workers enforced the strike demanding adequate allocations for the jute industry, payment of their arrears, formation of a wage board and cessation of the move to privatise the state-owned jute mills.



Two monkeys frolicking in a pool inside the Dhaka zoo at Mirpur to get respite from the sweltering heat. A heat wave is sweeping across the country, making life difficult for everybody. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Hot, sunny day

WHAT TO DO TO PREVENT HEATSTROKE, DEHYDRATION

1. Wear thinner and light-coloured clothes
2. Stay in shed when outdoors
3. Drink plenty of water or fluids
4. Saline water that contains sodium, potassium and sugar is a good option to stay hydrated during long exposure to heat
5. Take fresh juice of summer fruits
6. Reduce meat intake, prefer fruits and vegetables
7. Monitor the colour of your urine. Darker urine is a sign of dehydration
8. Always keep an umbrella or a cap
9. Use sunscreens

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be high," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the BMD forecast, a moderate to mild heat wave is sweeping over Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Tangail, Faridpur, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Barisal and Patuakhali, and it may continue for some more days.

However, the BMD says there may be rain in some parts of the country on Saturday.

"Rain or thundershower accompanied by temporary gusty wind are likely to occur at one or two places over Sylhet division and the weather may remain dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere in the country," it said.

For most of the last week, the maximum temperature in Dhaka stayed over 35 degrees. In the last three days, the temperature hovered between 36 and 37 degrees Celsius.

The highest temperature recorded yesterday was 39.5 degree Celsius in Rajshahi followed by 38.8 degree Celsius in Khulna.

Aliya Naheed, head of the Initiative for Non-communicable Diseases at the icddr, said that as the weather continues to be hot, there are risks of heatstroke, a condition that occurs after exposure to excessive heat where body's temperature control system stops working. Eventually, sweating stops and body temperature rises rapidly.

To prevent heatstroke and dehydration, she suggested wearing thinner and light-coloured clothes, drinking plenty of water or fluids, taking fresh juice of summer fruits, avoiding meat and having more fruits and vegetables and keeping an umbrella or a cap.

Two aid workers shot dead in South Sudan

AFP, Juba

Gunmen in South Sudan have shot dead two aid workers, colleagues said yesterday, taking the number killed in over two years of civil war to more than 50.

The pair, South Sudanese nationals who worked for the Danish Demining Group (DDG), making safe landmines and unexploded bombs, were killed in the southern Yei region as they went to work.

"The vehicle was ambushed and two of the team members were shot," DDG said in a statement, calling the killings "tragic."

EC, law enforcers praise each other

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the lowest tier of the local government. Elections are due in 621 UPs on April 23, in 743 on May 7, and in around 1,400 more in two other phases till June.

The EC faced massive criticism from the media, civil society, different political parties and cross section of people for its alleged failure to curb violence and irregularities in the two phases of the polls, held on party lines for the first time.

But at yesterday's meeting, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad said police and other law enforcers were sincere in maintaining

law and order during the elections, according to meeting sources.

Similarly, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque said the EC took some bold and effective steps against those who violated electoral laws and were involved in irregularities.

The CEC, however, directed the law enforcers to remain more alert in the next phases to prevent recurrence of the incidents that took place in the earlier spells.

"The law enforcers must keep vigil to prevent ballot stuffing at night before the polling, capturing polling stations and obstructing any aspirants in filing

nomination papers," the CEC was quoted as saying in the meeting.

Benazir Ahmed, director general of the Rapid Action Battalion, suggested the EC sit with the political parties to discuss ways to curb violence.

The EC, however, did not respond to the suggestion, said meeting sources.

Four election commissioners, chiefs of the Border Guard Bangladesh, Coast Guard and Ansar-VDP forces and senior EC officials, among others, attended the meeting.

CEC'S BRIEFING
The law enforcers have been directed to take more effective steps to ensure that the

next phases of the UP polls are held in "a fairer manner" than the previous phases, said the CEC.

"We have discussed how we can take more effective measures in the next phases of the polls, keeping in mind the experiences of the previous two phases of the elections," Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad told reporters after the meeting.

The incidents of loss of lives in shooting by law enforcers during the past elections were being investigated, he said.

The EC was working on introducing an online system for submission of the nomination papers in the next phases of the polls, the CEC added.

BGB pushes for choppers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday requested Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal for quick implementation of its proposed "heli-wing" for speedy access to remote areas.

The proposal for a heli-wing with four helicopters has been lying with the home ministry for two years, said a top BGB official.

The demand came at a commanders' conference of the paramilitary force at the force's Pilkhana Headquarters. The home minister attended the meeting as the chief guest.

Kamal assured them of taking steps for quick implementation of the proposal.

BGB officials said they were facing difficulties in reaching remote areas, particularly the hilly areas, quickly. "It takes five to seven days to reach some remote hilly areas," said an official.

BGB Director General Maj Gen Aziz Ahmed referred to a recent incident in which two BGB members who were serving in remote areas died of illness, as they could not be evacuated swiftly. He said the incident left an impact on the force.

At the meeting, BGB officials also demanded upgrading the rank badge of the director general to Lieutenant General and additional director general to Major General. Now the DG's rank is equivalent to the rank of Major General and ADG's rank to Brigadier General.

Terminating the demands logical, the home boss said he would look into them, meeting sources said.

The officials also demanded 20 percent deputation allowance which was curtailed in the new pay scale.

The minister asked the authorities to place the demands in writing.

The senior secretary to the home ministry, Additional DC, and regional commanders, among others, participated in the day-long conference.

Festivity all around

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day of Bangla New Year, is off the menu of many, as its price skyrocketed over the last few weeks.

Like every year, cultural organisation Chhayanaut gives a rendition of songs at Ramna Batamul at the crack of dawn.

Another cultural organisation Shurer Dhara, which organised a programme to mark Chaitra Sangkranti -- the last day of the Bangla year -- yesterday, will hold its own cultural event, Hajaro Konthe Borshoboron, at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital at 6:00am.

Other organisations, including Fakir Alamgir's Rishij Shilpi Gosthi, Dhaka South City Corporation, Shishu Academy and Liberation War Museum, will also hold programmes.

Rishij will hold a cultural event in the morning in front of Shishu Park at Shahbagh, while the other three organisations will hold programmes on their office premises.

The Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University and Jagannath University will bring out Mangal Shobhajatra, a colourful procession, from their campuses in the morning.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police's ban on outdoor cultural events and concerts will come into effect at 5:00pm.

There is a prohibition on blowing noisy plastic trumpet "vuvuzela", wearing masks and donning T-shirts with advertisements of any companies or their products.



Yesterday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told reporters that people have been asked to leave Shahbagh and Dhaka University area before the evening to avert recurrence of sexual assault on women.

In response to a query, he said it's quite natural that people would want to celebrate as long as they can. "But it is our duty to provide security to people and some restrictions have been imposed to ensure that."

He was speaking to reporters at Ramna Park after inspecting the security measures put in place there for Baishakh celebrations.

Asked whether any quarter was active to spoil the celebrations, he avoided giving a direct reply, and told reporters, "You are observing..."

Meanwhile, security has been tightened on the DU campus, the centre of the celebrations.

Apart from law enforcers, members of Bangladesh National Cadet Corps and Rover Scout will be deployed at different points in DU area today.

Watchtowers and CCTV cameras have been set up at many points, and the gates to Suhrawardy Udyan and Ramna Park will be closed after 5:00pm.

Vigilante groups of different student and rights organisations will also remain alert at various points in the city.

At a press conference at Madhur Canteen on DU campus, Bangladesh Chhatra Union announced that more

than 100 volunteers of the organisation will be vigilant in the area between Matsya Bhaban and Doyel Chattar.

It requested people to dial 01826041952 if they witness any untoward event.

Besides, volunteers of Narir Jonno Nirapod Bangladesh Andolon and Nari Nirapotta Jote, two platforms working for women's safety, will be on watch to prevent assault and harassment of women during the celebrations.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Workers' Party criticised the restrictions imposed by law enforcement agencies.

In a statement yesterday, it said the imposition of the restrictions was tantamount to surrendering to fundamentalist and communal forces.

The party said the law enforcement agencies dampened the Pahela Baishakh celebrations by imposing the restrictions at a time when the prime minister gave the government employees 20 percent of their basic pay as festival bonus.

Such reactionary attitude of law enforcers explained why they kept on blaming free-thinking bloggers for their own murders, instead of arresting the killers, it said.

Dream trip to US turns nightmare

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"Not only men but there were some women agents too. They used to instruct us where we needed to go and what we had to do and how to avoid law enforcers."

Dalim was in a US prison for 16 months from December 2014, when he along with six other Bangladeshis were detained by the US immigration police for illegal entry into the country from Mexico.

"My elder brother made a Tk-28-lakh deal with a broker for sending me to America. All I knew was that I was being sent to get a job," said the disheartened man after his American dream shattered.

Dalim left Bangladesh in September of 2014 and went through the 13 countries of Asia and the Americas.

From Dhaka he was flown to the United Arab Emirates. He did not stay in the UAE, rather had gone to Bolivia on another flight. "When I reached Bolivia, the immigration police checked my papers but didn't say anything," Dalim said.

He was taken to a flat where he had found 10 to 12 other Bangladeshis. They had been staying there for three days.

"Two or three Bangladeshi brokers used to visit us frequently. They never allowed us to go outside," the youth said.

From Bolivia, the brokers sent them to Brazil on a bus and it took them two days to reach the Latin American country.

In Brazil, they were taken to another flat and kept there for about a week. "We were confined to the flats there too. We

were not allowed to talk to our families in Bangladesh," Dalim said.

Then the trafficking victims were sent to Peru on a bus from Brazil. Their next destination was Ecuador.

"We had to change buses three to four times to reach Columbia from Ecuador. We didn't stay in any place. We were kept on the streets without any toilet facilities or proper food," he narrated.

In Columbia, they were confined to another flat for two weeks. "The brokers -- Bangladeshis and Columbians -- informed us that we had to wait as they were collecting immigration passes for us to enter Panama," Dalim said.

After they had entered Panama with "immigration passes", the Panama police allowed them to stay in refugee camps for about a month.

"Around 30 Bangladeshis were there," he said.

In November of 2014, the Bangladeshis were divided into three groups before they were put into taxis and sent on a 10-hour journey to Costa Rica.

They did not face immigration harassment as they were provided with documents of being asylum seekers of the USA.

After three or four days of their stay in Costa Rica, they went to Nicaragua on a bus.

Their next destination was El Salvador, but their journey there was perilous.

"We were put into a small boat. Two fishermen of El Salvador were the



boatmen. It was a horrifying sea journey. In the middle of the night, there was a storm at sea. We thought we were going to die. We were saved by the grace of Allah," Dalim said.

They entered Guatemala through coffee plantation in the dark of the night.

"The brokers then took away all our money and some other valuables before sending us to Mexico," he said.

The smugglers divided them into two groups before sending them to Mexico.

"The immigration police detained us and took us to a detention centre where we had to stay for 14 days," he recalled.

After getting released, the traffickers bought them air tickets and took them to an airport near the US border.

Dalim along with six others entered Texas in early December, 2014, and was captured by the US immigration police.

They were taken to a detention centre immediately.

"The American immigration police asked us why we had entered the country and why from Mexico. We tried to explain that we needed political asylum in America," he said.

The USA police interviewed them several times and contacted the Bangladesh embassy in Washington DC. "But the Bangladesh embassy officials said we were not political asylum seekers," he claimed.

An US court held hearings to settle the issue and finally rejected their appeal and ordered them to be deported last year.

Md Shahjahan, 40, another victim from Noakhali, claimed that he had to pay Tk 40 lakh to the smugglers.

"I have a wife, two children and parents at home. As I couldn't earn enough to manage my family with the small business in Noakhali, I had been looking for a job abroad. But it was not my initial plan to go to America, rather I wanted to go to Saudi Arabia or the UAE," he told The Daily Star.

When he failed to get a visa with a decent job and handsome salary in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, he met some local brokers who allured him into taking a chance.

"Some local brokers were behind me. They had been trying to convince me to go to America saying that I would be able to earn Tk 2 to 3 lakh a month there. I had agreed thinking of a better future for my family despite the risks," the lone breadwinner of the family said.