

## RECRUITMENT ROW 'AL men' beat up school headmaster

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A school headmaster was assaulted allegedly by some Awami League men for refusing to help recruit their candidate as a teacher of Haridev Doyez Uddin High School in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila yesterday.

They also beat up some students as they tried to protect their teacher from the attack.

The headmaster, Manoranjan Roy, 52, who has been teaching at the school for the last 26 years, was undergoing treatment at Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital.

Soon after the incident, over 300 students of the school boycotted their classes and held a demonstration, demanding arrest and exemplary punishment of the attackers.

"We will continue our demonstration and class boycott until the arrest

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Manoranjan Roy, headmaster of Haridev Doyez Uddin High School in Lalmonirhat, wipes his tears after being assaulted allegedly by Awami League men inside his office yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Headmaster hits teacher over class routine

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

An assistant teacher of Dipshikha Junior High School in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila was beaten up allegedly by the school's headmaster over class routine yesterday.



Bhabananda Pal

The victim, Bhabananda Pal, 30, was undergoing treatment at Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

Talking to The Daily Star at the hospital, Bhabananda said headmaster Ohidul Haque asked him for preparing a class routine several days ago for the current year. As per Ohidul's instruction, he prepared the routine and distributed the copies among the teachers.

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## Exists on paper, lost in reality

FROM PAGE 1

On top of this, some traders have stolen and smuggled thousands of tonnes of fertilisers from mother vessels, submitted cooked up bills worth crores of taka and supplied substandard fertilisers, documents obtained by this newspaper show.

Investigations by the BCIC show some of its own officials along with traders are involved in such crimes, but other than transferring one or two officials it took no serious action to stop these gross irregularities.

### 'TRANSIT' THE TRICK

The volume of the fertiliser "in transit" has multiplied manifolds year-on-year since the Awami League took office in 2009.

When Dilip Barua became industries minister that year, only 7,400 tonnes were in transit, which shot up to 1.73 lakh tonnes at the end of his tenure in 2013. It has risen further in the last two years -- to 3.34 lakh tonnes in FY 2014-15 and 4 lakh tonnes in FY 2015-16, a staggering increase of around 54 times since 2009.

"This is nothing but a trick to eat up the fertilisers and sell those in local markets and in some cases in neighbouring countries," said a BCIC source with direct knowledge of the syndicate and its workings.

Every year, the government spends a hefty sum -- between Tk 6,000 and 9,000 crore -- to make sure that farmers across the country get urea on time and at a subsidised price.

Dividends have been enormous. In recent years, farm outputs have grown so much so that Bangladesh is now not only self-sufficient in rice production; it also exports quality rice.

However, that does not mean that farmers always benefit from government subsidy. Though there has not been any supply shortages because of surplus import and also because these unscrupulous traders sell the misappropriated fertilisers in local markets,

farmers in some cases had to buy those at higher prices.

The average import rate is about Tk 35,000 per tonne while farmers buy it at Tk 14,000 a tonne.

The BCIC manufactures urea in six factories around the country and imports part of the demand. Private traders then sell the urea throughout the country.

The six factories and 24 buffer warehouses can store 3.55 lakh tonnes, but carriers have piled up 7.5 lakh tonnes there with hundreds of thousands of bags open to the weather.

The syndicate exploits this inadequate storage capacity. Traders and carriers write to the BCIC that they kept the fertilisers in "transit" warehouses due to the space shortages in the buffer warehouses. Lakhs of tonnes remain in "transit" for months and even years and never ever get delivered.

An official in Chittagong, requesting anonymity, said, "We never get these fertilisers shown in transit. Just by issuing these letters, the syndicate tries to wash its hands off and continues to gobble up huge amount of fertilisers."

### NO TRACE!

BCIC's closing balance of 2014-15 showed 1.61 lakh tonnes of fertiliser (worth Tk 566 crore) in transit, but there was no information on the exact whereabouts. Another 1.72 lakh tonnes existed only on paper; they were neither in the warehouse nor in transit.

In October last year, Audit and Accounts Officer Md Abdus Salam found the BCIC in a report to the industries ministries showed 3.82 lakh tonnes in transit as of July 30 last year. But BCIC's internal report showed 2.8 lakh tonnes in transit.

This "discrepancy of 86,657 tonnes of fertiliser in transit" cost the BCIC a loss of Tk 226.6 crore from this, he said in the report, seeking an explanation for this mismatch. But the authorities did not respond.

However, his calculation does not add up because the difference between the two figures is over 1.02 lakh tonnes.

Also, Salam calculated the loss at the rate of Tk 26,150 a tonne whereas the average import rate was Tk 35,000 (\$438) in the last eight years.

Fertilisers also vanish from factories. For instance, Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) in its report on June 30, 2015, showed it had a stock of 53,500 tonnes. In another report just 13 days later, it said the stock was 43,331 tonnes, around 10,000 tonnes less, although no fertiliser left its warehouse in the meantime.

THE SYNDICATE  
According to BCIC's own investigations since 2009, Bulk Trade International, Nabab and Company, Poton Traders, M Trading, Nur Trading and Gramsico Limited have made it a practice to show thousands of tonnes of urea in transit.

But as the Corporation had no trader or carrier-wise accounts of fertiliser in transit until recently, it faced difficulties in realising those.

On April 21 last year, BCIC's marketing department chief raised the issue in a letter to Md Nur Nabi, who used to look after fertiliser in transit when he was in BCIC's marketing department. Nabi is now posted as the additional head of marketing at the CUFL.

Over the years, the BCIC also wrote to the traders, asking them to provide the detailed accounts of the fertilisers in transit with little success.

STEALING, SMUGGLING, FAKE BILLS  
Some of the biggest allegations are against Bulk Trade International, a Chittagong-based importer and carrier.

In a July 2016 letter to the BCIC, Bulk itself acknowledged that it did not deliver 2.14 lakh tonnes of urea to the buffer warehouses between November 2014 and January 2016. It claimed the product, worth about Tk 750 crore, was in transit but said nothing about the

location.

Earlier in January last year, Bulk submitted two transport bills. The BCIC later found them to be forged. It then stopped payment on the bill and recommended legal action against the trader. But nothing was done.

Another trader, Chittagong-based M/s Nabab and Company, "took/smuggled" 21,500 tonnes of urea from MV KKAN JEBUH and 6,608 tonnes from MV OCEAN MELODY without BCIC's approval. In a letter on July 12 last year, the BCIC asked the company to return this 28,308 tonnes worth around Tk 100 crore or face legal action.

The trader returned the volume, but faced no action.

There are other ways of stealing though. Under the rules, traders are supposed to import fertilisers in 50kg sacks. But sometimes they import in bulk and bag locally. Hundreds of thousands of such locally packed sacks contain only 40, 30 or even 10kgs of fertiliser. This makes huge unearned profit for the traders and shortchanges the farmers in the end.

On October 17 last year, a joint agriculture ministry wrote to the BCIC chairman about such sacks and requested him to ensure the right weight.

Sources said the syndicate is so powerful that the BCIC could not take any action against it as some top officials in the purchase, marketing and management are involved.

Over the last two years, a joint general secretary and an organising secretary of the ruling Awami League tried to start fertiliser business. Both of them told The Daily Star that they had to back away because of this "powerful syndicate".

In an August 8 letter last year, the industries ministry asked the BCIC Chairman Mohammad Iqbal of any actions taken against such officials.

When contacted, the BCIC chairman said, "I have heard about this after

joining here. We are working on it.

"On the assumption of involvement in the syndicate, in the meantime, two officers of the relevant factories have been transferred."

He admitted that there are various irregularities in the name of transporting fertilisers. "I will bring changes in the distribution system by involving railway and BRTC, and bring down the delivery time to five days from 21 days."

But he had no satisfactory answers as to how this syndicate can operate year after year with no heads rolling, including in the last two and a half years under his watch. He also dismissed any notion that he gets undue financial benefits from the syndicate.

### NO ONE TAKES RESPONSIBILITY

The BCIC operates under the industries ministries.

Dilip Barua, during whose tenure the volume of fertiliser in transit started going up like never before, blamed mismanagement for this. Asked why he did not address this, he said neither the ministry officials nor any journalists had brought it to his notice.

He said the BCIC alone was responsible for this and denied allegation that he received any financial benefits.

Nabab Khan, owner of Nabab and Company, claimed they delivered all the fertilisers about 15 days ago. He also said they wrote several letters to the BCIC to receive the fertilisers, but it did not do so.

Echoing his comments, Aminur Rashid Khan Mamun of Bulk International said there was no syndicate in the fertiliser business, which he has been doing for 35 years.

"Some 50 or 200 tonnes of fertilisers maybe missing sometimes," he claimed, contradicting BCIC reports.

He also squarely blamed the BCIC for importing surplus fertilisers, which the BCIC chairman defended, saying additional fertilisers are imported to make sure there are no supply shortages.

Kamrul Ashraf Khan Poton, owner of M/S Poton Trader and also chairman of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA), said it was not "completely true" that the fertilisers in transit have been stolen.

Except for one incident by Nur Trading, other local carriers, including Bulk Trade International, have kept the fertilisers in the open due to space shortage, he added.

Claiming they have nothing to do with the misappropriation, Poton advised that The Daily Star sits with the traders along with the officials who made such "nonsensical comments".

The BCIC Chairman said, "I am taking action against them [the syndicate]. Initially, I am going soft so that the supply chain of the fertiliser is not hampered. I will take tough actions against the defaulter gradually."

Between January 2 and 4 this year, the BCIC sent warning letters to three such defaulters -- Bulk, Poton and M/s Surama Banijjik Sangstha.

According to the letters, Bulk has not yet delivered 1.28 lakh tonnes allotted against it in FY 2015-16; Poton has not delivered 7,626 tonnes allotted against it in FY 2014-15; and M/s Surama has not delivered 5,827 tonnes allotted in the same FY.

The letters asked them to inform the latest whereabouts of the fertilisers.

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the Anti-Corruption Commission should take actions against the persons involved in corruption in this sector. At the same time, the industries ministry and the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry should probe the anomalies.

Terming the corruption a partnership between the BCIC officials and traders, he said as the BCIC officials benefitted financially, the wrongdoers continue to operate with impunity.

## Bird flu recurs after three years

FROM PAGE 1

Dhamrai and there has been no other report of outbreak as of yesterday.

Different strains of bird flu have been spreading across Europe and Asia since late last year, leading to mass culling of poultry in certain countries.

Nearly 40 countries have reported new outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry or wild birds since November last year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The situation has prompted the WHO to call on all countries to monitor closely outbreaks of the deadly virus and to report promptly any human cases that could signal the start of a flu pandemic.

"The rapidly expanding geographical distribution of these outbreaks and the number of virus strains currently co-circulating have put WHO on high alert," WHO Director General Margaret Chan said in Geneva on Monday.

There are different strains of bird flu virus. The H5N1 virus can cause illness and death in humans, but scientists say the chances of being infected are low.

Official records show Bangladesh's poultry industry last reported a H5N1 outbreak back in April, 2014 and since then there was one known case of the flu that caused deaths of several dozen crows in Rajshahi in February last year.

In the beginning of the third week of this January, two outbreaks were detected -- one at a Dhamrai poultry farm causing deaths and culling of 3,000 birds and the other one in

Rajshahi causing deaths of some 22 crows.

Dr H B M Golam Mahmud said initially, it was found out that the 15-week-old birds in that particular Dhamrai farm were not vaccinated. The reason for the outbreak is, however, still being investigated, he added.

There are several major migratory routes for wild birds over the country, and the Dhamrai farm is close to a migratory bird sanctuary.

Dr Mahmud said if the people involved in the industry remain alert and do due diligences in terms of vaccination and disinfection, things would not go out of control.

Officials have assured that poultry meats and eggs are safe to eat after cooking as usual.

Dr M M Khan, secretary general of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association, said after the new outbreak report, they have alerted all concerned and building further awareness for preemptive protections.

Dr Nitish C Debnath, a national consultant at the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Emergency Centre for Transboundary Diseases emphasised on further enforcing vaccination of the birds, particularly at breeders' farms, ensuring at least two doses -- one at chick stage and the other one when the birds reach 12 weeks.

Dr Nitish, also a former vice-chancellor of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, called for proper reporting of birds' diseases so that no stains of flu remained hidden and unreported. "Otherwise, we'll not be able to

allay the worry of any potential pandemic."

Bird flu was first reported in Bangladesh's burgeoning poultry industry back in March, 2007, resulting in loss of nearly two million chickens and so far, only a single case of flu being transmitted to human was reported in May, 2008. There was on and off reports of bird flu outbreaks till late 2013, resulting in shutting down of hundreds of small and medium poultry farms.

However, the government and WHO initiatives and awareness building, better vigilance, promotion of vaccination programme helped the industry spring back with some 5,000 farms restarting poultry rearing again in 2013-14.

Industry sources said the number of poultry farms more than doubled to over one lakh over the last two decades, largely catering to the domestic needs of poultry meat and eggs. Commercial poultry production has been growing rapidly in the country since early 1990 by using improved genetics, manufactured feeds and management. Around the same time, the poultry feed industry also propelled banking on farmers' rising interests in maize cultivation.

WHO DG Margaret Chan said on Monday that the world is better prepared for the next influenza pandemic, following the one that circled the world in 2009-10, "but not at all well enough."

Under the International Health Regulations, a binding legal instrument, WHO's 194 member states are required to detect and report human cases promptly, Chan said, adding: "We cannot afford to miss the early signals".

FROM PAGE 1

The PM said many did not raise their voice when culprits killed people of different faiths in a planned way, carried out arson attacks on mosques and set fire to the holy Quran.

Describing this as part of conspiracies, she asked the senior police officials to stay alert in this regard, reports UNB.

She also wondered why police personnel had been withdrawn from MP Liton's house and his licensed arms seized just before the killing. "His life was put at risk in a planned way."

The prime minister assured the officials of considering their various demands, which include raising the number of Grade-1 and 2 posts, alongside increasing the number of vehicles and infrastructural facilities.

She also suggested ensuring accommodation for all the female police trainees.

Referring to an ambassador's Facebook post after the Gulshan café attack that Bangladesh would not be able to tackle the situation, she said, "We have been able to tackle the situation within a few hours and it seemed that some were unhappy with this as they expected that we would seek their help... but they're yet to know the Bangalees fully."

Praising again the role of police in tackling the Gulshan siege, the prime minister said they might have to face such challenges again in future.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) AKM Shahidul Haque delivered the welcome speech at the programme.

Others who spoke on the occasion include Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Home Secretary Kamaluddin Ahmed, DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia,

DIG of Chittagong Range Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, Additional Police Commissioner of DMP Md Monirul Islam, Additional DIG Habibur Rahman and SP of Gazipur Harun-ur-Rashid.

### POLICE DEMAND

On this occasion, police demanded creating a separate division to be run by its own officials under the home ministry to speed up their operational and specialised activities.

Shafiqul Islam, DIG of Chittagong Range, placed the demand, which police have been pressing for over the last three years but never got the prime minister's nod.

Some other officials demanded steps for expansion of the counterterrorism unit's jurisdiction over the whole country, upgrading some top posts to Grade-1 and increasing training and transportation facilities.

"An additional inspector general with the rank of secretary and a DIG equivalent to joint secretary will look after the activities of the division after creation of necessary positions," Shafiqul told The Daily Star.

Meeting sources said the prime minister asked the officials to discuss the issue of separate division formally. Earlier in 2013, the police headquarters sent a proposal to the home ministry for separate division.

The demand was also placed during the police weeks in 2014, 2015 and last year. The government last year split the home ministry into two divisions -- the Public Security Division and the Security Services Division. A circular was issued in this regard a week ago.

The ministry looks after the activities of Border Guard Bangladesh,

Bangladesh Jail, Fire Service, Department of Narcotic Control, Ansar, Coast Guard and 10 other forces besides the police force that have around 1.94 lakh members.

According to high police officials, a separate police division would speed up recruitment, transfer and promotion in the force.

Wishing anonymity, another top official said sometimes it takes long to get approval from different ministries for important files of police.

Monirul Islam, chief of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of DMP, proposed expanding the unit's activities across the country. Now it needs approval from the IGP to carry out any operation outside the DMP's area.

Monirul, an additional commissioner of the DMP, also demanded higher training facilities for its officials and ensuring counter-radicalisation programmes.

D M P Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia demanded upgrading the posts of DMP commissioner, director general of Rab, chief of CID and one more additional IG post to Grade-1.

Presently, the posts of the inspector general and the chief of Special Branch are under Grade-1.

## BCL won't hold

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General Secretary Obaidul Quader suggested the BCL leaders should find out an alternative to blocking roads during processions.

He also told the gathering that the PM asked them not to hold any programmes by blocking or obstructing streets.